

# Case Study: Tren Crucero



## Getting heritage back on track in Ecuador

Tourism planners across the globe have a new benchmark to measure their work against, but they will have to travel to Ecuador to fully understand how a tourism project can be used to re-connect a nation with its history and revitalise the economies of remote rural communities.

Tren Crucero, or the 'Cruise Train', is a four-day, three-night heritage train journey between Guayaquil on Ecuador's Pacific seaboard and the nation's capital city, Quito, located in the high Andes.

It travels along a breath-taking railway line which, when first constructed over 100 years ago, was one of the world's greatest feats of railway engineering.

But, unstable geology and extreme weather conditions damaged the track so badly that, in 1998, it had to be abandoned. This closure became a metaphor for Ecuador's struggling economy until, in 2007, the country's newly elected President, Rafael Correa, personally decreed that the track should be repaired and re-opened.

His vision was of a tourism-only heritage train service that would use authentic steam engines and traditional rolling-stock to take international visitors and Ecuadorians alike into the heart of this extraordinary country and boost its struggling rural economy.

Six years and \$280m later, Tren Crucero made its maiden voyage.

This is a slow train; it travels at a pace which relaxes the mind and stimulates the senses. It pulls four carriages built in the Spanish Baroque style, the first two of which can comfortably seat up to 54 passengers. The third carriage has a bar and lounge area and the fourth carriage has an outdoor observation deck, just like in the movies!

The train stops frequently, visiting tourist attractions and indigenous rural communities where meals, snacks, souvenirs and crafts are purchased, delivering thousands of tourism dollars to where they are most needed.

On day one Tren Crucero travels across Ecuador's coastal plain, through lush pineapple, banana, sugar cane and cocoa plantations. The landscape then changes dramatically on days two and three as it



climbs over 4,000 metres, negotiating the infamous Devil's Nose and the awesome Avenue of the Volcanoes. Day four includes a visit to the Cotopaxi National Park and the run up to Quito, UNESCO's first ever World Heritage City.

### The UK Marketing Campaign

Ecuador's national railway company, Ferrocarriles del Ecuador, appointed The Destination Marketing Group in late 2012 to promote Tren Crucero to the UK's long haul travel industry, using a combination of travel trade PR, tour operator liaison, networking at travel industry events, E-newsletters, sales calls and staff training.

The principal objective of the campaign was to recruit those UK tour operators who specialised in Latin American or rail-based holidays so that they could act as distributors and retailers for Tren Crucero and 'sell' it to potential UK holidaymakers.

Securing media exposure for Tren Crucero was relatively straightforward. It was a new and exciting project and we obtained good early coverage in most of the major travel industry titles, including

'Selling Long Haul' and 'ASTAnetwork' magazines.

We also worked with UK Tour Operators to send journalists and travel writers on the train and this was rewarded by consistently positive editorial coverage in most of the national dailies, including the Times, the Independent, the Guardian and the Financial Times, etc.

Tren Crucero's Commercial Director, Jose Quintero and I attended the 2013 World Travel Market and toured London to brief Tour Operators about the launch of Tren Crucero and establish the personal relationships that are so important to international commerce.

And it worked. By the end of 2013, the UK was providing Tren Crucero with as many passengers as the USA, a market five times larger, much closer to Ecuador and with good air connections.

In November 2013 Tren Crucero won the British Guild of Travel Writers Best 'Wider World' Tourism Project award. It was then included in Wanderlust magazine's 'Twenty Journeys That Will Change Your Life' and CNN's '11 Places to Go in 2014'.