



FROM THE FOUNDER

Dear Friends:

Fifteen years ago, the exotic wonder of my home Costa Rica, and my memorable childhood experiences in the outdoors motivated me to venture out to become a competitive athlete and a dedicated adventure travel guide in Costa Rica. As I did this, my environmental education degree and my interest in environmental conservation converged, and the inspiration to found Adventures Under the Sun was born. Now, as we enter our 10th year, I think back to how it all started. I am amazed to see how AUSun has grown in different directions while maintaining a constant focus on our mission and achieving our goal of having a lasting impact on our young participants, developing in each a sense of adventure; a commitment to protection of their environment, no matter where it is; a profound respect for their peers of similar and different cultures; and most importantly, a strong sense of self.

Today, AUSun operates travel programs for individuals and groups, and outfits travel programs from abroad. Many of these programs have a concentrated volunteer component that helps our young people not only learn about a new part of the world but also come to understand the communities inhabiting it. In hopes of providing more opportunities for younger children, here in the heart of Costa Rica, we have partnered up with our friends, Carol Weir and Carlos Chacon, and started a NEW Adventure Kids Summer Day Camp for kids living in Costa Rica's Central Valley. Finally, we are also working with local schools to provide comprehensive outdoor programs for their students, ensuring that they learn about the wonders of the land that surrounds them. It is exciting to work with so many people, all who seek experiences in the outdoors and to better understand the communities in Costa Rica.

As the organization has grown, I still find that the most thrilling moments come when I am able to spend time with our young clients while on their travels. It is so rewarding to see kids laughing and smiling at each other, "high-fiving" with an instructor, or sharing an intense roundtable conversation about a current issue. A sense of achievement- like one feels after catching a wave or hiking the trails in a national park- overtakes me at the end of each program. With each trip, not only do we provide these young people with unforgettable experiences that will change them, but we have also created jobs for our guides, provided clients to local hotels, tours and restaurants, created home stays with humble families, and helped our local

communities with outreach activities. It is so gratifying to know that in a small way, we are having an important impact on this place we call home. And, even more gratifying is the impact we have on our young participants who offer us incredible feedback and kind words in response to their experiences.

These last few years have been intense for the entire world. The global political and environmental threats that are changing the world are hitting us all. The only sure way we can confront these changes, is to step out of this known “comfort zone” and push ourselves to do new things, get involved, help shape this change. Personally, I am constantly pushing myself to do more, do it better, have more of a positive impact. My continued hope is that AUSun can help young people develop this same drive. Thank you for putting your faith and trust in us to lead our young people out of their personal “comfort zones” for a moment, towards a path of personal growth, improvement and change.

Mélida L. Barbee
Founder and Director