



Tourism development in the Caribbean

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The need to implement solutions to steer us towards sustainable development that incorporates the environmental, social and economic aspects, is an enormous challenge

In recent decades, humanity has been raising awareness regarding the need to balance its coexistence with the planet's environmental system. This has provoked in the Caribbean, especially due to the fragility of its ecosystem, the emergence of debates on this issue.

The need to implement solutions to steer us towards sustainable development that incorporates the environmental, social and economic aspects, is an enormous challenge in the region. It must take into account the development of its tourism potential and the responsibility of designing and executing plans that would help to mitigate the effects of the massive activity currently existing and focus on undertaking low impact projects, which would allow the less fortunate communities to enjoy greater benefits. It is therefore necessary for Caribbean States to pool their efforts by way of cooperation, so as to formulate proposals that would ensure the shift from the appropriate dialectics to effective and efficient solutions.

Incorporation into the environmental, social and economic aspects

The earth has accumulated an historic degradation of its natural resources, the implementation of the capitalist system, wars, aspirations to power, as well as the development of industrialisation, its consequent need to burn fuels, the indiscriminate exploitation of resources and the waste resulting from consumption, have all left substantial negative effects on the planet. These include the loss of forests, the disappearance of species, pollution and the degradation of fresh water sources and seas. Perhaps what has had the greatest impact on the collective consciousness are the damages caused to the ozone layer, by coming close to disaster theories that cast doubt on the continuity of the human race.

These processes find their origin in the European and Asian regions, in the expansion of empires and the emergence of the countries referred to today as

developed. The American continent began suffering these effects with the onset of European colonialism. The full decline of the feudal system, paved the way for commercialism, which promoted as the basis for survival, the accumulation of precious metals, trade monopoly and the exploitation of man, producing an impact on the region's environmental system.

However, the havoc wreaked on the fragile ecosystem of the Caribbean is minimal compared to that caused in other continents, thereby making us, as we already know, the heirs of an extremely diverse zone. We have a high appreciation for tourists and conditions that are favourable for tourism activity given its geopolitical location, coupled with a multi-cultural influence incomparable with the rest of the world, which has produced its own identity in cultural diversity accumulated over centuries of history: "We are Caribbean".

These characteristics are presented in the economic arena as an advantage, but if this advantage is developed incorrectly or overused with massive affluence in focalised areas, it can, within a short period of time, compromise our responsibility towards the sustainability of our heirs and reconciliation with the future generations of the world; something that perhaps, several countries in other regions can no longer hope to achieve, since they are remembered as the precursors of current and future ecological degradation.

Sustainable development

We are obligated to establish a sustainable development model; nevertheless, any "development" process involves considerable initial investment, more so when it is conditioned to mitigate or avoid environmental impacts. We immediately assume the need to create solid infrastructure, advanced technical training and a substantial investment in promotional activities.

We ensure that we can produce joint formulas that require less investment than expected and which can



prove more effective for our peoples, maintaining sustainability as a condition. We propose that sustainable development plans be based on four basic and symbiotic policies, namely: environmental balance, effective economic generation, social development and close co-operation among Caribbean States.

The first of these policies should be geared towards ensuring the rational use of natural potential, by implementing improvements in handling the effects brought about by massive and focalised affluence, as is the case with cruise ships. We must also create new low impact offers, but which would in turn increase affluence with the use of a higher number of local attractions.

The second should be focused on increasing the economic revenue for Caribbean countries, derived from tourism expenditure on the part of their visitors, which in many instances, remains at a high percentage in countries of other latitudes.

The third is associated with the creation of ventures that would entail more direct community involvement in the planning and execution of tourism activity, thereby improving the technical and organisational capabilities of local management and the direct use of the revenue generated by tourism operations.

The fourth and by no means the least important, is the formulation of cooperation models based on intercultural respect that is established in the common identity, aimed primarily at mutual support for the promotion of joint projects, the exchange of potentialities and access to common markets.

Strategies

The creation of multi-destination packages with overnight stays in several countries on the same trip, focusing on the Caribbean as a single destination, offers the tourist more diversified options, opening up a space for new markets, intra- and mainly extra-regional. They represent a channel for undertaking integrated projects that would allow the grouping of potentialities of the countries involved, facilitating access to the tourist if combined with joint promotion and marketing strategies.

The impetus towards training in the field of sustainable tourism, incorporating communication technologies into distance learning and developing content that is suited to Caribbean potentialities, allows for greater coverage and lower costs when students stay in their towns. Moreover, it creates virtual spaces for discussion and knowledge production among the

experts and practitioners of the sector, which promotes the academic development of tourism activity.

While the various languages that coexist in the Caribbean are indicative of the existing cultural diversity, they can also serve as an obstacle to regional integration and tourist care. Because of this, we would encourage the creation of a Centre for the Promotion of Languages and Cultures of the Greater Caribbean (CPLC), with three initial satellite centres located in Trinidad and Tobago, Guadeloupe and Venezuela.

Although cruise ships have been a tremendous promoter of tourism activity for the Caribbean, they also represent one of the greatest environmental impacts with the massive entry of tourists within a short period of time and focused on a single geographical point of the islands. Furthermore, most of the tourism expenditure is incurred when the package is obtained in another country (which includes accommodation, transport and considerable drinks, meals and souvenirs). This leaves the Caribbean countries, in addition to the waste, only one portion of the service expenses added to those already incurred on the cruise ship. Thus, support is given for the creation of the Association of Caribbean Cruise Ship Destinations, which is in the process of being set up by the Ad-Hoc Working Group of the ACS, in order to establish spaces for participation in negotiations that would strive to establish fair cruise ship trade for the Caribbean. ■

Sustainable development plans must be based on environmental balance, effective economic generation and social development

The Association of Caribbean Cruise Ship Destinations is dedicated to the establishment of fair cruise ship trade for the region

