

# Maria Soledad Lopez: Empowering Tourism in Ecuador

**RAMA CHAKAKI:** Working in the hospitality sector of her native country, Ecuador, Maria Soledad Lopez witnessed how group after group of tourists would flock to the same popular destinations: the Galápagos Islands, the capital city of Quito, and the Amazon jungle. However, with its mega-diversity and rich cultural heritage, Ecuador has a lot more to offer travellers. And so, in partnership with her brother Diego, Maria launched the startup GoRaymi.com (Go - Rhye - Me) , an online platform and marketplace promoting the lesser-known destinations in Ecuador.

**RAMA CHAKAKI:** Stay tuned to hear more.

I'm Rama Chakaki, and you're listening to Innovate with Purpose, the official podcast of Expo Live, an innovation programme by Expo 2020 Dubai.

**[INTRO STING]**

**MARIA SOLEDAD LOPEZ:** Diego, my brother is an expert in computers with many years of experience in developing technological projects. And I had been working for more than 15 years in the hospitality and tourism industry.

**RAMA CHAKAKI:** This is Maria.

**MARIA SOLEDAD LOPEZ:** We were witnesses that tourism can generate a lot of revenue, a lot of economic wealth. However, big companies of tourism, are not interested in sharing that economic wealth with the small actors of tourism in Ecuador.

**RAMA CHAKAKI:** Why did realizing that compel you and Diego to act?

**MARIA SOLEDAD LOPEZ:** Both of us had successful careers, financial stability, and we loved what we were doing at the time.

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But you know, money is not everything in the world. We felt that something was missing in our lives.

After a long meditation process, we found in our father's teachings the answer: The reason for being an entrepreneur is not only creating economic wealth. The reason for being an entrepreneur is to contribute with our knowledge to create a better world for people.

So five years ago, we left our comfort zone and we realized it was mandatory to create a new startup from zero where our passion, vocation, profession and our desire to change the world were involved.

**MARIA SOLEDAD LOPEZ:** And this came at a time when you decided to create GoRaymi. How would you describe what it does?

We describe GoRaymi as a process of technological empowerment that allows small towns to position themselves as possible touristic destinations through a promotion and online marketplace platform that allows small tourism suppliers to coordinate the necessary actions for the digital transformation of their territories.

We've been working with approximately 1000 small and rural tourism suppliers, training them digital readiness. We have hope you said in giving them all the tools to promote by themselves their small businesses in the Internet as way of improving their incomes and their economic situation.

**RAMA CHAKAKI:** But for Maria, impact goes beyond numbers.

**MARIA SOLEDAD LOPEZ:** For me impact means to find innovative solutions that make the world a better place. We make an impact in society when our technological solution gives the opportunity of changing lives of the smaller tourism suppliers in my country.

We identify three impact areas. With our digital readiness methodology, we try to achieve gender equality and empower all women that are working in the tourism industry of my country. After these last years, working with our beneficiaries all over in Ecuador, we discovered that women are the fundamental base of small and rural businesses. Women drive the economy of the rural territories. They keep the cultural and gastronomic traditions.

However, for years they have not been valued and have been invisible for society. With our digital readiness methodology, we visit them in their rural territories, we train them in digital tools for promoting their businesses themselves, but more important, we encourage them to believe in their selves as as important part of

society. Our methodology includes to make visible the work through campaign social media, showing their faces faces of beautiful and strong, proud, and empowered women.

**RAMA CHAKAKI:** That's incredible. And with Expo Live, GoRaymi has received support from mentors on how to improve your business methodology and social impact goals, which has allowed you and Diego to continue making strides with your mission of bringing sustainable tourism development to Ecuador. Talk about that.

**MARIA SOLEDAD LOPEZ:** We consider the Expo Live team as our family. Just our father and our close family believe in our idea. Expo Live team also believe in us. They are the first international investor that talk with us and told us that our idea is excellent and they give us a lot of support, not only financial, it's an emotional support. They encourage us to continue in our commitment to help other people.

**RAMA CHAKAKI:** Thank you Maria. It was a pleasure.

**RAMA CHAKAKI:** "Innovate with Purpose" is the official podcast of Expo Live, an innovation programme by Expo 2020 Dubai. Innovation can come from anywhere, to everyone.

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"Innovate with Purpose" is produced by Kerning Cultures Network.

Innovate with Purpose  
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