

PART A. PROFILE OF BUSINESS

Avenjúcar is a rural tourism company dedicated to rustic accommodation, traditional cuisine and leisure, free time and multi-adventure activities. It is located in the small village of Tolosa in the municipality of Alcalá del Júcar, province of Albacete, in the Autonomous Community of Castilla-La Mancha (Spain). Alberto Ruiz Sáez (53) is the owner and the founder of the business.



The Manchuela is a region situated between the plains of La Mancha and the mountains of Cuenca, traversed by the Júcar and Cabriel rivers, which give rise to a rugged landscape running between two canyons, of remarkable natural beauty. The region has a rich historic, cultural and natural heritage, being one of the most visited parts of the Community of Castilla-La Mancha. Alcalá del Júcar is a highlight, a small town of exceptional beauty, located in a gorge marked by the bends in the Júcar river. It is a tourist destination featured in all the main Spanish rural tourism guides.



Tolosa is a small village belonging to Alcalá del Júcar, situated 5 kms downstream, with only 33 inhabitants in the census. Its location has made it a destination much appreciated by tourists who lovers of nature and peaceful tourist pursuits.

The company offers rustic-style accommodation, comprising 12 rooms and one suite; a dining-room where breakfast and homemade food are served. The restaurant kitchen prepares typical homemade dishes (*gazpacho manchego*, a type of stew with unleavened bread and game meat, pork rib casserole, roast meats, winter stews, Easter chickpea stew, etc.) and desserts made with local products. There is a lounge area with a fireplace and armchairs with views over the Júcar river valley and a summer terrace, from which visitors can admire the landscapes and the sunsets. The leisure, free time and multi-adventure activities include trekking, guided walks, horse-riding, canoeing and kayaking, gymkhanas (trekking, orienteering, games, etc.), climbing wall, abseiling, rafting in the Cabriel river, canyoning and other on-demand multi-adventure activities. The company also has agreements with agricultural companies in the area to organise guided visits, of, for example, wine tourism.

PART B. THE FAMILY DIMENSION OF BUSINESS

In 1992, Alberto was a restless 28-year-old, who liked to spend time in rural environments and engage in leisure activities in the nature. He pioneered running the river Cabriel, teaching himself the skill. Alberto's parents are from the area, which is traditionally one of rainfed agriculture and livestock. After a period of working for other companies, Alberto decided to start up his own business, substituting the normal agricultural activities of the area for services for the first visitors seeking leisure spaces in the rural world in holiday periods. His first initiative was to offer a canoe service on the reservoir of Tolosa (see note) during the summer season. He took his inspiration from other rural areas that offered such activities to their visitors and which he was familiar with (mainly in the Spanish Pyrenees).

In 1993, against the opinions of the people in the neighbouring area, he decided to set up a business and adapted a space as a jetty for four canoes, next to a small river beach at the reservoir. Subsequently, to avoid transporting the canoes from Alcalá del Júcar to Tolosa every day, he decided to build a small boathouse on some adjacent undeveloped land, which was used as a farmyard for livestock, which he bought from his father. The boathouse had a small fireplace, kitchen and a rest area for employees. The first clients, courtesy of Alberto, were treated to a taste of typical food from the area (*migas ruleras*, fried breadcrumbs) after their activities and were allowed to warm up next to the open fire before and after rowing. The attractiveness of the location, the magnificent attention given to his clients and the good reputation the business gained, made him think about offering more services, progressively including food, accommodation and further activities, in the successive extensions made to the installations, despite the opinions of his neighbours, reluctant to change their way of life, and unable to understand the business model.

Alberto has a twin brother and a sister, and his parents have supported him since the difficult beginnings but do not share in the business. Alberto has no ancestors related to the tourism industry. Currently, Alberto's nephew, Antonio (24) works part-time for the company, along with two full-time employees, 6 other part-time workers and ten seasonal staff, none of whom are family members (Figure 1). Alberto plans to transfer the business in 2029, when he reaches the age of 65.

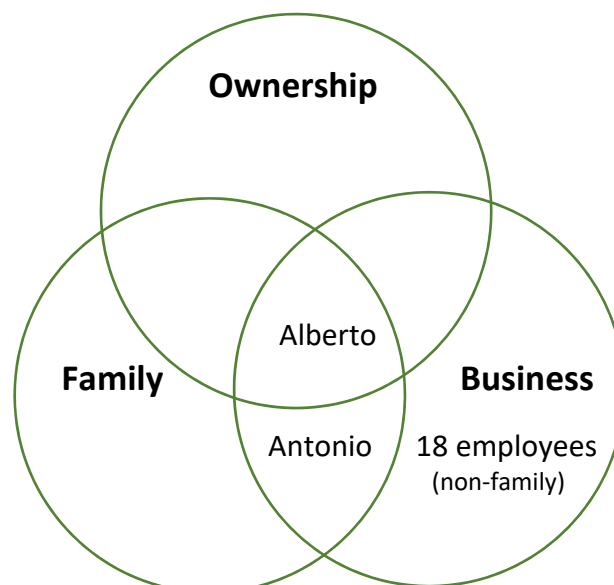


Figure 1 – Avenjúcar 3-circle diagram

PART C. CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES OF BUSINESS GROWTH & SUCCESSION

One of the main challenges facing AVENJÚCAR is that of sustainability, at a time when tourism in the area of Alcalá del Júcar is growing disproportionately, reaching saturation point. New companies have started up, imitating Alberto's business model, offering accommodations, restaurant services and leisure activities. This has all impacted negatively on the surrounding environment. In the short term, the sector is expected to reach a point of maturity leading to a

price war and a shift from quality to low cost tourism, which will also have an impact on the area of Tolosa. Hence, AVENJÚCAR has proposed public policies to control and limit the number of tourists and has offered to reach agreements with other companies to limit the supply and avoid saturating the market.

Another challenge is to de-seasonalise demand and generate bookings during low-occupancy periods from November to February (with the exception of Christmas). To this end, the company is providing its services to communities such as schools, colleges, social associations and organisations and companies attracted by the offer of leisure, free-time and adventure activities and event celebrations. The company prefers to work with small groups so as to maintain quality and the level of attention to its clients. During the low season, it uses hotel booking platforms to attract weekend clients.

Another opportunity to enhance its offer of services and activities is through agreements with wineries in the area to organise guided wine visits and tastings. These options could be extended to other production and/or typical artisan sectors (cheese, ironwork, *esparto*, honey, wood, etc.). These would be integrated into the company's offer, generating synergies that would consolidate this type of active cultural tourism in the area.

Another opportunity is the recent incorporation of a new country house, in the nearby hamlet of Casas del Cerro, also in the municipality of Alcalá del Júcar, which offers a different accommodations service. It is a newly-built property, decorated in the traditional style, but is more functional, with all household services (electrical appliances, swimming pool, barbecue, garden, Wi-Fi, etc.), with capacity for 17 guests (6 rooms and 4 bathrooms). This related diversification strategy fits with Alberto's interest in renovation and decoration. This option opens up new opportunities to expand the business to other locations with similar characteristics, in line with Alberto's attitude of constant entrepreneurship, always looking for new options, services and ways to improve the business. To make ready for this new scenario, he has begun to delegate responsibility and activities to his employees.

Lastly, Alberto would like his business to be continued by someone who shares and will take on his business model of "artisans in emotions", where the most important thing is customer satisfaction and personal service, which generates sensations and emotions fostering the perception of well-being and helps customers enjoy the contact with nature and the return to rural life. Finding a person with this profile who is willing to take over the business is a challenge for which he has already received offers.

PART D. THE ENTREPRENEURIAL DIMENSION

The main feature of AVENJÚCAR is that it has integrated its leisure, free-time and adventure services with those of catering and accommodation (Figure 2), in such a way that 80% of its income derives from the sale of packages including all three services, or at least two of them, which generates synergies for the business. Alberto was clear from the beginning about the synergy of offering integrated services, creating a chain in which all the links are of equal importance for the leisure of clients who seek a special something for their free time or holidays.

Furthermore, over the years and thanks to the reputation gained earned, AVENJÚCAR has specialised in a specific type of client: urban, medium-high income professionals, aged 30-45,

who are nature lovers, with an environmental conscience, who seek to enjoy their free time in a rural setting. Alberto’s business allows them, in just one booking, to have access to all the accommodation, restaurant and activity services in direct contact with nature, with services ranging from more peaceful activities such as country walks to high-action activities such as rafting. His client profiles are: family groups with children (50%), young couples (25%), groups of friends (12.5%) and meetings and celebrations (12.5%). They mostly come from neighbouring regions (70%): the Valencian Community, the region of Murcia and the Community of Madrid, as well as the Community of Castilla-La Mancha itself (30%), mainly from the provinces of Albacete and Cuenca. Customer loyalty is high (90%), with the arrival of only a few new clients, since most bookings are from repeat customers. Most of these book through the AVENJÚCAR website or booking platforms like Booking© and TripAdvisor©.

Key Partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entities for the promotion of local tourism • Initiatives for the sustainability of sector and environment • Agreements with wineries for visits and tastings 	Key Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional dishes • Accommodations and rest spaces well-set (atmosphere and decoration) • Diversity of leisure activities, free time and multi-adventure 	Value Propositions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer Support • Very personalized treatment in all services • Quality of services 	Customer Relationship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct relationship • Very loyal customers 	Customer Segments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Groups of young families with children • Couples • Groups of friends Events and social celebrations
Key Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualified staff • Nice rural environment • Facilities 			Channels <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Own Website, for direct bookings • Specialized reservation platforms: Booking©, TripAdvisor© for low season 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neighbouring regions Urban origin Professional profile Young people (30-45 years old) Medium-high purchasing power
Cost Structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff (60%) • Equipment maintenance (20%) • Reservation platforms (10%) • Supplies (10%) 		Revenues Streams <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated tourist packages (80%): accommodation, catering and activities • Reservation of isolated services (20%) 		

Figure 3 – Avenjúcar’s Business Model

The location in the village of Tolosa, near Alcalá del Júcar and in a setting, such as the Manchuela region, has great drawing power. The main sources of competitive advantage are the quality of the services supplied and the company’s capacity for customer satisfaction. This is achieved by offering a personal, familiar, direct service, which makes customers feel comfortable, relaxed and at home, thanks to the care taken with all the details both in the accommodations (decoration, music, atmosphere, amenities), and in the rest areas (lounge and terrace). Pets are allowed in the accommodations. The food services are also carefully prepared. For example, the breakfast services include sweet and savoury options, with homemade pastries and cakes, using local ingredients. Lunch and dinner menus include typical dishes as well as gluten-free, anti-allergy, lactose-intolerant, vegetarian and vegan options. Special menus are also available for children. The activities are organised in small groups so the relationship between monitors and clients is more direct and personalised, with the monitoring using the customers’ first names

and being familiar with their characteristics and circumstances before embarking on the activity. Activities are never cancelled as no minimum number policy is applied. Activities are also organised for special groups; customers with physical disabilities, visually impaired visitors, etc.

AVENJÚCAR has an active presence on social networks: Facebook®, Twitter®, YouTube®, to publicise its activities and keep the company in the public eye.

PART E. FAMILY ENTREPRENEURIALISM: LESSONS & CONCLUSIONS

The case presented here is atypical. Alberto Ruiz is a **visionary entrepreneur**, with no tradition or family ancestors in the sector, who decided to set up a new type of business in an initially sceptical economic and social environment. Taking advantage of a **privileged location**, the village of Tolosa, in a state of semi-abandonment, Alberto was a pioneer in offering activities for an emerging tourism in a rural setting, successfully **integrating services** that generate synergies and make it possible to **control the supply and quality** of the product offered. The foundation of his success is **customer orientation**, putting himself in the place of his customers, offering services and activities as he would like to have them, taking care of details and personalised treatment, which makes his customers feel well-treated and at home, able to enjoy the natural environment and experience rewarding sensations and emotions (**“artisans in emotions”**), through contact with nature, relaxation in a well-maintained rural setting and the tasting of typical local food. Moreover, his business philosophy and his gift for interaction enable him to orientate the business towards a well-defined **client profile**, clients who, essentially, share his way of understanding and enjoying contact with nature. This highly particular and personal way of understanding the business presents an added difficulty in providing **continuity** when he decides to retire. He must gradually work towards a successful changeover.



All pics are property of the Alberto Ruiz and have been used with their permission.

NOTES:

TOLOSA: At the start of the 20th century, an electricity company built several dams along the Júcar river, to create small hydroelectric power plants. These plants supplied electricity to other more populated settlements, located many kilometres away, spurring the area's industrialisation but changing its physiognomy. The traditional economic activity in this rural area was riverbank farming (small family vegetable gardens which supplied fruit and vegetables to neighbouring communities) and subsistence livestock (usually goats, given the ruggedness of the terrain). In the 18th century, there was a fulling mill (*batán*), belonging to the Tolosa family, who gave their name to the village. One of the dams was built by the village of Tolosa, creating a reservoir in the Júcar river, yielding a haven of quiet water surrounded by pines and olive trees, aromatic plants and autochthonous animals (it is easy to spot Iberian mountain goats, as well as other small mammals, birds of prey, rodents, etc.). The location is suitable for fishing, water sports and nature adventure. The building of the dams led to the disappearance of many of the riverbank vegetable gardens and the migration of most of Tolosa's inhabitants to other places. During the 1960s and 1970s, a large proportion of the Spanish rural population emigrated to other more developed areas, to provide the labour force for an emerging industry demanding human resources. This resulted in depopulation and ageing populations in large swathes or rural areas.

FULLING MILL (BATÁN): A machine made from fine oak wood parts, moved by the water current, turning a wheel with hammers which strike the cloth so that it is evenly milled (normally sheep wool blankets) Fulling mills were used in Spain from the 17th to the 19th century, situated near a river to process woollen cloth, an important Spanish tradition.

CONSORTIUM



UCLan Cyprus



UNIVERSIDAD DE CASTILLA - LA MANCHA



UNIVERSITA DEGLI STUDI DI PALERMO



GrantXpert Consulting Ltd



EDHEC BUSINESS SCHOOL



UNIVERSIDADE DA BEIRA INTERIOR



**ISOB INSTITUT FÜR
SOZIALWISSENSCHAFTLICHE BERATUNG
GMBH**