

# Tourists in Transfrontier Protected Areas: A Case of La Amistad International Park

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**Abstract :** There are hundreds of international parks throughout the world, where natural areas are bisected by international boundaries and are important resources for tourism. This creates management, conservation and tourism challenges and opportunities. This paper examines visitors' perceptions of La Amistad International Park (Costa Rica-Panama), of the border situation in the park, the cross-boundary management of the park, and the appeal associated with the park's transboundary status. The findings suggest that tourists appreciate the UNESCO WHS value of the park and believe in the importance of cross-border cooperation to conserve natural resources. As well, the transfrontier situation of the park is important for some but not for all visitors in their decision making.

**Keywords:** Costa Rica, Panama, borders, transfrontier parks, tourism, protected areas, La Amistad, tourist perceptions

## Introduction

Borderlands are common venues for natural resources upon which tourism can be based. On the national periphery, borders are prone to development neglect by central governments and are therefore often sites of relatively untouched and pristine environments that are utilized as natural tourism resources. The border itself, however, can potentially lend additional appeal to natural areas, and where resources overlap political boundaries, different management and policy regimes on opposite sides often function at odds with each other, even though they are attempting to conserve or develop the same ecosystem resources. International parks, or transfrontier peace parks, are one example of a tourism resource of this kind. Divided by political boundaries, these often face many conservation, management, and tourism development challenges. By the same token, these conditions provide opportunities for cross-border cooperation between neighboring polities.

While a few observers have begun to examine the dynamics of transfrontier management of international parks (King and Wilcox 2008; Spenceley 2006, 2008; Suich 2008; Timothy 1999), visitors' experiences at international parks have not been well documented. This paper aims to help fill this gap by examining tourists' understanding and perceptions of park management, World Heritage Site status, and the transboundary nature of La Amistad International Park, which straddles the border of Costa Rica and Panama. The study looks at how cross-border partnership in international park management and the binational situation of the park affect tourist perceptions and experiences.

## **Borders, Tourism and International Parks**

International boundaries are known to have several important functions. They mark the limits of national sovereignty and military or security defense. They sometimes determine citizenship, can influence economic and social development, and they control the flow of goods, people, and ideas into and out of a country. By and large, international borders demarcate differences in social, economic and cultural ways of life and therefore can have a major impact on the tourist experience, affecting the flow of tourists, their choices of destinations and activities, as well as the approaches to tourism marketing and planning a destination may choose.

Many popular tourist attractions are located near or at international boundaries, and many borders themselves have become important attractions and destinations. Tourism development at such locations has been described by a handful of scholars (Butler 1996; Chan 2008; Gelbman 2008; 2010; Gelbman and Timothy 2010; Timothy 1995; 2001; Timothy and Canally 2008; Wachowiak 2006). Often, the border and its demarcation methods can themselves be an attraction for tourists. In other cases, abandoned borders that no longer function as political boundaries are popular attractions, such as the Great Wall of China (part of a defensive line in an ancient frontier zone) and remains of the Berlin Wall. Areas in the immediate vicinity of international boundaries, known as borderlands, which are heavily influenced by the border economically, physically, and socially (Hansen 1981), are also important destinations for a variety of border-related

attractions and activities, such as shopping, gambling, prostitution and dining/drinking (Timothy and Canally 2008). Some destinations, where the border is a prominent socio-economic force, have even developed border-themed visitor attractions.

Another phenomenon that has recently been recognized but not well expounded on is the idea of borders running through cultural and natural areas that are important tourist destinations and how the transboundary status of the area affects management, planning and tourism development (Butler 1996; Timothy 2001). There are many examples around the world of international boundaries bisecting historic cities and other heritage areas (Arreola and Curtis 1993; Buursink 2001; Cuasay 1998; Herzog 1991), such as Nicosia (Cyprus), Narva-Ivangorod (Estonia-Russia), Tornio-Haparanda (Finland-Sweden), but even more common are areas of natural beauty and scenic amenity being divided by an international border.

There are literally thousands of examples of beaches and coastlines, mountains, rivers, lakes, deserts, rainforests, waterfalls and other ecosystems and natural features that are divided by international frontiers. Among the most famous of these are Niagara Falls, Victoria Falls, Iguacu Falls, the North Sea beaches, and rainforests in Central Africa and Southeast Asia. These have recently gained academic attention and increased in popularity owing to the demands of contemporary tourists to find unadulterated natural destinations.

Borderlands are among the most common locations of national parks and other protected natural areas because of their situation on the national periphery. While most political and economic emphasis within the state is placed upon central and core areas (Painter and Jeffrey 2009), which are only occasionally on the edges of national space, the margins of the state tend to be ignored from a developmental perspective, except where extractable natural resources abound. As such, borderlands and other peripheral regions remain some of the most pristine natural areas of the world, and nature-loving tourists tend to flock to them to appreciate their unspoiled and ignored attributes (Hall and Boyd 2005; Timothy 2000). There are ongoing efforts in Germany, for example, to establish nature preserves in the old East Germany-West Germany border zone where most physical

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development has been stalled and most of the land is owned by the national and state governments. Some of the 1,400km former border, known today as the Green Belt, has been virtually untouched for years and attracts many species of endangered animals and has largely been overgrown by native plants (Dowling 2008; von Haaren and Reich 2006). Similar conditions are present in the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Korea-an area that has been virtually untouched by humans for nearly 60 years and abounds in nature (Kim 1997; Kim 2001; Westing 1997).

International parks (also known variously as peace parks, transfrontier protected areas, and cross-border nature preserves) are a leading manifestation of tourism resources bisected by a border. There are nearly 200 international parks throughout the world taking on several forms, including national parks abutting each other on opposite sides of a border, true cross-border parks that overlap boundaries and park areas that lie adjacent to borders but which do not overlap (Timothy 1999). In most cases, these parks, particularly the more isolated ones, appeal to trekkers and ecotourists, while some of the more accessible and commonplace ones see higher numbers of visitors each year. Many tourists aspire to view the attraction from both sides of the border, particularly when each side offers a unique experience. Although most tourists visit these parks for the natural attraction, the presence of an international boundary can add an aspect of intrigue to the destination (Timothy 2000).

In the present case, La Amistad, bisected by the border of Costa Rica and Panama, is a tourist attraction in both countries (Cusack and Dixon 2006). The area is extremely diverse in terms of its flora, fauna and geological processes (Clark, Dixon, Ashton and Francis 2006) and was inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List for both countries in 1983 (the Costa Rica side) and 1990 (the Panama side) as a natural heritage site worthy of global recognition. La Amistad is one of the most isolated parklands in the world with relatively few people visiting each year because of its near inaccessibility. Nonetheless, guided ecotours and individual travelers are both present, particularly on the Panamanian side of the park because it is closer to the market and its gateway more accessible by public transportation

and road networks.

## **Methods**

To understand tourist attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of La Amistad and its border-related management, functions, and appeal, a questionnaire was administered in 2006 and 2007. Because the park does not receive a particularly high volume of tourists, convenience sampling was used. Questions dealt with the cross-border nature of the park, and their perceptions of management and satisfaction with their visit.

This exercise provided general themes and ideas about tourists' perceptions of international collaboration. Ideally, the survey would have been administered to visitors on both sides of the border, but because of the extremely limited number of tourists in the park on the Costa Rican side, owing to limited accessibility, and time limitations, the survey, in English and Spanish, was conducted in Panama at the park ranger station at Las Nubes, and in the greater Cerro Punta area. In total, 52 self-administered questionnaires were completed. One of the researchers approached all visitors who entered the park at the ranger station and asked them to participate in the study. Additional respondents were recruited in restaurants, shops, and hotels in Cerro Punta.

The instrument aimed to elucidate information about travelers' current visit, their perceptions of the park, and general demographic information. Yes and no questions, Likert scales, and open-ended questions were employed to understand visitors' awareness of the transboundary nature of the park, their experience or intent to visit both sides, their perceptions of cross-border cooperation in managing the park, the World Heritage Site status of the park, and their present trip characteristics. The data were entered, cleaned, and analyzed using SPSS, version 14.0. Because the sample size was small, as expected, data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine individual and group means, percents and frequencies.

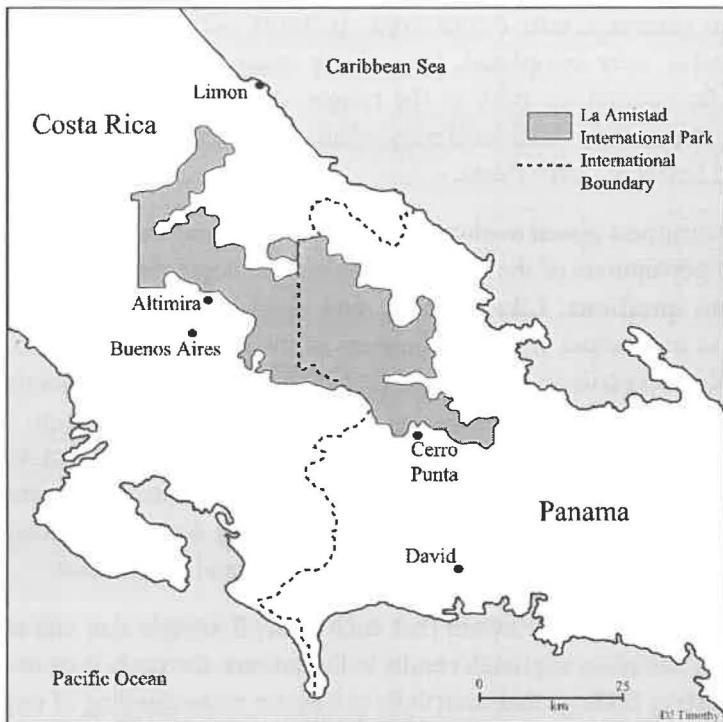
While the authors are aware that such a small sample size and non-probabilistic sampling approach results in limitations, the study does reveal some interesting findings that contribute to a better understanding of visitor

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experiences at this remote binational preserve. While some observers might see the remoteness and lack of tourist traffic as a major drawback to studying visitors at the site, which it certainly can be, the authors looked upon this as an opportunity to explore some of the more important challenges that the park's remoteness creates.

## The Setting

Parque Internacional La Amistad (PILA) is divided into four management segments: La Amistad Caribbean and La Amistad Pacific in both Costa Rica and Panama (Figure 1). In both countries, the majority of the park lies in the Caribbean sector, although visitor access in these areas is limited or non-existent. In each country's Pacific sector, there is one visitor's center that provides access to, and information about, the park. Field work for this study took place at the entrances to the park and visitor's centers in the Pacific sector.



La Amistad Panama includes 207,000 hectares of land, extending across two provinces. While the vast majority of the park lies in the Caribbean sector, access for tourists is extremely limited with only a few dozen people per year entering from the Caribbean sector. The main visitor facilities are located in the highlands of Chiriqui at the village of Las Nubes, near the larger gateway community of Cerro Punta-a fertile highland area that produces some 80% of Panama's vegetable products. Access to the ranger station and gateway generally originates in David, the capital of Chiriqui province. The rough 5.5km ride from Cerro Punta to the park headquarters requires a high ground-clearance vehicle. The ranger station is located 500 meters or so inside the park entrance and is surrounded by a dense rainforest. There is a camping area, administrative offices, an interpretation room, and two dorm rooms with a capacity of ten people.

The ranger station and entire park are managed by Panama's *Autoridad Nacional del Ambiente* (National Environmental Authority) or ANAM. There are seven park rangers living on site. The rangers recorded 2,604 visitors from 39 different countries in 2006 (Table 1). Visitation peaks during the summer months when large school groups visit the park.

**Table 1.** Visitation to La Amistad Panama

2006 Visitation to PILA Panama			
	Nationals	Foreigners	Total
January	83	102	185
February	140	52	192
March	14	56	70
April	122	85	207
May	92	32	124
June	302	41	343
July	284	46	330
August	118	49	167
September	210	32	242
October	278	51	329
November	237	49	286
December	73	56	129
Total	1953	651	2604

Source: field notes, 2007

ANAM maintains trails that depart from the ranger station, varying in length from .5 km to 3.5 km. Visitor pamphlets and materials are sparse. The only handout available is a photocopy of a hand-drawn map of the trails. There is no other park promotional material. Other than its name at the entrance, there is no mention of the cross-boundary status of the park. There is no information about the Costa Rican side.

La Amistad Costa Rica encompasses 193,000 hectares of land in the provinces of San Jose, Puntarenas, and Limón. The park is divided by the Talamanca mountain range into Pacific and Caribbean sectors, each managed by a separate office of the *Sistema Nacional de Areas de Conservacion* (National System of Protected Areas) or SINAC, a division of the *Ministerio del Ambiente y Energia* (Ministry of Environment and Energy). There are no park entrances in the Caribbean sector; on the Pacific side there are three public entrances, Sector Pittier, Tres Colinas, and Altimira. The Altimira ranger station is the park headquarters and the only entrance staffed by park personnel and maintained for visitation. The ranger station is located 2km outside of the small village of Altimira. Access to the park is much more difficult than in Panama. The closest major city is Perez Zeledon, a 4-5 hour drive away. The closest town is Buenos Aires, a 2-hour drive away, and the village of Altimira is only accessible via a 20-km dirt road that requires a 4WD high-clearance vehicle. Reaching the park by public transportation is nearly impossible, forcing most visitors to hire their own vehicles or hike.

The park headquarters is a series of three interconnected buildings that house the park office, four private rangers' quarters, a biodiversity office and lab, a 12-bed dormitory, a kitchen, and a storage room. InBio, Costa Rica's national institute for biodiversity, employs a full-time scientist who lives and works at the Altimira Station. There is also a small amphitheater, which overlooks a valley, a picnic area, landscaped camping areas, a covered camping kitchen, bathrooms with hot showers, and an exhibition room. The exhibition room houses interpretation in the form of posters telling about the history, flora, fauna, biodiversity, and geology of La Amistad. In addition, there are two main trails originating at the park headquarters, one 13.8km long and the other 1.5km.



Because of its near inaccessibility, PILA Costa Rica receives far fewer visitors than PILA Panama. Data are not regularly available, but in 2006, park rangers recorded only 316 visitors (Table 2). While visitors from 18 countries were represented, over three quarters of them were Costa Ricans.

**Table 2.** Visitation to La Amistad Costa Rica

2006 Visitation to PILA Costa Rica			
	Nationals	Foreigners	Total
January	39	15	54
February	10	0	10
March	15	3	18
April	20	10	30
May	7	6	13
June	11	10	21
July	56	16	72
August	2	8	10
September	10	0	10
October	18	0	18
November	35	1	36
December	18	6	24
Total	241	75	316

Source: field notes, 2007.

As noted above, the most drastic difference between the two park entrances and ranger stations is accessibility. While both roads into the park require a 4WD vehicle, the 3km dirt road in Panama is much easier to traverse than the 20km dirt road in Costa Rica. More importantly, however, is the proximity to visitor services. Panama's side is only five kilometers from Cerro Punta, a town with budget and upper-class accommodations and reliable public transportation. Conversely, the Altimira ranger station in Costa Rica is over 100 km from the nearest hotel and is almost impossible to reach via public transportation. These differences have a striking impact on visitation.

Despite the large difference in visitation to each side of the park, in both countries, domestic travelers comprise roughly 75% of visitors.

Interestingly, these nationals are not concerned with seeing the other side of the park in the neighboring country. No Panamanians were registered as visitors to the Costa Rican park, and only 35 Costa Ricans (less than 2% of visitors to La Amistad Panama) visited the Panamanian side. The isolation of the Costa Rican gateway is very likely the primary reasons for this imbalance in visitation between the two sides of the border.

## **Visitor's Views**

Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 73, with a mean age of 42.1 years. The majority (65.4%) of respondents chose to take the survey in English, with the remaining (34.6%) choosing Spanish. Just over half (53.8%) were male, and more than half (53.8%) were from the United States. Panamanians were the next most represented nationality (38.5%), followed distantly by Canadians (3.8%). There was also one respondent from Colombia (1.9%) and one from the United Kingdom (1.9%). Respondents tended to be well educated, with over three quarters of them holding bachelors (50%) or post-graduate (26.9%) degrees.

## **Trip Characteristics**

Visitation characteristics are presented in Table 3. Just over half (51.9%) of the respondents were part of a guided trip to La Amistad, while 48.1% chose to see the park on their own. The overwhelming majority of respondents were aware of the international nature of La Amistad, leaving only 2 respondents unaware of this fact. Some 23.1% of visitors surveyed had been to the Costa Rican side of the park. Of the remaining 76.9% who had not visited the neighboring side, 37.5% planned to visit someday, while 62.5% had no plans of visiting the Costa Rican side. The majority (65.4%) of visitors planned to stay in the park a day or less. The remaining 34.6% planned multi-day trips in the park, with 9.6% remaining four or more days. The probability of returning to the park within the next two years varied significantly, distributed as follows: very unlikely (23.1%), unlikely (25.0%), not sure (13.5%), likely (13.5%), and very likely (25.0%). The most popular activity engaged in by respondents was day hiking (71.2%), followed closely by bird watching (67.3%) and other wildlife viewing (51.9%). Less popular

activities included camping (13.5%) and multi-day hiking (5.8%). The average number of previous visits to the park was 24.3 times. This number is largely skewed by Panamanians who participated in the study and who have visited multiple times. The average number of previous visits for foreigners to the park was .71 times.

**Table 3.** Visitation Characteristics of Tourists to La Amistad

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Awareness of international park (N=52)</b>		
Yes	50	96.2
No	2	3.8
<b>Cross-border visitation (N=52)</b>		
Have been to both sides	12	23.1
Have not been to both sides	40	76.9
<b>Plan to visit other side (N=40)</b>		
Yes	15	37.5
No	25	62.5
<b>Length of stay in La Amistad (N=52)</b>		
Half a day or less	21	40.4
A day	13	25.0
More than a day	9	17.3
2-3 days	4	7.7
4 or more days	5	9.6
<b>Likelihood of return in next 24 months (N=52)</b>		
Very unlikely	12	23.1
Unlikely	13	25.0
Not sure	7	13.5
Likely	7	13.5
Very Likely	13	25.0
<b>Activities participated in during visit (N=52)</b>		
Day hiking	37	71.2
Multi-day hiking	3	5.8
Wildlife viewing	27	51.9
Camping	7	13.5
Bird watching	35	67.3
<b>Trip style (N=52)</b>		
Guided	27	51.9
Self guided	25	48.1

## **Tourists' Perceptions and Experiences**

Questions from this section of the survey have been divided into the following themes: tourism development, the UNESCO status of the park, international nature of La Amistad, cross-border collaboration, improved resource management, and goodwill between neighboring countries.

### ***Tourism Development***

This theme was explored to assess how visitors felt about tourism and tourism services at La Amistad (Table 4). When asked if the park needed more visitor facilities, 50% of respondents strongly agreed that it did, and a further 36.5% also agreed with this statement. Only 5.7% disagreed that the park needed more visitor facilities. The mean response was 4.29. The statement, "There is potential for more tourism to La Amistad", also received a similarly level of agreement: 4.37. Only 1 respondent (1.9%) disagreed with this statement, with 86.5% agreeing or strongly agreeing. When asked whether tourism was underdeveloped at La Amistad, the level of agreement was somewhat lower, with a mean of 3.75 on a 5-point scale. For this statement, only 65.4% agreed or strongly agreed, with 23% neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and 11.5% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

**Table 4.** Tourism Development Questions

<b>Tourism Development</b>	Mean*	S.D.
Tourism at La Amistad is underdeveloped	3.75	0.99
There is potential for more tourism to La Amistad	4.37	0.77
La Amistad needs more visitor facilities	4.29	0.91

\* Items coded on 5-point scales ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)

### ***World Heritage Status***

Questions were also designed to assess whether respondents were aware of the park's status as a World Heritage Site and to see if that designation had an impact on their interest in visiting (Table 5). Participants were asked if they knew the park was a UNESCO site. Only one respondent (1.9%) disagreed with this statement, indicating that he/she did not believe it was a World Heritage Site. 26.9% of respondents neither agreed nor

disagreed with this statement, indicating that they were unsure about the designation. The majority (71.2%), however, agreed or strongly agreed that La Amistad was a World Heritage Site. While most people were aware of La Amistad's status, it did not appear to have a strong influence on their interest in visiting the park. The statement, "If La Amistad were not a UNESCO World Heritage Site, I would be less interested in visiting", received a mean response of 2.46 on a 5-point scale, indicating that respondents were not more interested in visiting the park because it was a World Heritage Site. 53.85% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. The UNESCO designation only had an impact on 11.5% of respondents, who agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

**Table 5.** World Heritage Status Questions

	Mean*	S.D.
<b>World Heritage</b>		
La Amistad is a UNESCO World Heritage Site	4.02	0.90
If La Amistad was not a UNESCO World Heritage Site, I would be less interested in visiting	2.46	0.98

\* Items coded on 5-point scales ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)

### ***International Nature of La Amistad***

These questions were designed to assess whether the international nature of the park had an influence on respondents' desires to visit La Amistad (Table 6). 26.9% respondents agreed and 19.2% strongly agreed that the binational/border setting had a strong influence on their interest level, though the majority (36.5%) neither agreed nor disagreed. The remaining 17.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. The mean response was 3.44 on a 5-point scale. A second statement inquired whether interest in visiting would be lower if La Amistad was simply a national park instead of an international park. The majority of respondents (53.9%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, indicating that they were not more interested in visiting the park because it was international. Only 19.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would be less interested in visiting the park if it was only a national park. This indicates that the international nature of the park is only important to about 1/5 of visitors to La Amistad.

**Table 6. International Nature of La Amistad Questions**

<b>International Nature of Park</b>	Mean*	S.D.
The international nature of the park had a strong influence on my interest in visiting La Amistad	3.44	1.07
If La Amistad was simply a national park rather than an international park, I would be less interested in visiting	2.56	1.04

\* Items coded on a 5-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)

### ***Collaboration***

These questions were designed to assess the respondents' beliefs about and perceptions of cross-border collaboration between Costa Rica and Panama (Table 7). The overwhelming majority of respondents (94.2%) agreed or strongly agreed that it was very important for Costa Rica and Panama to collaborate on park management issues, with a mean response of 4.42 on a 5-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). However, when respondents were asked whether there was enough international collaboration, only 23.1% agreed or strongly agreed that there was. The majority of respondents, 55.8%, were neutral, while 21.1% disagreed in some capacity. Collaborative efforts were somewhat visible to respondents, with a mean response of 3.10.

**Table 7. Collaboration Questions**

<b>Collaboration</b>	Mean*	S.D.
It is very important for Costa Rica and Panama to collaborate on management issues affecting the park	4.42	0.91
Collaborative efforts between Costa Rica and Panama are apparent to visitors at La Amistad	3.10	1.21
There is sufficient international collaboration between Costa Rica and Panama	3.00	0.93

### ***Improved Resource Management***

These questions were intended to find out whether tourists perceived improved resource management at La Amistad (Table 8). No respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that there are environmental benefits of having a protected area that spans across an international border, with a mean response of 4.58 on a 5-point scale. 96.2 % of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. When asked whether La Amistad promoted improved resource management, the response level was lower

(mean=3.83); however, the majority of respondents still agreed (53.6%) or strongly agreed (19.2%) that it did.

**Table 8.** Improved Resource Management Questions

	Mean*	S.D.
<b>Improved Resource Management</b>		
La Amistad promotes improved natural resource management	3.83	0.88
There are environmental benefits of having a protected area that spans across an international border	4.58	0.57

\* Items coded on 5-point scales ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)

### ***Peace and Goodwill***

These items measured whether respondents believed that La Amistad and other international parks promoted peace and benevolence between neighbors (Table 9). Again, no respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that an international park can promote peace between two countries. 94.2% of respondents agreed with this statement, with a mean response of 4.33 on a 5-point scale. Respondents also felt strongly that La Amistad was promoting peace (mean=4.08) and goodwill (mean=4.08) between neighbors. In response to a similar statement indicating that La Amistad promotes cultural exchange between nations, park visitors did not agree so strongly (mean=3.6).

	Mean*	S.D.
<b>Promotion of Peace</b>		
La Amistad promotes goodwill between neighboring countries	4.08	0.76
La Amistad promotes peace between neighboring countries	4.08	0.71
La Amistad promotes cultural exchange between neighbors	3.60	0.89
An international park can promote peace between two countries	4.33	0.58

\* Items coded on a 5-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

In many parts of the world, international parks, or trans-frontier nature preserves, are important tourist attractions. The case described here also has some potential for tourism. In almost every case around the world, ecotourism or other forms of nature-based tourism are the focus of visitor use (Hearne and Salinas 2002). Such venues exist in every region of the world, but this particular case study has focused on a limited number of visitors on the Panamanian side of La Amistad International Park on the border of Panama and Costa Rica. The authors are cognizant that this case study is limited by sample size and convenience sampling approach, but given conditions within the park there are few other options, and it does provide some valuable insight into international park visitors' experiences and perceptions of the park and the border that divides it. Many more studies are needed to verify whether or not tourists' experiences at other binational parks are similar to the context described here.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this study. Visitors to La Amistad International Park believe it is important for Costa Rica and Panama to collaborate on park management issues. However, the majority of respondents were unsure as to whether there was sufficient international collaboration. Cross-border collaborative efforts were only slightly evident to visitors, though most were still unsure about any cross-frontier initiatives at all except in the name of the preserve. Field visits by the authors confirm that there are few, if any, indicators located where tourists tend to go, at either ranger station, administrative office or set of trails, of the cross-border collaborative efforts at La Amistad.

Tourists were strongly in agreement that the conceptual existence of an international park has environmental benefits. Visitors also agreed that La Amistad is performing this function by promoting good natural resource management. There was also a strong agreement that international parks have the ability to promote neighborly relations between adjacent countries, and most saw La Amistad as doing just that. There is also a fairly strong belief that La Amistad promotes goodwill, and to a lesser extent, cultural exchange, between Costa Rica and Panama. The majority of respondents



were aware of La Amistad's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site; however, this did not appear to affect their interest in visiting.

Questions regarding the international nature of the park demonstrated some mixed results. While many respondents agreed that the cross-national form of the park had an influence on their interest level, less than a quarter suggested that their interest would be lower if the park were only a national park without the international designation. This probably reflects two issues. First, the focus of tourism at the park is the ecosystem and remarkable natural scenery it houses. The international designation is a mark of the place's ecological importance to the world. Second is the notion that the border itself is not a significant part of the visited landscape. The trails do not cross the border, nor do visitors cross from one country to the other inside the park limits in any other way. Only 37.5 percent of respondents planned to visit the Costa Rican side of the park as well. Were it the case that people could cross the border in the park, it is likely that more participants would have a keener interest in the border and the cross-border situation of the protected area (Timothy 2000; Wachowiak 2006).

The current level of cross-boundary partnership does not influence much the experience of visitors to La Amistad, although it certainly has the potential to. There could be more educational and interpretive materials informing visitors about the benefits of having a bi-national protected area and what this entails. The notion of a cross-border World Heritage Site is also something that could be highlighted on both sides.

According to previous scholarship, the border location of international parks has the potential to contribute an added value not found at non-border area national parks. Many respondents reported that the international nature of the park increased their interest in the park. However, because the park is so remote and the visitor centers on each side of the border are so distant from each other, it is not currently feasible to have a cross-border experience at the park. Survey data indicated that most visitors to the Panamanian side were not even interested in seeing the park from the other side of the border. It can therefore be concluded that not all attractions and destinations in borderlands can be thought of as 'border attractions' (Gelbman 2008) even if they are part of the broader notion of borderlands tourism. The

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ecosystem that attracts visitors to La Amistad is appealing regardless of its existence astride the Panama–Costa Rica boundary. The vastness of territory involved, the difficult topography and vegetation, and tourists' inaccessibility into the park and across the international boundary that divides it mean the border itself plays a small part in the appeal of La Amistad.

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