

## THE GREEN LINE

*Fair trade gifts support sustainable development*

BY TALLI NAUMAN  
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A family friend recently asked for personal help selling an indigenous design quilt she sewed by hand. So I advertised it by sending an e-mail to friends and acquaintances across the continent who she otherwise could not reach from her isolated rural home. But by the time I got a buyer, she said she had sold the quilt at half price because she needed money urgently. That left her with no resources to make another quilt for my client.

This frustrating experience highlights some of the difficulties encountered in achieving fair trade. It shows on an individual scale the challenges facing organized marketing of artworks, handicrafts and family farm products to help people make a living in their communities of origin.

The object of fair trade is to promote socially responsible and environmentally friendly enterprise and purchasing, for the purpose of sustainable development. Put in other words, fair trade encourages use of natural resources in ways that provide income security now and protect ecosystems for future generations' greater welfare. This is a stewardship approach that builds bulwarks against migration pressure.

How can you connect the micro businesses and consumers worldwide, while reducing overhead for distribution? How can you keep investment flowing to small-scale ventures to provide income sources and at the same time assure availability of products for your shoppers? How can you compete with mass-produced merchandise subsidized by free-trade policy directives? These are just a sampling of the questions dogging fair traders.

Yet a growing number of extremely devoted and self-sacrificing people are dedicating themselves to this worthy cause. This holiday season is a perfect time to lend a hand in appreciation for their effort by choosing fair trade goods as gifts for important people and occasions, such as Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, and Three Kings Day.

This is not an altruistic concept. It's actually rather self-serving, if you think about it. After all, fair trade practices have environmental and economic benefits not only for the producer and dealer, but also for the shopper and the gift recipient.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE RINCÓN PROJECT

**GIFTS WITH A CAUSE:** Above, Laura Perez Madrigal, a member of the Corner Project team, models the Malinalco Migrants Eagle brooch, earrings and scarf. Brooch shown in detail below.



So I have a few choice places on my list of where to shop and find gifts that deepen the meaning of giving, instead of cheapening it by reinforcing the tired consumerism of the proverbial Christmas past.

#### MALINALCO PROGRAM

A newcomer on the fair trade block this holiday season is The Corner Project (El Proyecto Rincón) in Malinalco, State of Mexico. At its Aztec Chic web page <http://www.elrincon.org/english/>, you can see the elegant, hand-carved local cedar wood jewelry you will receive if you make a tax-deductible donation to the non-profit group's mission. Donations will provide the startup revenue for an ongoing sales program to finance the combat against the scourges of migration and initiate area reforestation.

On the same page, an icon linking the reader to One World Projects serves two primary functions. It guarantees that One World Projects will contribute 15 percent of any purchases you make there to help The Corner Project get off the ground; and it shows you a wide

range of products from around Latin America that are ripe for the picking as presents.

One World Project states its goal thusly: "We strive to be a positive force in reducing poverty, restoring balance in nature, and promoting peace by providing viable economic alternatives for artisans." At its site, check out handcrafted holiday decorations from Ecuador, Guatemala, Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru. Find colorful Bolivian animal figurines made from plaster, ceramic and wood, as well as baskets from Lake Titicaca. Or get a Mayan chef's apron, hot-pads and coasters from Guatemala. Keep kids out of coal mines in Colombia by buying carved coal tree-hangings. Select gourd instruments and other gourd articles from Peru.

One World Project also features goods from far-off lands such as Thailand and Africa. This is largely due to its partnership with the free traders at Economic Development Imports, which has product collections from Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and Ghana. Try <http://www.edimports.com> for exquisite baskets woven of sisal

and banana bark, journals made of recycled and bark cloth paper, soapstone carvings, beaded and recycled silver jewelry, or hand loomed textiles.

Says the sponsor: "At Economic Development Imports our mission is to offer our customers unique, high-quality, handmade products while providing income-generating opportunities to women in developing countries." That creates a shopping option that certainly beats the average mall.

Another valuable option is "Gifts of Service," brought to you by Seva Foundation, based in Berkeley, Calif. At <http://www.seva.org>, you can find out how to make a gift in a friend or relative's name to indigenous community self-development in the Mexican state of Chiapas, adjoining Guatemala or even the southwest United States. Schooling, clean drinking water and chemical-free gardening projects are among the tantalizing choices.

One of my favorite sites for green goods and services in Mexico is <http://www.bioplaneta.com> because I have tested its ability to deliver its orders even in the domestic sphere, which is a tougher than delivering abroad. Its sponsor Bioplaneta advises grassroots producers all over the country, showcasing some of the best free trade goods in this market. At its online store, you can get surprising treats, such as: Mazunte Natural Cosmetics from Oaxaca state; lime juice concentrate, tomato juice and sauce from Morelos; soy sauce and miso from Veracruz; potent herbal remedies, such as tincture of ginger or cardamom; natural fiber picture frames or painted gourd candleholders and boxes from Guerrero state; organic guava, pineapple, coconut, orange and strawberry jam; as well as chocolate, honey, coffee, amaranth, and liqueur specialties.

Many more fair trade sources are out there. They range from the now widespread shade-grown coffee suppliers to small circles of local organic produce exchanges. With a little online shopping, you can find them and go a long ways toward giving, as well as fortifying conservation of habitat. Shop 'til you drop... and give to live!

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