

Local Community Support in southern Chile

A wonderful example of one woman's attempt to clean up her local beaches turned into a wonderfully rounded collaboration between three pioneering companies in the sustainability arena.

Señora Orieta lives on a tiny town called Detif, on the tiny island of Lemuy, that forms part of the Chiloé archipelago in southern Chile.

Chile is well known for its mussel and salmon industries, and while those industries do indeed bring lots of job opportunities for locals, they also bring undesirable pollution of the natural habitat.

Señora Orieta decided there had to be a use for the discarded polyethylene nets left lying on the beaches of the tiny island. She spent six months collecting and cleaning them before beginning the meticulous task of weaving them into delicate yet robust baskets.

Smartrip - a B Corp and the first travel agency with social purpose in Chile, heard about Señora Orieta's work and joined forces with Parley for the Oceans - a non-profit environmental organisation focussed on cleaning up the oceans worldwide, and Tierra Chiloé hotel - an architectural masterpiece located on Chiloé island, to provide support and revenue stream options for her work.

Through this collaboration, Tierra Chiloé now employs Señora Orieta to continue to clean the beach and the hotel also sell her baskets in their hotel gift shop.

However, the benefits don't stop there. Great news travels fast and the demand from other hotels and shops to sell the baskets grew. With guidance and training from Smartrip and Parley for the Oceans, Señora Orieta now teaches other local women on her island to weave the baskets. Tierra Chiloé also embraces its role in the education of future generations by organising and hosting environmental consciousness presentations and workshops for local schoolchildren. The power of this action is far reaching and will continue to influence the guardianship and attitudes of the local community for generations to come.

We can all take inspiration from this wonderful project that has grown from one woman's desire to clean up the beaches in her destination, to an initiative that offers not only work and income for the local community, but purpose and pride in the place where they live.

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