

Why Should you Pay More for Sustainably Made, Fair Trade Products?

march 4, 2020 · 5 minute read · conscious contributors



Sustainable. Ethically made. Conscious consumer. Fair trade. These words have become synonymous with the evolution of how more people choose what products and services we buy. It is a positive move forward, especially in the fashion industry, as the growing numbers of mindful consumers positively affect how products are made and what they buy.

But, like organic food, sustainably and ethically made goods cost more, as they're usually not mass produced, and fair wages are paid to workers who make them.

Is it worth it to pay more? *Should* we pay more for sustainably and ethically made, fair trade products? I believe the answer is a resounding "yes", and I'll explain why.

Paying more for goods or services is motivated by several factors, depending on the individual. I have observed two influences, however, that seem to be a larger part of our decision-making process. One, our instinctive desire to turn our emotions and frustrations about unethical practices into positive action, and two, valuing the most precious concept we have: time.

In my post college years, I had the pleasure of living and working in Ecuador for over 16 years. It is a beautiful country, dotted with magnificent snow-capped volcanoes, crystalline blue lakes, and lush cloud forests. Ecuador is also the source of the original, authentic, Panama hat, an accessory I love and wear almost every day.

In my work and travels, I have had the honor of meeting many resourceful and talented Panama hat weavers and artisans in towns, large and small. However, I soon learned many of them abandon their beloved craft, which is a time-honored talent handed down through the generations.

Why? To accept jobs in the service sector, as demand for their handmade goods decreases in favor of lower quality, factory-made products.

I also became keenly aware of the concept of how *time* has a cost, and how it is often under-valued, after seeing how hard weavers and artisans work for such low salaries. I couldn't justify the idea that a beautifully woven, handmade Panama hat made in Ecuador, selling in the United States or Europe for \$300 USD or more, often barely generated \$5 or \$8USD for the Ecuadorian hat weaver. A quality Panama hat takes many days to make; the higher quality hats require many weeks to weave. The retail cost of the hat simply did not appropriately value the time the weaver spent in making it.



Weaving a Panama hat can be literally backbreaking work. To weave a Panama hat, the weaver rests her upper body on a thinly padded hard surface such as a stool or a cut tree stump, and meticulously weaves the sustainable toquilla (palm straw) into what will be a refined, artistically designed hat which can last for decades if cared for properly. But it became clear to me the weaver's time was not being respected and honored appropriately. She should be receiving more of the revenue from each hat she makes. She should be able to better support her family with her talents. I found it grossly unfair that a talented weaver whose craft passed through the generations was getting paid pennies on the dollar for what many correctly see, as a work of art. An art so worthy of appreciation that in 2012, the hand weaving of Panama hats was added to the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list.

The heartbreak of learning a generational craft was being abandoned, the frustration of seeing people exploited, and the realization that economies value people's time less in developing countries, called me to action.

I wanted to turn my frustrations about this exploitation into a force for good. I felt I needed to be an advocate and supporter of these talented people and promote the ethos that in addition to the monetary cost of products, we all should consider the human and environmental costs of the products we choose. This was in 2014, before "sustainable" and "ethically made" became the terms as prevalent as they are now, but I knew I couldn't be alone in this thinking. I felt strongly that there must be a wider market for quality products made responsibly. Buying less, but buying better. It was time, for me anyway, to address these issues.

Which is why I founded Ninakuru.

Ninakuru is a luxury artisanal brand based out of my new hometown of Ojai, California which designs and distributes bespoke and ready-to-wear handmade collections of sustainably made authentic Ecuadorian Panama hats, ethically sourced wool hats, and eco-friendly straw bags dyed naturally with rainforest botanicals.

I set up my business model so that each purchase of a Ninakuru handmade product helps us actively engage in supporting artisans earn living wages for their craft, while helping us raise awareness for the need of higher ethical and environmental standards in international trade.

By creating unique designs and adding top quality finishes to each hat, I add value and obtain fair sell prices, enabling me to pay the weavers and artisans prices representative of their work, honoring their time, while promoting slow fashion. This acts as counter-weight to the exploitative nature of the fast-fashion industry. In this way, I am able to help equalize the value of time for all workers in developing countries, and preserve what I lovingly call "The Art of Handmade".

So, do handmade, sustainably and ethically made products cost more? Yes, but it's an upfront cost. And by buying less, and buying better, in the long term, we can actually save money. If we are to be empathetic to people who make the products we buy, and honor their time and talents, it is a worthy investment that we can all afford.

About



Jennifer Moray is the founder and designer of [Ninakuru](#), an Ojai, California based luxury brand, curating collections for select high-end boutiques and a mindful, conscious clientele who appreciate skilled craftsmanship and the luxury it represents. Translated from Quechua, the language of the Incan people, Ninakuru means "firefly", representing that true beauty radiates from within, and each of us has an inner glow worthy of being noticed.



Conscious Contributors

Contributions from our community experts - sharing the best of their knowledge in their field. From sustainability champs, therapists, entrepreneurs, nutritionists to experienced mothers and beyond. We are lucky to enjoy their wisdom, friendship and guidance.

