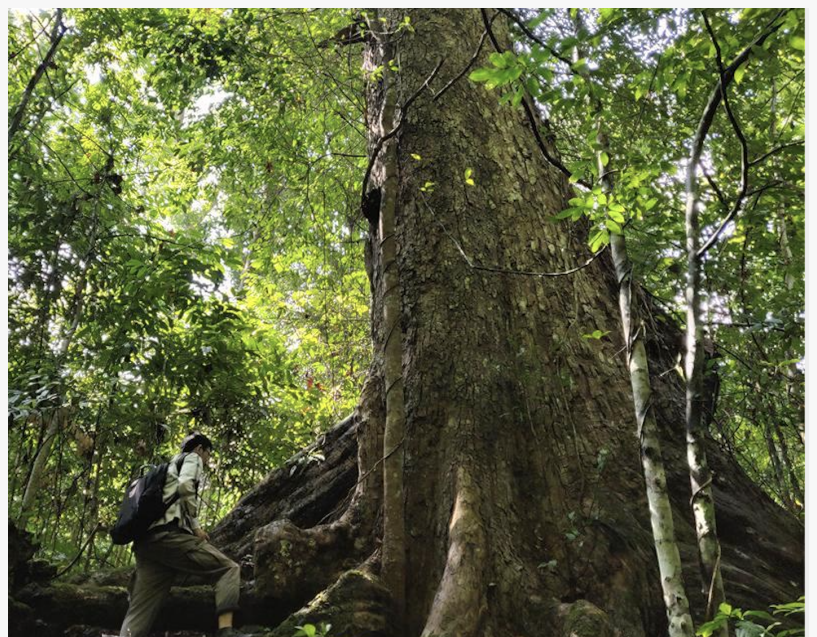


# D&E Journey Protects Rainforests, Wild Elephants and Jino People in Yunnan

*D&E Journey is a sustainable community-driven initiative with a focus on conservation, cultural preservation, and community empowerment.*

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- [Green Globe](#) recently awarded [D&E Journey](#) their inaugural certification. In the lush landscapes of Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture in China, D&E Journey is a sustainable community-driven initiative with a focus on conservation, cultural preservation, and community empowerment. D&E's motto is "The law of jungle does not mean that the weak is a prey of the strong but symbolizes symbiosis and integration".



D&E Journey rainforest trekking

## Returning Rubber Trees to Rainforests and Reforestation

In some high-altitude areas of Xishuangbanna, the large scale cultivation of rubber trees over decades has had devastating impacts on rainforest ecology. At the same time, the price of rubber has plummeted since 2013, resulting in low incomes for local villagers who now face great difficulty maintaining their livelihoods.

In 2018, D&E Journey started a collaboration with Xishuangbanna Tropical Rainforest Conservation Foundation in Jino Town to carry out a pilot project entitled "Returning rubber trees to rainforest and rainforest reforestation". The project encourages villagers to cut down rubber trees and plant a variety of native tree species instead. The Foundation organizes fundraising initiatives supported by the general public and distributes monies to villagers to grow and maintain saplings.

To reduce the damage to the rainforest and the Jino people's dependence on rubber cultivation,

D&E Journey helps Jino villagers in the development of ecological tourism projects such as rainforest trekking and cultural experiences with Jino ethnic minority groups by training villagers to serve as guides, cooks and Jino life and culture instructors. The organization also assists villagers in developing new travel routes and products as well as other alternative sources of income. In addition, D&E promotes the importance of rainforest reforestation to tourists, especially entrepreneurs and celebrities who may be able to assist by adopting newly planted saplings and making donations to the foundation. In the past six years, a total of nearly 5 million yuan has been donated to the Tropical Rainforest Conservation Foundation, providing necessary financial support for public welfare projects.

By the end of 2023, the rainforest reforestation area had reached 543 acres with more than 20 tree species and over 30,000 saplings planted. The 38 villager families participating in the project received 1.136 million yuan in management fees for saplings and it is estimated that more than 2 million yuan profit has been gained through ecological tourism in the town of Jino.

Meanwhile, rainforest trekking in Jino Town has become a new popular travel option in Xishuangbanna. After the Covid-19 pandemic, there are currently 19 travel agencies and more than 10 village groups carrying out tourism businesses. Out of a population of 25,000 Jino people, nearly 5,000 of them are engaged in the trekking business. In 2023, more than 100,000 tourists visited Jino Mountain to experience rainforest trekking providing substantial returns in the millions to villagers.

The development of tourism has completely changed the Jino people's way of thinking about environmental protection. They know that rainforest protection can generate considerable income, which no longer requires publicity by the government or the Foundation but has become the Jino people's spontaneous movement to ensure their livelihoods are secure.

### Protecting Wild Asian Elephants

Ten years ago, the Chinese public knew little about Asian elephants and their conservation, and there was limited media coverage. In 2013, in collaboration with the only wild Asian Elephant Rescue Center in China, the two founders of D&E Journey took actions to protect Asian elephants by launching a public welfare project named "Baby Elephant Future Growth Program". D&E Journey recruited volunteers to participate in the daily work of the center, spreading news of the status of Asian elephants through social media, and inviting media to report on Asian elephant conservation work at the center.

Focusing on the stories of rescued elephants, the Baby Elephant project team encouraged tourists to visit the Asian Elephant Rescue Center and also carried out social initiatives to raise awareness about the achievements and problems faced by China in protecting Asian elephants. Today, the Asian Elephant Rescue Center has become a must-visit destination in Xishuangbanna for many travel agencies and research institutions, and Asian elephant conservation has become a major drawcard for these organizations to attract tourists.

Xiyan Zhang from D&E said, "D&E Journey not only takes tourists to visit the elephants in the rescue center, but also encourages tourists to participate in the restoration of wild Asian elephant habitats and tropical rainforests. We aim to restore wild Asian elephant food sources area, alleviate human-elephant conflicts, and carry out public communication on the protection of Asian elephants from a more basic and urgent level."

## Jino Mountain Trekking

In 2015, D&E Journey innovatively started and developed the Mount Keno Rainforest Trekking Project. During the last year, the rainforest treks have become a popular tourist activity on the internet for over 100,000 tourists, which greatly contributes to the local economy. Devised by Dragon Elephant, the treks invite foreign visitors into the pristine rainforest to learn about its wonderful ecology and the importance of rainforests as the lungs of the earth.

The last generation of hunters in the Jino tribe were also hired as guides so that rainforest knowledge and survival wisdom gathered over thousands of years could be shared with tourists. A rainforest feast is also served that showcases traditional Jino hunter culture featuring roast meats wrapped in banana leaves alongside food presented in banana leaf bowls and eaten with bamboo cutlery.

The popularity of trekking has not only educated millions of foreigners about the Jino people through videos and stories shared globally on the internet, but it has also completely changed the local villagers' understanding of rainforest protection. Furthermore, the trekking has brought young Kino people back to their hometowns, so interestingly, this minority culture might become an integral part of modern society both in China and abroad.

## Eco-tourism Initiatives and Awards

D & E Journey's innovative initiatives are varied with wide ranging benefits. Starting from helping poor tea farmers sell tea, to helping them acquire a deep understanding of tropical rainforest, the company has also helped to promote the culture of other ethnic minorities such as the Keno and Hani and protected cultural traditions such as drum dancing, Qike musical instruments, and tea festivals, as well as the current key project, transforming rubber tree plantations back to rainforest and reforestation in Jino town.

After ten years of practice, D&E has taken a small step toward the protection of ecological environments and ethnic culture through eco-tourism. However, rainforest trekking is only suitable for a few villages, and in fact, the rainforest should not be disturbed by too many people visiting at once. Ecological restoration needs to explore new patterns, and ecological tourism also needs new content. For example, the Baby Elephant Future Growth Program does not rely solely on charitable donations, it also encourages people to help villagers and support public projects by purchasing local agricultural products and travelling in the region.

“It is our responsibility to relentlessly explore new green and sustainable travel,” said Xiyan Zhang. “D&E Journey’s initiatives have been steadily gaining recognition. At the start of 2023, the Baby Elephant Future Growth Program was one of the winners at the Xinlvxing Voyage - Ecological Protection Community Economy Development of 2022 Sustainability Awards. And in September 2023, the Baby Elephant rainforest trekking gained recognition at the Reborn Eco-Travel Forum and in November was a recipient at Conservation & Environmental Grants, Ford China.”

## Southern Yunnan Native Species

Environmental protection can also have unexpected outcomes as D&E discovered on one of its recent eco-campaigns. *Eleutharrhena macrocarpa*, a native species of southern Yunnan, was once one of the five national first-class protected endangered plants in Xishuangbanna. As of 2019, no more than 100 plants had been found in the wild. To support the research and protection of the species by the researchers of the Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve, D&E Journey started tours for parents and children and research activities in the summer of 2019, which allowed tourists to go deep into the workstation of the reserve to understand this species and the protection measures being taken. D&E Journey donated 80,000 yuan to the Reserve from sales of tourist tickets to support the field surgery and artificial cultivation of *eleutharrhena macrocarpa*. In the end, although artificial cultivation was not realized, the increase in funding gave researchers more opportunities for field investigations. The results seem almost ironic, when in 2021, thousands of *eleutharrhena macrocarpa* were found in the wild, downgrading its status from a first-class protected plant to a second-class protected plant.

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