



# Tourism & cultural heritage: a strategic & necessary alliance

Mercedes Silva, Sustainable Tourism Advisor, Association of Caribbean States

The Caribbean has cultural resources of great value and potential for the creation of tangible and intangible cultural tourism products

In the mind of the international traveller, the Caribbean appears as a tropical paradise where the principal 'products' or 'experiences' to be bought are holidays based on sun, sand and scenery. They hope to take back with them to their countries of origin memories of beautiful beaches, aquatic activities, unspoiled nature.

The Caribbean is recognised as the world's most tourism-dependent region, in particular the Insular Caribbean, if we compare the income obtained by the industry with other export products and services. It is also recognised that the main elements which attract tourists to the region are its warm climate and its beaches and that the result of this is that its main products and tourist activities revolve around these resources. The culture of destinations is seen, in most cases, as a bonus. However, the Caribbean has cultural resources of great value and potential for the creation of tangible and intangible cultural tourism products which can themselves attract visitors to their destinations.

But the availability of a resource as such is not enough to guarantee that it will play a role as a tourist attraction. The resource needs to be given a plan and a tourism management programme to be able to be considered as such. Not all 'sites' visited by tourists have the tourism management elements necessary to be considered as 'tourist attractions' which in most cases leads to deterioration of the resource and loss of appeal.

At this time when the Caribbean is facing strong competition from traditional and emerging markets, the governments of the region are looking at the diversification of their tourism product as a tool to sustain their tourism industry, and consequently their economies. This is becoming more evident in the region's island states, particularly in the smallest ones, which possess limited resources.

## Cultural and heritage tourism in the Caribbean

Cultural tourism is defined by the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) as the "movement of people essentially through cultural motives like study trips, artistic

presentations and cultural tours, trips because of festivals and other cultural events, visits to sites and monuments, trips to study nature, folklore or art, and pilgrimages". The world organisation also denotes heritage tourism as "immersion in the natural, human history, heritage, arts, philosophy and institutions of another region or country". According to the UNWTO, 37 per cent of all international tourism arrivals have a cultural heritage component.

If we are referring to the Greater Caribbean, the programme for development of cultural and heritage tourism could be divided into two main blocks, the Insular Caribbean, still perceived as a 'resort' type destination, which makes the promotion of specialised tourism products difficult; and the Continental Caribbean which offers more solid and recognised cultural and heritage tourism products.

However, in both cases cultural and heritage tourism depends to a large extent on the co-operation and support of non-government organisations, cultural heritage agencies and local communities. For their part, national tourism organisations play an important role in achieving co-operation between tourism operators, cultural heritage agencies and local communities. This requires additional funds and personnel for these organisations, which in most cases work with limited resources in the product development area. In some countries it is becoming difficult to justify the disbursement of funds for a relatively small market like cultural tourism, compared with the movement of visitors produced by traditional sun and sand tourism.

The Greater Caribbean, through its cultural and heritage potential, has been recognised as an area of special attention by international organisations which manage and promote culture and heritage. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is implementing special projects in the region, like the Slave Route and the System of Caribbean Fortifications. In addition, ACS Member States the Bahamas and Costa Rica form part of the Marrakech<sup>1</sup> Task



Force on Sustainable Tourism, which is chaired by France, an ACS Associate Member. Within this initiative there is an ongoing project for Promoting Natural and Cultural Heritage as assets for Sustainable Tourism Development, in which the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Central American Integration System (SICA) also collaborate.

In addition, the Regional Plan of the Organisation of the Greater Caribbean on Monuments and Sites (CARIMOS), created since 1982, has established the bases for the creation of a regional entity for the management of historic sites and monuments in the Caribbean, and for collaboration between cultural and tourism organisations in the preparation of plans for managing cultural heritage for the purpose of tourism. At sub-regional level, the 'Mundo Maya' joint promotion and multi-destination initiative can be highlighted as a demonstration of the organisational capacity of a tourism operation around a cultural attraction.

### **Tourism in UNESCO-declared Cultural Heritage Sites in the Greater Caribbean**

"The natural and cultural heritage forms part of the invaluable and irreplaceable assets, not only of each nation, but of the whole of humanity", so states the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in its "Practical guidelines on the application of the World Heritage Protection Convention", published in 1999. This Convention, approved in 1972 by the member states of UNESCO, guarantees the identification, protection, conservation and appropriate revaluation of heritage assets which because of their noteworthy qualities, have an exceptional universal value.

The advantages which tourism can offer to World Heritage Sites are well known, such as the additional income from charging entrance fees and concessions, as well as other donations which can contribute towards efforts to restore and protect the site. Tour operators and hotel chains can play an important role in the management of Heritage Sites by ensuring that their activities take place within the framework of a responsible and sustainable operation, where their customers, the tourists, are made aware of the importance of the place they are visiting. Moreover, tourism can be used as a tool for utilisation of Heritage Sites, as their importance for the development of this industry is recognised.

All ACS Member States and Associate Members are also members of UNESCO and signatories of the World Heritage Protection Convention. Their governments have been working with the World Heritage Centre to

include in the World Heritage List sites of recognised national, regional and universal value within their territories. This has resulted in the inclusion of 67 World Heritage assets, 47 of which are cultural heritage assets, 19 natural heritage and 1 mixed cultural/natural heritage (See table 1 on pages 67 and 68).

The challenges in managing these sites vary according to their specifications, which range from active heritage towns, to monuments with restricted or special use. However, all the sites share a common use: visits from locals and foreigners attracted for a wide range of reasons, ranging from services offered, especially in the case of towns, to the fact that they are sites of cultural and heritage value.

The possibility of using these important places as tourist attractions provides a viable alternative for obtaining the necessary funds for their maintenance and development without compromising the service they provide to the community. In a region where tourism is considered the principal source of income the strategic tourism-heritage alliance could signify great benefits for both sectors. Provided it is carried out in a planned and agreed manner.

Nevertheless, in the majority of cases, this strategic alliance is difficult to crystallise. An assessment carried out in six Insular Caribbean countries which have World Cultural Heritage Sites showed even though a tourism management plan is requested as part of the documentation for the inclusion of a heritage asset in

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A tourist group visiting the San Felipe de Barajas Fort in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, built in the 17th Century





In a region where tourist activity is considered the principal source of income, the strategic tourism-heritage alliance could signify great benefits for both sectors

The former Palace of the Counts of Jaruco, built in 1737, now houses the La Casona Art Centre in Havana, Cuba

the World Heritage Sites List, it is not clearly identified or simply not available. The authorities responsible for managing heritage sites formulate specialised plans for site restoration and physical development of the same, however, the tourism and visitor management component is generally quite weak.

These problems have been recognised by the majority of site administrators, which have indentified as the main constraint the lack of coordination between heritage management agencies, located in most cases within the Culture ministries, and the country's tourism authorities, i.e. both at the level of tourism board and ministry. In the case of heritage cities, the participation of local or municipal authorities adds another element of complexity to their management, especially with regard to obtaining permits for construction and organising public events in the historical area.

This lack of coordination has in some cases resulted in discrepancies in plans for tourism and those for heritage conservation, as well as in the identification of possible tools for channelling private funds for restoration of and improvements to heritage properties. Regional and international tourism and cultural heritage organisations must play an important role in defining guidelines for facilitating coordination between these two sectors. Equally, within the national and local sphere, it is important to establish greater communication channels between tourism and culture, through inter-sector planning mechanisms, with the participation of other important agencies like urban development

(infrastructure services), education and environment.

The need is becoming evident for formal studies on visitor management at heritage sites, that treat with corresponding general considerations like: different ways of visitor access; movement of visitors within the site and their impact on the physical environment; the quality of the visit, including the capacity of the most important sites; standards for visitor facilities and their associated services (food and beverages, shops, restrooms, etc); general orientation information and interpretation (guides, visitor centres, educational facilities); distribution of profits in the local community and minimisation of the social impact of the visit.

Furthermore, the participation of the private sector is crucial in developing tourism products, in particular the provision of visitor services, such as accommodation, catering and activities, always in keeping with the specialised market at which the heritage cultural tourism product is directed. Equally important is the participation of the community, which can benefit through micro-credits for improving facilities to buildings with a view to offering accommodation and other services within and/or near heritage sites.

The tourism-heritage alliance should also be extended to the area of promotion and marketing of heritage tourism products. The correct identification of the most suitable international tour operators and markets as well as the definition of an authentic image for the product, will be important elements for optimising the benefits which tourism may be able to bring to heritage conservation.

There is no doubt that in order to carry out this process, institutional strengthening and training are required in both sectors in the areas of tourism and heritage management. There is a proposal for an Institutional Strengthening Programme for the Caribbean Sub-region, within the framework of the UNESCO programmes for Latin America and the Caribbean. Some of the elements of the proposal include the creation of jobs related to heritage, the participation of young people in heritage sites conservation programmes, the development of heritage as a product and the economic value of heritage, in addition to its tourism value. This is undoubtedly a chance for the Greater Caribbean States to join forces to overcome the challenge of developing sustainable cultural and heritage tourism. ■

*1 This Task Force forms part of the Marrakech Process, which refers to the 10-Year Framework Programme to accelerate the shift towards sustainable consumption and production, formulated after the mandate of the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development.*







Table 1: World Heritage List sites in the Greater Caribbean

CRITERION: C = Cultural, N = Natural

COUNTRY	YEAR OF INCLUSION	NAME OF THE ASSET	
Netherlands Antilles (Curaçao)	1997	Historical Area of Willemstad, Inner City and Harbour, Curaçao	C
Belize	1996	Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System	N
Colombia	1984	Port, Fortresses and Group of Monuments of Cartagena de Indias	C
	1994	Los Katíos National Park	N
	1995	Historic Centre of Santa Cruz de Mompox	C
	1995	National Archaeological Park of Tierradentro	C
	1995	San Agustín Archaeological Park	C
	2006	Malpelo Fauna and Flora Sanctuary	N
Costa Rica	1983/1990	Reserves of the Talamanca Range/La Amistad National Park (Transboundary site)	N
	1997/2002	Isla del Coco National Park	N
	1999/2004	Guanacaste Conservation Area	N
Cuba	1982	Old Havana and its Fortifications System	C
	1988	Trinidad and the Valle de los Ingenios	C
	1997	San Pedro de la Roca Castle, Santiago de Cuba	C
	1999	Desembarco del Granma National Park	N
	1999	Valle de Viñales	C
	2000	Archaeological landscape of the first coffee plantations in the South-East of Cuba	C
	2001	Alejandro de Humboldt National Park	N
	2005	Urban Historic Centre of Cienfuegos	C
Dominica	1997	Morne Trois Pitons National Park	N
El Salvador	1993	Joya de Cerén Archaeological Site	C
Guatemala	1979	Antigua Guatemala	C
	1979	Tikal National Park	NC
	1981	Archaeological Park and Ruins of Quirigua	C
Haiti	1982	National History Park: Citadel - Sans Souci - Ramiers	C
Honduras	1980	Maya Site of Copán Ruins	C
	1982	Río Plátano biosphere reserve	N
Mexico	1987	Historic Centre of Mexico City and Xochimilco	C
	1987	Historical Centre of Oaxaca and Archaeological Site of Monte Albán	C
	1987	Historic Centre of Puebla	C
	1987	Pre-Hispanic City and National Park of Palenque	C
	1987	Pre-Hispanic City of Teotihuacan	C
	1987	Sian Ka'an	N
	1988	Historic Town of Guanajuato and Adjacent Mines	C

World Heritage List sites in the Greater Caribbean *continued*

CRITERION: C = Cultural, N = Natural

COUNTRY	YEAR OF INCLUSION	NAME OF THE ASSET	
Mexico	1988	Pre-Hispanic City of Chichen-Itzá	C
	1991	Historic Centre of Morelia	C
	1992	El Tajín, Pre-Hispanic City	C
	1993	Historic Centre of Zacatecas	C
	1993	Rock Paintings of the Sierra de San Francisco	C
	1993	Whale sanctuary of El Vizcaíno	N
	1994	Earliest 16th Century monasteries on the slopes of Popocatepetl	C
	1996	Historic Monuments Zone of Querétaro	C
	1996	Pre-Hispanic town of Uxmal	C
	1997	Hospicio Cabañas, Guadalajara	C
	1998	Archaeological Zone of Paquimé, Casas Grandes	C
	1998	Historic Monuments Zone of Tlacotalpán	C
	1999	Archaeological Monuments Zone of Xochicalco	C
	1999	Historic Fortified Town of Campeche	C
	2002	Ancient Maya City of Calakmul, Campeche	C
	2003	Franciscan Missions in the Sierra Gorda of Querétaro	C
	2004	Luis Barragán House and Studio	C
	2005/2007	Islands and Protected Areas of the Gulf of California	N
	2006	Agave Landscape and Ancient Industrial Facilities of Tequila	C
	2007	Central University City Campus of the <i>Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México</i> (UNAM)	C
Nicaragua	2000	Ruins of León Viejo	C
Panama	1980	Fortifications on the Caribbean side of Panama: Portobelo - San Lorenzo	C
	1981	Darien National Park	N
	1983/1990	Reserves of the Talamanca Range/La Amistad National Park (Transboundary site)	N
	1997/2003	Archaeological Site of Panamá Viejo and Historic District of Panama	C
	2005	Coiba National Park and its Special Zone of Marine Protection	N
Dominican Republic	1990	Colonial City of Santo Domingo	C
Saint Kitts and Nevis	1999	Brimstone Hill Fortress National Park	C
Saint Lucia	2004	Pitons Managements Area	N
Suriname	2000	Central Suriname Nature Reserve	N
	2002	Historic Centre of Paramaribo	C
Venezuela	1993	Coro and its Port (in danger)	C
	1994	Canaima National Park	N
	2000	Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas	C