



Asociacion Mar a Mar : Costa Rica

About Us

Asociacion Mar a Mar, works in the nexus between conservation and protection of biodiversity, sustainable tourism and economic development of vulnerable communities.

Mar a Mar functions as a DMO, Destination Management Organization, ensuring sustainable tourism principles and it also works as a Community Fund, bringing resources from various sources to invest in communities along the Camino de Costa Rica, fostering sustainable development and protection for the environment at the same time. [In all its activities, Mar a Mar fosters conservation and protection for biodiversity and involves a large number of local individuals and local institutions.](#)

Mar a Mar, has more than 35 associates which include business leaders, professionals in tourism, local leaders and hikers. It was established as a non profit in Costa Rica in November 2015 (Cédula jurídica N° 3-002-718717). It has a solid Board of Director selected for their experiences in various sectors. The board elects an Executive Director who runs the operational side of the organization and leads 7 working groups: Trail Development and Maintenance, Community Engagement, Institutional Engagement, Art and Culture, Marketing and communications, Fundraising, and Legal and Fiscal Issues.

The Board is composed of the following members elected by the 36 associates on the 15th of February, 2023.

Isabel Sanchez, President; David Rodriguez, Vice President; Pablo Ramirez, Secretary; Draham Solano, Tesurer; Heidi Smith, Vocal; Monica Quesada, Vocal; Karin Nagel, Vocal; Gian Carlo Massali, Fiscal.

The Board of Director elected, Conchita Maria Espino as its Executive Director for 2023.

Mission: to help develop sustainable rural communities committed to conservation. The organization does this by bringing hikers from the urban areas of Costa Rica and from other countries to appreciate the natural beauty as well as the local culture through promoting a long-distance hiking trail, *El Camino de Costa Rica*. **Vision:** As the number of trekkers and hikers grows, *El Camino de Costa Rica* becomes a development engine for the trail's vulnerable communities bringing new resources, social infrastructure, and badly needed income that will also ensure conservation and protection for the existing biodiversity.

The Asociación has three pillars:



In order to achieve its objectives Mar a Mar works with **three principal programs and the informal grass-root groups** which we have developed and work with.

- 1) **The Route**: Marketing and Information for hikers, signage and maintenance programs much of it through volunteers and local collaboration. Soon an international program for volunteer hikers to be developed in a more structured manner.

- a) **Hikers and Operator group** of 1.9k members interested in sharing recommendations for improvements and highlighting valuable initiatives.

- 2) **Communities**: Capacity Building for small enterprises and local organizations managed through a Community Fund. Programs of small grants and direct donations to schools, clinics and others to meet community needs.

- a) Group of lodging and restaurant owners along the route called **Red de Albergues del Camino de Costa Rica**.

- b) Group of development associations along the route called **Red de ADIs del Camino de Costa Rica**.

- 3) **Conservation y Biodiversity**: Program of reforestation and maintenance of footpaths.



- a) **Program de Environmental clubs** for students who then impact their communities. Activities, Capacity building, and Conferences. Expanding to include developing venues for youth through outdoor classrooms and other venues.
- b) A long term project to develop a **Center for Biodiversity and Environmental Education** is being planned. Consortium of universities, organizations and grass root community institutions being assembled.

Principally all the programs have as their objective the long term impact on the social economic conditions and the environment. The work of Mar a Mar aims at real and long lasting impact.

El Camino's value depends on a variety of natural and local culture attractions along its course, *Mar a Mar* and local communities devote special attention to conserving local flora and fauna, promoting reforestation, and showcasing local traditions. Where they exist, local development associations are empowered to define and implement such projects with *Mar a Mar* playing a guiding and supporting role.

Mar a Mar Making a Difference

The Association *Mar a Mar* created *El Camino de Costa Rica* to provide hope and a way forward with dignity for enterprising individuals in some of the poorest regions of Costa Rica. Many who live in these remote regions of Costa Rica have lacked access to economic opportunities that would allow them to raise healthy families while staying in their beloved small communities, family farms, and traditional tribal lands. *El Camino* brings opportunities for sustainable income generation and our donor-supported programs help strengthen vital local infrastructure like schools and healthcare services.

Because no one knows their homelands and needs like those who live in these rural regions, we collaborate with local community associations and small entrepreneurs to design projects and guide investment decisions. Roughly 90% of funds donated to *Mar a Mar* go directly to trail and community infrastructure projects designed to increase access to markets, empower small entrepreneurs, and improve quality of life in rural villages by growing the quality of their sustainable ecotourism offerings that generate income. We place a special priority on empowerment of women and indigenous communities.

"Getting to know the Association *Mar a Mar* has been an inspiration...we have now gained the confidence to look for better projects and create sustainable work within our territory."

– Leo Martines, President of the Ethnotourism Committee of Tsiobata
Member of ADI of the Nairi Awari Territory

Values y Principes:

- **Sustainability -social and environmental:** we believe the dual goal of economic development and conservation and biodiversity are particularly compatible in our work. We dedicate much of our work to ensuring to environmental education and appreciation of the flora and fauna along the route. Protecting the biodiversity in the participating communities is essential for the success of the project.



- **Participation and commitment:** active and committed participation is sought from all stakeholders in order to ensure the success of all initiatives.
- **Solidarity:** We believe the only way development can be sustainable is through the balanced growth of all elements of the community ensuring mutual benefits and collaboration.
- **Perseverance:** We seek that all participants accept the challenges of facing setback and obstacles without giving up. We provide the support through difficult times keeping the vision and the long term objectives very present.

Mar a Mar is a member Fundación Costa Rica Estados Unidos de América para la Cooperación (CRUSA) and relies on Amigos of Costa Rica as its umbrella la 501 C(3).