



## What type of tourism for Haiti?

Patrick Delatour

Minister of Tourism, Architect of Monuments, Haiti

Haiti represents, for the entire Caribbean, the emancipatory dimension par excellence that gives tourism in the Caribbean Basin a cultural and historical dimension

It is doubly symbolic that while, at the level of the Ministerial Council, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs are discussing the delicate issue of the environmental future of our region, it falls to the Ministry of Tourism to present Haiti to the leaders and people of the countries of the Caribbean comprising the Association of Caribbean States (ACS).

- Firstly, because the Caribbean now has the potential to be the most buoyant tourism basin, not only in terms of natural wealth, but also with regard to diversity and security.
- Secondly, because Haiti represents, for the entire Caribbean, the emancipatory dimension par excellence that gives tourism in the Caribbean Basin a cultural and historical dimension, which constitutes a key asset in alternative tourism today.

However, our Caribbean Sea, which has such great potential in terms of “miraculous tourist catches”, is frequently ravaged by hurricanes. Thus, after “Hugo” in Guadeloupe, “Ivan” in Grenada, and the ongoing suffering in Cuba – just to name a few – this year, it was Haiti’s turn to pay its heavy debt to an unpredictable and capricious Mother Nature. Yet, though fragile, the Caribbean remains an attractive destination.

This double symbolism no doubt points to the urgency of protecting our common potential. From this perspective, our country must once again assume the leadership that you have offered to it, by entrusting it with the chairmanship of the Ministerial Council in 2008, under the main theme of the environment. This is at the core of our tourism recovery strategy, which, for the past two years, has served as the basis for the revision of our 1996 Tourism Master Plan.

### What are the issues involved in the recovery of our destination?

Since the 1960s, we have proudly displayed abroad our visitor slogan: “*Haiti, Vive la différence*” (*Haiti, Celebrate the difference*). If, today, the new order in international tourist demand finds in this slogan the content that

fuels the imagination with soft adventure tourism and a quest for an authentic encounter with the local population, it is incumbent on us to restore the full significance of a formula that suits us so well, often for “different and varying” reasons.

Our tourism strategy falls within the framework of our obligation to simultaneously develop our territory, strengthen our urban and communication infrastructure, establish land tenure security, boost national production and, most importantly, restore our environment.

It is a vast programme, and one that has marked a generation. As the President of the Republic has invited us to do, we have deemed it appropriate to follow in the footsteps of our nation’s founding fathers by proposing a strategy that is in keeping with the history of our people and the challenges of the Millennium Development Goals, which support us in our commitment.

During the first quarter of the 19th century, in seeking to protect our dearly-won independence, successive leaders, following the vision of the independence heroes, first rid us of the colonial model of obsession with coastal towns, linked to a counter economy, and then, approaching resistance and survival from a new angle, took control of the interior of the liberated country. This resulted in the construction of the most extraordinary group of mountain fortresses in the world, modelled in the image of our Citadel Henri, figurehead of the group, which was so magnificently portrayed in the previous edition of the Association of Caribbean States Yearbook.

This vision of our ancestors was not merely aimed at leaving us a historical legacy of inestimable value in the eyes of the world, but also at providing us with a model to develop our island both economically and environmentally.

Learning the lessons of the great legendary battles, which remain engraved in the Caribbean memory, for example the Crête à Pierrot Battle, the new fortresses



were places of withdrawal and survival since they were equipped with an internal rainwater collection and water tank system. They also consisted of a real system, at the periphery of cultures, similar to the “jardin créole” (creole garden), which produced what was required for the local consumption of a population, whose members were alternately peasants and soldiers of the formidable native army.

This serves as our compass in revising our Tourism Master Plan, where we place an emphasis on recovering and restoring this heritage, as well as its facilities and environment. However, in order to restore the value of this heritage, we must first protect it. To this end, we must improve the condition of the watersheds whose degradation endangers it.

### A bold gamble

To return this heritage to the Haitian people, their diaspora, and the world, is to open our country to a tourism that offers glory, memory and land; indeed, though singular, this history is common to us all.

However, this is not the only element that fuels our difference. Thus, in the first phase of our revision, we have highlighted four key areas:

1. The North, “Cradle of our identity”, with the National History Park and its Citadel Henri, the Ramiers, the Sans Soucis Palace, the town of Milot, as well as the town of Cap and its historical urban structure – that covers the memory component. To this should be added the Labadie Beach and its future cruise quay for large passenger vessels of the Genesis generation. This northern region will consist of two ports of entry, the new international airport at Cap Haïtien, and the border post at Ouanaminthe, which is serviced by an excellent road connecting Ouanaminthe to Milot – an invitation to tourists at resorts in the Dominican Republic to discover this region.

2. The Southeast, “In all our dreams”, with its capital Jacmel, also remembered by all of Latin America as the starting point of the liberation of the subcontinent and the making of the Bolivarian flag. Today, Jacmel has become a tourism destination in its own right, with its old historical centre that serves as the venue for its masked carnival, which portrays dreams that have been immortalised in the writings of its greatest authors and poets.

3. The South, “Essence of wealth”, with its natural sites consisting of rivers, seaside resorts and underwater discoveries, called Port-Salut, Camp Perrin or les

Cayes, as well as essences such as vetiver, with their potential added value.

4. The West, which includes a “Capital city to be reinvented”, Port-au-Prince, which this year commemorates the 260th anniversary of its establishment and is seeking to recover the modernity that 50 years ago made it the envy of all the capital cities in the Caribbean, and, a mere 30 years ago, a port of call for tourists. Today, it is enriched by the Arcadins coast, which aims to serve as a seaside resort to the capital city.

For the Ministerial delegation that recently stayed in our country, this programme brings to mind the reflection “So much to do, so little time to do it!” This reflection is not a new one. It was already known to the subjects of King Christophe, since the formula is attributed to him, as the leitmotiv of his entire reign.

The pleasure that I derive from sharing, in the columns of the ACS Yearbook, our hopes, our dreams for the recovery of our tourism, is based on a reasonable reformist utopia “that Haiti will rise from its ashes”.

I know that what we Haitians anticipate, and what you, our brothers and sisters in the Caribbean also anticipate, is that ultimately, with the recovery of the tourism sector, Haiti would project to the entire world a new image of a promised land, for all who, before closing their eyes, glance with recognition toward the Citadel Henri. While it has been inscribed by UNESCO on the World Heritage List, the Citadel is also inscribed in the hearts of the African diaspora, both in the Americas and elsewhere, as the symbol of recovered dignity. ■



This vision of our ancestors was not merely aimed at leaving us a historical legacy of inestimable value, but also at providing us with a model to develop our island

This article was written before the 7.0 magnitude earthquake that struck Haiti on 12th January 2010