

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Diversification of tourism through cultural routes in Manglaralto county, in the province of Santa Elena

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ABSTRACT

The work was carried out in the Manglaralto parish in the province of Santa Elena, with the objective of generating new cultural tourism routes within the framework of sustainability and diversification of Santa Elena's offer, as an alternative to complement the positioning of sun and beach tourism affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The methodology implemented is based on the georeferencing and mapping of resources throughout the parish, supported by the ArcGis program, and then ranking them by applying the nine evaluation criteria established by the Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador. As a result, 163 attractions were evaluated, which were used to propose the design of three cultural tourism routes, proposals that were socialized with local authorities, the Manglaralto Parish Government, the Santa Elena Municipal Tourism Company and Tourism Management and Promotion Office in the province.

Keywords: cultural attractions; diversification; tourist routes; hierarchization

1. Introduction

The context of tourism worldwide and its trends presents an important preference for culture. In fact, the World Tourism Organization, as cited in Espeso-Molinero, shows as a result of a study, that its growth reports 4.5% per year, in relation to the 3.9% growth of the sector in general^[1]. In this regard, the 2015 World Charter for Sustainable Tourism includes cultural and creative tourism as a driver of sustainable tourism development through responsible management of cultural, tangible and intangible heritage, arts and cultural and creative industries^[2]. During the first months of 2022, and based on the decrease in travel restrictions, the increase in the vaccination rate in the world, as well

as the recovery of confidence to travel, international tourism has experienced a significant increase "of 182% in January to March 2022, and the world's destinations received about 117 million international arrivals"^[3].

The tourism activity in Latin America has contributed to development; generating income, employment opportunities, improving the standard of living in several communities, trying to maintain and preserve a friendly environment. Countries such as Cuba, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Brazil and Colombia evidence (before the pandemic) this progress in the economy of their territories and demonstrate, in turn, the relevance in the operation of the tourism system and the analysis of internal and external factors that affect its operability^[4,5].

ARTICLE INFO

Received: August 20, 2022 | Accepted: September 28, 2022 | Available online: October 14, 2022

CITATION

Mendoza Tarabó AE, Yumisaca Tuquinga JE, Peralta Mendoza SP. Diversification of tourism through cultural routes in Manglaralto county, in the province of Santa Elena. *Smart Tourism* 2022; 3(2): 11 pages.

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In Ecuador, tourism accounted for 2.2% of the gross domestic product in 2019, or 2,398 million dollars before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The year 2021 registered a number of foreign arrivals of 590,006, which generated revenues of \$ 1,063.2 million, the situation reflects an early recovery with the decline of the pandemic^[6].

The practice of tourism in the country has meant its development in society and, at the same time, has been reflected in the national productive matrix; domestic tourism has been key to the recovery and reactivation of the activity. According to MINTUR statistics^[6], the four holidays so far this year have boosted the tourism sector's economy, generating an expenditure of approximately US \$ 213 million. Similarly, studies by MINTUR refer to the motivations of foreign tourists, highlighting cultural tourism (58.9%) as the one of greatest interest, followed by ecotourism (20.8%) and sun and beach tourism (15.9%)^[7]. Ostelea Tourism Management School, in its publication on tourism trends for 2022, specifies that some of the motivations for travel in 2021 will be maintained, as in the case of cultural tourism, rural tourism, gastronomic tourism, among others, thus raising the search for and interest in the daily life and culture of peoples and communities^[8].

In the local context, the province of Santa Elena has positioned itself nationally and internationally as a sun and beach destination, which presents a high influx from late December to April with a marked seasonality between May and December, with some peaks of visits thanks to the presence of national holidays. As a national benchmark, it generated in 2019 a tourist expenditure that amounted to 50,749 thousand dollars, with a total of 1,068,842 trips, according to statistics from the Ministry of Tourism for the corresponding year^[9], which placed it as the province with the highest number of visits. Statistics presented in the document International Tourism Profiles 2017 place the province of Santa Elena in third place for visits by foreigners^[10], motivated mainly by cultural tourism, ecotourism and sun and beach tourism.

Santa Elena has tourism facilities with the following characteristics. 327 lodging establishments represent 5,782 rooms for a total of 16,267 beds. In terms of food and beverage establishments, the province has 366 establishments and 3,899 tables for a total of 15,596 tables. 40 tourism service agencies and 15 intermediary companies, four community tourism centers offer 11 rooms (34 beds) and 149 tables (596 tables), in addition to a registered tourism transportation company^[11]. Also, the National Registry of Tourist Guides Continental^[12] registers 39 local guides, six national tourist guides, three guides specialized in adventure and one guide specialized in heritage for the province of Santa Elena.

Regarding the analysis of the province's tourism offer, Arce Bastidas et al. point out that the territory has six types of products: cultural, ecotourism, nature, sports and adventure, community, as well as sun and beach^[13]. Of these, the last mentioned is considered the main product, followed by sport and adventure. The development of the province is based on the efforts of its people in their various activities, including inbound tourism and the dynamization of typologies such as nature, sun and beach, cultural, community and other modalities that take place in rural areas. Between 2020 and 2022, some initiatives linked to the supply of tourism products for people with disabilities have been strengthened, such as sun and beach tourism, access to some of its museums and even surfing. Similarly, the territory is designing a sustainable tourism development plan, in coordination with the public, private and community sectors, a process led by the Provincial Autonomous Decentralized Government. The importance of tourism generated interest in the Santa Elena municipal government in projects to protect the cultural heritage, including in its Territorial Planning and Development Plan several actions that contribute to its tourism value, from the cultural typology^[14].

In this scenario, the Santa Elena Peninsula State University, through the Tourism Management and Development career, has executed from 2019 to

2021 the project “cultural resources as tourist attractions and their enhancement for the diversification of tourism in Santa Elena”, whose results also aim to contribute to the development and diversification of tourism in the province. Tourist resources are those elements with a potential that do not yet have the necessary adjustments to serve visitors, but are presented as a tourist asset in stock or raw material for attractions^[15].

Therefore, the tourist resource is the basic element to be able to develop a destination and differentiate itself from the competition. It is around these services such as hotels, restaurants, entertainment centers, among others, can be created. The resources are the main element that motivates the movement of visitors. In this sense, it is correct to make an analysis of their potential and, if feasible, to put it in tourist value.

There are methodologies that propose the classification of tourism resources into 5 groups: natural, historical, cultural, sports and others^[16] considering for this purpose the reference formulated by the Organization of American States (OAS) in 1985 and adapted to other variables identified, in this case, in the inventory of tourism resources of the province of Buenos Aires.

In this context, the intentionality of every destination is to diversify by taking advantage of its resources. Tourism diversification is of great importance in tourism development, as it generates additional economic activities and increases tourist demand^[17]. The most significant transformation of contemporary tourism is around diversification. In fact, Tofler as cited in Donaire Benito warns of the expansion of certain industries whose output consists not in manufactured goods^[18], but in preprogrammed experiences. Therefore, any typology based on cultural resources becomes a completely experiential activity whose main purpose or product is to be able to grant the tourist an experience that can be lived through food or drink, music, legends, dance, gastronomy, its festivities and traditions, etc. The Manual of tourist attractions of the Ministry of

Tourism of Ecuador establishes the conceptualization of the tourist resource and attraction^[13]. The main difference is established because the resource (natural or cultural) can motivate a displacement, but is not yet part of the tourist dynamics, while the attraction is based on the valued record of attributes (natural and cultural) and opportunities for the operation, constituting part of the tourist heritage.

This work focused on generating a contribution to the diversification of the Manglaralto destination, through the proposal of tourist routes based on cultural resources, whose process of inventory, evaluation has finally allowed us to have three new routes that contribute to the diversification of tourism in this complicated post-pandemic era for communities struggling for their development.

For the implementation of the project, the methodology of the Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador was applied to inventory and rank the resources, verifying, through their evaluation, whether they reached a score to be considered attractive. Ortiz Liñán and Vázquez Solís point out the importance of having a tourism inventory to manage the development of the activity in any territory, which leads to making appropriate decisions for the use of natural and cultural resources^[19].

Regarding the methodology for inventorying tourism resources, when comparing the process applied by Peru, it can be appreciated in the respective of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism^[10] that establishes five categories for better management (natural sites, cultural manifestations, folklore, contemporary technical, scientific or artistic achievements and scheduled events), unlike Ecuador that works with two categories (natural sites and cultural manifestations). The subtypes of the Peruvian methodology are more detailed and require basic information for their description depending on the characteristics of the resource. Eight evaluation criteria linked to the intrinsic value of the tourism resource and to representativeness and demand are incorporated, as opposed to the 9 criteria applied for

this process in Ecuador.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Study area

The Manglaralto parish is located in the north of the province of Santa Elena, has an area of 497.4 m² and a population of 33,633 inhabitants^[20]. The territory was considered a parish on May 31, 1861 and is made up of 18 communities dedicated to agriculture, commerce and tourism.

Table 1. Weighting of criteria for tourist attractions

Valuation Criteria	Description	Weighting
1 Accessibility and collectivity	It refers to the conditions of accessibility, attractiveness, nearest town or village, as well as the existence of access roads, transportation services and signage.	18
2 Tourist plant complementary	Refers to the existence of lodging services, food and beverages, travel agencies, guides, transportation or internal mobilization, tourist facilities and complementary services to the tourist activity.	18
3 State of conservation and site/environment integration	Estimation of the state of the physical-environmental and sociocultural attributes, the conditions of the attraction and its surroundings.	14
4 Tourist hygiene and safety	It refers to the availability of basic services, environmental management, signage, health, security, communication, and natural hazards.	14
5 Policies and regulations	Consideration of the attraction within tourism territorial planning and compliance with regulations for activities carried out in the attraction.	10
6 Activities practiced at the attraction	Water, air, land activities practiced in natural attractions and activities practiced in cultural attractions.	9
7 Dissemination, means of promotion and marketing of the attraction	Refers to the mention of the attractiveness in publications in specialized national or international magazines, as well as websites, social networks, press, television, among others.	7
8 Visitor registration and inflow	It refers to the visitors' registry made by the attraction's administrator, temporality of visit, origin of the visitor, frequency of visitors.	5
9 Human Resources	Refers to the number of people and level of education of the personnel working at the attraction.	5
Total		100

In the last two decades, the parish has been consolidating its tourism development, generating community lodging projects, tourism carrying capacity studies on the beaches, and vacation season plans. The non-governmental organization Centro de Promoción Rural also developed the Proyecto Ecoturístico de Desarrollo Comunitario (Prodecos), among other activities in favor of tourism. The parish enjoys a massive influx due to the supply of sun and beach tourism, being Montañita the territory of greatest national and international demand.

2.2. Inventory and ranking of tourist attractions (preliminary evaluation)

During 2019 and 2020, 163 tourism resources relevant to the cultural manifestations throughout the Manglaralto parish were georeferenced (**Figure 1**). This process was carried out with the support of the ArcGis survey123 field tool, which allowed the collection of the required information and the generation of xy location within the parish map.

We proceeded to preliminarily evaluate the 163 resources/attractions registered in the research project. We considered the methodology established in the Manual of tourist attractions^[10] for the hierarchization and generation of tourist spaces that points out 9 weighted criteria for natural and cultural attractions, according to **Table 1**.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Results

Figure 2 below shows the results achieved by each of the communities that make up the Manglaralto parish.

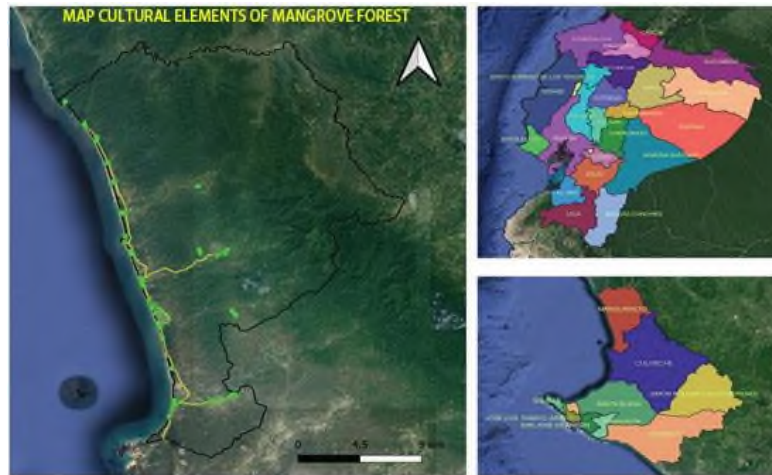


Figure 1. Cultural elements distributed in the territory of Manglaralto.

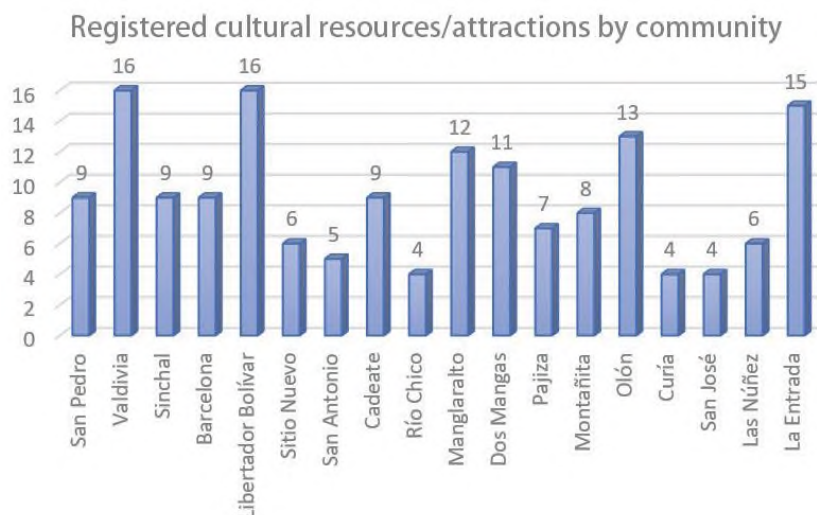


Figure 2. Cultural resources/attractions recorded by community.

Of the 163 resources/attractions registered in Manglaralto parish, the community of Libertador Bolívar has 9.8%, as does the community of Valdivia (9.8%), La Entrada (9.3%), followed by Olón with 8%, while the parish of Manglaralto has 7.4% and Dos Mangas has 6.7%. Resources and attractions were also classified into types and subtypes based on the methodology of the Ministry of Tourism. The predominant type of resource/attraction corresponds to cultural and popular heritage, registering 100 elements, followed by technical and scientific achievements with 36 data, architecture with 19

records and, finally, programmed events with 8 events. Of the 15 subtypes recorded in the data collection in the Manglaralto parish, 31.3% corresponds to religious festivals, traditions and popular beliefs, engineering works, including churches, jetties, among others, represent 20.9%; crafts and arts occupy third place with 17.8%; historical/vernacular architecture 11.7% and gastronomy 6.7%.

The handicraft production of the Manglaralto parish, mainly those made with raw materials from

the area (toquilla straw, tagua, banana zapan, guadua cane, etc.), presents a variety of products that are made, in some cases, applying ancestral techniques and knowledge, in 16 of the 18 towns of the territory, with more than 900 artisans distributed in this territory. The information on the artisans was provided, for the most part, by the presidents of several of the communities during the 2019 management period, the Manglaralto parish GAD contributed with the collection of this data.

The results obtained by applying the hierarchical ranking methodology with the preliminary evaluation carried out show that the parish registers many tourist attractions with hierarchy II (87%), while 8% belong to hierarchy III (86–100 points), and 5% correspond to hierarchy I. The territory has no attractions of the highest

hierarchy. These same 163 attractions, considering the classification of cultural heritage established by the National Institute of Cultural Heritage^[21] are distributed in the following categories: immovable property 34.4%; movable property 18.4%; archaeological property 2.5%; documentary property 0.6%; and intangible property 44.2%.

Considering the results of the evaluation of the attractions within the Manglaralto parish, we proceeded to the design of the routes that constitute the generation of new tourism products for the territory under study. It is relevant to point out that the different options of tourist attractions that reached hierarchy 3, that is, that obtained a score between 61 and 85 points, have been chosen (**Table 2**).

Table 2. Tourist attractions with hierarchy III

N°	Location	Attractive	Type	Subtype	Score
1	Montañita	Gastronomy sector	Cultural and popular heritage	Gastronomy	75
2	Montañita	Surfing championships	Scheduled events	Sporting events	72
3	Montañita	Malecon	Architecture	Public space	71
4	Olon	Santuario Blanca Estrella de la Mar (White Star of the Sea Sanctuary)	Architecture	Other architectural infrastructures	71
5	Olon	Gastronomy cabins dining rooms	Cultural and popular heritage	Gastronomy	67
6	Liberator	Handicrafts made of toquilla straw and banana zapán	Cultural and popular heritage	Crafts and arts	67
7	Liberator	Guadua cane handicrafts	Cultural and popular heritage	Crafts and arts	67
8	Liberator	Gastronomy cabins dining rooms	Cultural and popular heritage	Gastronomy	67
9	Montañita	San Isidro Labrador Festival	Cultural and popular heritage	Religious festivals	66
10	Manglaralto	Launch of beach season	Scheduled events	Gastronomic	65
11	Montañita	Handicrafts sector	Cultural and popular heritage	Crafts and arts	64
12	Cadeate	Bread baked in a wood-fired oven	Cultural and popular heritage	Gastronomy	64
13	Olon	Feast of Santa Lucia	Cultural and popular heritage	Religious festivals	62

The routes designed are aimed at the general public, suitable for family groups, groups of friends, couples or individuals, can be done independently or in an organized manner through local tour operators, which participated in September 2021 in a Fam trip organized by the Municipal Tourism Company of Santa Elena canton, the Technical Tourism Office of Mintur in Santa Elena and the Peninsula University of Santa Elena, which welcomed the proposals and, in other cases, combined them with other attractions.

Unfortunately, not all the attractions are adequately equipped for people with disabilities.

Route 1 Manglaralto cultural identity

The Manglaralto parish has the greatest cultural wealth that represents the identity of the Santa Elena people. It begins with the knowledge of the ancient Valdivia culture, touring the techniques and ancestral knowledge manifested in the craftsmanship of the toquilla straw, tagua, clay and other raw materials

with bright and colorful designs (**Figure 3**). During this visit, tourists will have the opportunity to show their skills by making pots, Venus de Valdivia, replicating the traditional weaving of the toquilla straw hat, and they will also be able to engrave their names in the seed of the vegetable ivory, all of this following the instructions of the artisans. You will be able to observe closely the clay oven, be part of the

elaboration of the delicious breads in the community of Cadeate and even taste them. In the same way, you will learn about the gastronomy based on the delicious seafood, tasting one of the typical dishes of this territory. Finally, you will appreciate representative churches of the parish, the historical architecture, as well as popular characters that are distributed throughout its territory.

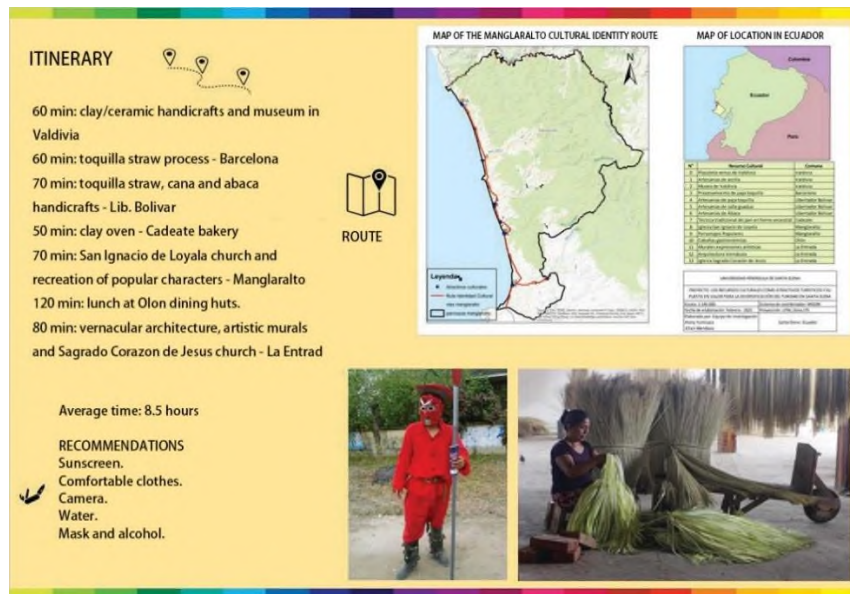


Figure 3. Route 1 Manglaralto Cultural Identity.



Figure 4. Route 2 Manglaralto Artesanal.



Figure 5. Route 3 Manglaralto Cultural: Adventure, arts and architecture.

Route 2 Manglaralto Artesanal

The Manglaralto parish has the greatest wealth of handicrafts in the province of Santa Elena, skills that its inhabitants demonstrate through the harmonious work with different raw materials such as toquilla straw, tagua, guadua cane, wood, banana zapan, clay and abaca, designing appreciated objects for personal and decorative use, varied and colorful, applying techniques and inherited ancestral knowledge that reflect the cultural identity of the territory.

The handicraft route offers a variety of activities in which visitors will have a direct participation, such as learning and practicing the knowledge for the elaboration of objects that have clay as raw material, to make pots; the process of toquilla straw with the cleaning and preparation of the vegetable fiber until the stage of cooking and laying; the traditional weaving of the toquilla straw hat, considered intangible cultural heritage of Ecuador; as well as the ability to engrave their names on the tagua seeds (**Figure 4**).

Route 3 Manglaralto Cultural: Adventure, arts and architecture

The Manglaralto parish offers adventure activities through the practice of paragliding and surfing, therefore, San Pedro and Montañita are the localities of reference for these activities and enjoy

the scenic beauty and the beach. Among the handicraft manifestations programmed in the tour, the visitor will not only learn about the techniques and ancestral knowledge inherited that reflect the identity of the territory but will also be able to participate in the process of the toquilla straw, putting into practice their manual skills with the weaving of hats and will also be able to engrave their name on the tagua seeds (**Figure 5**). In the same way, you will appreciate the architectural richness present in the churches and houses with constructions of past periods, going back in time up to 200 years ago. On your tour you will be able to taste the rich gastronomy, typical of its towns, and learn a little more about the secrets about the elaboration of several of its dishes.

3.2. Discussions

Within the research carried out, it is important to clarify that a preliminary evaluation of the cultural tourist attractions of the Manglaralto parish has been considered, since the competence to carry out this inventory and its respective evaluation corresponds to the Municipal Government of Santa Elena. However, thanks to the support of the Mintur of Santa Elena and the Municipal Tourism Company of the Santa Elena canton, it was possible to establish the hierarchy of those tourist sites mentioned in each of the three proposed routes.

The cultural richness of the Manglaralto parish is reflected not only in the 13 tourist attractions that reached hierarchy III (8%), but also in the variety of cultural manifestations that have a hierarchy II (142, representing 87%), which show the variety of types and subtypes that the territory has, according to the methodology of the Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador. The cultural richness of the Manglaralto parish is reflected not only in the 13 tourist attractions that reached hierarchy III (8%), but also in the variety of cultural manifestations that have a hierarchy II (142, representing 87%), which show the variety of types and subtypes that the territory has, according to the methodology of the Ministry of Tourism of Ecuador.

It is relevant to point out that studies such as Mikery Gutiérrez and Pérez-Vázquez propose within their method for analyzing the tourism potential of the rural area, a more detailed evaluation of the biogeographic, socioeconomic and cultural resources, even detailing the characteristics that enhance the ecotourism value of the attractions evaluated^[22].

On the other hand, Castro Lituma, in his research on a methodological proposal for the inventory of tourism resources in rural areas^[23], consulted a group of professional tourism specialists and found that the methodology applied by the Ministry of Tourism is not very adequate for the collection of information in these territories, because it is more focused on infrastructure aspects than on cultural conservation criteria and other elements^[24].

It is imperative to maintain constant coordination and planning between the public sector, mainly the municipal government of Santa Elena, to continue the work in the other parishes. In this way, it will be more appropriate to identify the cultural potential of the territory to propose a cultural tourism product according to the existing and the trends demanded by the market at the present time.

4. Conclusions

The cultural tourism products designed in the Manglaralto parish are the main result of the research

project “cultural resources as tourist attractions and their enhancement for the diversification of tourism in Santa Elena”, a proposal that reflects a relevant achievement as part of an activity planning process. For this reason, among the main conclusions are the following:

- A total of 163 cultural tourist attractions were identified in the Manglaralto parish, duly geo-referenced and classified into types and subtypes, according to the regulations, unprecedented results found in the province of Santa Elena, which were socialized with relevant agencies.
- As part of the preliminary evaluation and ranking of the 163 attractions identified, 13 were classified as hierarchy III (8%); 142 as hierarchy II (87%); and 8 as hierarchy I (5%).
- Three cultural tourism routes have been proposed for the Manglaralto parish based on the itinerary presentation formats and technical reports established by the Ministry of Tourism, with the respective review and application of recommendations suggested by the Mintur of Santa Elena.
- The results obtained have been presented in tourism events such as the International Cycle of Conferences “a look towards the new reality of tourism”, organized by the Sustainable Tourism Observatory of the UPSE, in the Student’s Week of the National University of Loja and in the radio program Turismo Ecuador in the city of Quito, all in the year 2020.
- In September 2021, during the Tourism Week, an event coordinated and executed between the Municipal Government of Santa Elena, Mintur Santa Elena and the UPSE Tourism career, a Fam and Press trip was held to socialize the routes proposed in this study.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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