



Photographer: Michael Bednar

By STEPHANIE FRASER

At the foothills of the Sierra Nevada in Colombia, sits a village called Minca. It's there, in the diverse landscape, where an organization is working to create a better future for the small community. The organization, Misión Gaia, works to provide many services to the community, with programs ranging from sustainable tourism and animal health to education and environmental practices.

Photographer Michael Bednar, a resident of British Columbia, teamed up with videographer Megan Ewing, a resident of Toronto, to document the work of the organization. The Canadian team met for the first time on Colombian soil and worked together to learn about the organization and its work for the village. Minca isn't a town for those looking for luxury and convenience, as it doesn't even have an ATM. If you are looking to withdraw money, you will have to travel about an hour away to the nearest city. But it doesn't mean this village off the Caribbean coast isn't filled with travellers from around the world. In fact, it's a draw for backpackers looking to learn more about the culture of the region. Tourism can be a great boost for places, but for Minca the promise of

projects to bring more travellers is worrisome.

The small village is struggling as it is. "Right now, the town is polluted and over populated with stray animals. Meanwhile, the town is trying to expand the highway extending the town and destroying forests along the way," Megan explains. "This would bring so many more tourists to the area, many more issues that Minca can't handle as they already are facing pollution, over population, and animal welfare issues with the small population and tourists that they have." Working to educate people about eco-tourism is very important, as Colombia is the second most diverse country in the world. It is filled with wild flowers, trees, birds' wildlife, and breath-taking landscapes. The land is also home to the indigenous groups of Arhuaco, Kogui, Wiwa, and Kankuamo. As great as it is for people wanting to learn about the land and the culture, it can be detrimental for those that will lose their livelihoods to deforestation and changes to the town to accommodate travellers.

The Director of Misión Gaia proposes a drive for sustainable tourism to help;

"sustainable tourism is important, because the impacts of tourism development can affect a community negatively in different ways: culturally, environmentally and economically." Diana Bednar, who expresses that the changes a host location has in time, especially if there are not clear roles to guide tourists in best practices or a plan for local businesses in their growing sector. The organization is always looking for donations and new volunteers to help their dedicated and passionate team. With the added bonus of new visuals to add to brochures, their website and other resources, the team will make sure that both residents and travellers of Minca, Colombia get to enjoy the wonderful village for years to come.

#### RESOURCES

Visit Misión Gaia online: [missiongaiacolombia.org](http://missiongaiacolombia.org)

Visit GroupBuy to donate: [groupbuy.com/gai](http://groupbuy.com/gai)



Colombia has the greatest diversity of hummingbirds of any country on the planet with more than 162 different species.

## Misión Gaia Colombia

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Photographer Michael Bednar, a resident of British Columbia, teamed up with videographer Megan Ewing, a resident of Toronto, to document the work of the organization. The Canadian team met for the first time on Colombian soil and worked together to learn more about the work that is being done for the village. Minca isn't a town for those looking for luxury and convenience, as it doesn't even have an ATM. If you are looking to withdraw money, you will have to travel about an hour away to the nearest city. But it doesn't mean this village off the Caribbean coast isn't filled with travellers from around the world. In fact, it's a draw for backpackers looking to learn more about the culture of the region. Tourism can be a great boost for places, but for Minca the promise of projects to bring more travellers is worrisome.

The small village is struggling as it is, "right now, the town is polluted and overpopulated with stray animals. Meanwhile the country is trying to approve a highway extension up to the town and destroying forests along the way," Megan explains. "This would bring so many more tourists to the area, many more issues that Minca can't handle as they already are facing pollution, over population, and animal welfare issues with the small population and tourists that they have." Working to educate people about eco-tourism is very important, as Colombia is the second most diverse country in the world. It is home to incredible flowers, trees, birds/wildlife, and breathtaking landscapes. The land is also home to the Indigenous groups of Arhuaco, Kogui, Wiwa, and Kankuamo. As great as it is for people wanting to learn about the land and the culture, it can be detrimental for those that will lose their livelihoods to deforestation and changes to the town to accommodate travellers.

The Director of Misión Gaña proposes a drive for sustainable tourism to help, "sustainable tourism is important, because the impacts of tourism development can affect a community negatively in different ways: culturally, environmentally and economically," Diana Benicore explains. "These impacts are reflected in the changes a host location has in time, especially if there are not clear rules to guide tourists in best practices or a plan for local businesses in their growing sector." The organization is always looking for donations and new volunteers to help their dedicated and passionate team. With the added bonus of new visuals to add to brochures, their website and other resources, the team will make sure that both residents and travellers of Minca, Colombia get to enjoy the wonderful village for years to come.