



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

**USAID REGIONAL PROGRAM FOR THE MANAGEMENT  
OF AQUATIC RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES**



# USAID PROGRAM FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF AQUATIC RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVES

**DELIVERABLE NO. 2(B): MARKET RESEARCH – SITE ASSESSMENT  
OF THE ROATÁN – CAYOS MISKITOS TRANS-BOUNDARY REGION**

**05 Julio 2011**

This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by Solimar International.

# **DELIVERABLE NO. 2(B): MARKET RESEARCH – SITE ASSESSMENT OF THE BAY ISLANDS – MOSKITIA REGION**

**Contract No. EPP-I-00-04-00020-00-SOL**

**Submitted by: Solimar International**

**Contact: Hamilton McNutt, Program Manager**  
**1327 14<sup>th</sup> Street, NW, Suite 320**  
**Washington, DC 20005**  
**Tel: (202) 518-6192 x109**  
**Fax: (202) 518-6194**  
**Email: [h.mcnutt@solimarinternational.com](mailto:h.mcnutt@solimarinternational.com)**

**Submitted To: Chemonics International**

The author's views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government

## Acronyms:

ATM	Automated Teller Machine
B&B	Bed and Breakfast
BICA	Bay Islands Conservation Association
CANATURH	Cámara Nacional de Turismo, Honduras
CAP	Conservation Action Planning
COECOMIS	Comité de Ecoturismo Mistruk
CORAL	Coral Reef Alliance
DMO	Destination Management Organization
GAD	Grupo de Apoyo al Desarrollo
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GVC	Gruppo Volontari Cristiani
HCRF	Honduras Coral Reef Fund
ICF	Instituto Nacional de Conservación y Desarrollo Forestal, Áreas Protegidas y Vida Silvestre
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
MAREA	Management of Aquatic Resources and Economic Alternatives
MOPAWI	Moskitia Pawisa Apiska
MPA	Marine Protected Area
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PADI	Professional Association of Diving Instructors
PPROCORREDOR	Proyecto de Gestión Sostenible de los Recursos Naturales y Cuencas del Corredor Biológico Mesoamericano en el Atlántico Hondureño
RAAN	Región Autónoma del Atlántico Norte
RECOTURH	Red de Comunidades Turísticas de Honduras
RMP	Roatán Marine Park
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
TIES	The International Ecotourism Society
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
UCME	Utila Centre for Marine Ecology
UMA	Unidad Municipal de Ambiente
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WWF	World Wildlife Foundation

## Executive Summary

The three sites analyzed here present three very different snapshots of tourism development. The Bay Islands present a destination that is known worldwide with one very strong attraction, scuba diving in the Mesoamerican Reef for affordable prices, and highly developed infrastructure (e.g. airports, cruise ship ports, roads, hotels, and restaurants). The Honduran Moskitia region from the Rio Plátano Biosphere Reserve to the Nicaraguan border presents a destination that sees a low volume of visitation of primarily more intrepid travelers, with just a few tour operators that organize and arrange travel throughout the region. Infrastructure development is minimal though present. In the Nicaraguan Moskitia no tourism has been developed for international markets. While some independent travelers might happen through from time to time the flow and volume of visitors does not constitute a ‘tourism industry’ meaning there is no definable tourism market, no apparent attractions developed for tourist visitation, and no operating tourism products in the region. While there has been some demand for products in the region detected through the inquiries received by tour operators in Granada, Nicaragua, there has not yet been a corresponding development of supply in tourism product offerings.

With the Bay Islands experiencing relatively rapid growth, especially in cruise ship visitation, tourism in the Bay Islands currently presents serious threats for conservation. These conservation threats need to be addressed in the short term in order to avoid degradation to the area’s important marine resources. However, with specifically targeted interventions, MAREA can seek to address some of these threats and promote tourism in local communities to support conservation and reduce the threats posed by tourism. Guide training and awareness campaigns paired with support for the development of community tourism enterprises present the best opportunity for positive impacts.

In Honduras’ Moskitia region tourism development is very local and small-scale. Tourism enterprises are locally owned and operated causing tourism revenues to flow directly to local communities. The minimal infrastructure demanded by the current market segment most often visiting this region also poses little risk to the region’s rich biodiversity. The primary threat manifest in this region is that tourism has not yet grown enough to where alternative livelihoods are provided to enough fishermen and lobster divers to significantly divert economic activity away from traditional resource-extraction and toward non-extractive natural resource use.

Unfortunately this site assessment was unable to fully explore first-hand the Nicaraguan side of the Moskitia region in the RAAN. Political unrest made travel risky and closed government offices resulting in a failure to secure any of the support promised by local partners. However, through interviews with tour operators and desk research performed before, during, and after the site assessment, the lack of tourism development of this region became apparent. With difficult border crossings, lack of developed tourism product offerings and occasional civil unrest, the development of tourism products in this region considering the time and financial resources available to the MAREA project is unrealistic except to incorporate Mistruk as a final stop to Managua for visitors traveling along La Ruta Moskitia or with some of the other tour operators running tours through the Honduran Moskitia.

## **Table of Contents**

1. Introduction: Project Background .....	1
2. Sustainable Tourism in Context .....	1
3. Site Assessment and Methodology .....	2
3.1 Site Description .....	3
3.2 Attractions .....	4
3.3 Infrastructure .....	6
3.4 Demand Characteristics .....	9
3.5 Overall Demand Analysis .....	12
3.6 Situational SWOT Methodology .....	13
3.7 Project Partners .....	17
3.8 Conservation Threat Assessment .....	24
3.9 Tourism Conservation Strategies .....	27
4. Works Cited .....	33
5. Annexes	
Annex 1: Organizational Profile: La Ruta Moskitia .....	34
Annex 2: List of Interviews .....	35

## Introduction: Project Background

The Management of Aquatic Resources and Economic Alternatives (MAREA) program, financed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by Chemonics International, with Solimar International as a subcontractor, builds on previous projects in Central America to support and promote marine and coastal conservation through rights-based access and market-driven mechanisms in concert with local partners from both the private and public sectors. The MAREA program will achieve these goals with a focus on four key trans-boundary areas and seven key focal species. The four trans-boundary regions are the Gulf of Honduras, the Moskitia Coast, Cahuita-Gandoca-Bocas del Toro, and the Gulf of Fonseca. The focal species for the MAREA program are divided into species with commercial importance: mangrove cockles, queen conch, grouper, snapper, and spiny lobsters; as well as two groups of endangered species: sharks and sea turtles.

The MAREA program will employ multiple strategies to positively affect its target species within its regional points of focus including the promotion of rights-based legislation, establishment of managed protected areas and no-take reserves, and by providing economic alternatives to local communities where research extraction threatens marine and coastal natural resources. Sustainable tourism will be employed as a strategy to provide economic alternatives to local communities. Tourism is the world's largest service sector industry and its growth outpaces all other industries. The World Tourism Organization estimates that tourism in 2008 represented nearly 10% of total world GDP at approximately US\$5.89 trillion and employed more than 22 million people.<sup>1</sup> The labor intensive nature of the tourism industry and the indirect economic benefits of extended interactions between visitors and the local economies they visit position sustainable tourism to play a crucial role in providing alternative economic opportunities.

## Sustainable Tourism in Context

Sustainable tourism focuses on developing tourism in a way that benefits local communities with job creation and business development opportunities, while also benefiting surrounding ecosystems and local cultures. Sustainable tourism is based on four pillars: effective sustainability planning; maximizing social and economic benefits to the local community; reduction of negative impacts to cultural heritage; and reduction of negative impacts to biodiversity.<sup>2</sup> It incorporates elements of ecotourism, defined by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) as *responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local peoples*,<sup>3</sup> and represents a new shift in the market for tourism products, that of experiential products. Consumers are searching more and more for *authentic experiences* as opposed to manufactured experiences in their travels. This is reflected in the high rate of growth of sustainable tourism outpacing tourism growth in general at 20-34% per year through the 1990's and predicted to comprise 25% of the total world travel market by 2012.<sup>4</sup> And, though the global economic crisis has hit the tourism markets hard, responsible tourism operators are reporting that they are not seeing a decline in customers; though they may spend less and stay for shorter periods of time they are still traveling because it is a part of their lifestyle.<sup>5</sup> As for tourism in general, the UN's World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has stated that the tourism slowdown will not affect its medium and long-term growth projections and the world's travel market will remain on track for growth to 1.6 billion

---

<sup>1</sup> SNV Netherlands Development Organization, *The Market for Responsible Tourism Products*, 2009

<sup>2</sup> Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria, "Criteria History and Background,"

([http://www.sustainabletourismcriteria.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=164&Itemid=348](http://www.sustainabletourismcriteria.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=164&Itemid=348)), Accessed: November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> The International Ecotourism Society, "What is Ecotourism,"

([http://www.ecotourism.org/site/c.orLQKXPCLmF/b.4835303/k.BEB9/What\\_is\\_Ecotourism\\_The\\_International\\_Ecotourism\\_Society.htm](http://www.ecotourism.org/site/c.orLQKXPCLmF/b.4835303/k.BEB9/What_is_Ecotourism_The_International_Ecotourism_Society.htm)), accessed: November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> SNV Netherlands Development Organization, *The Market for Responsible Tourism Products*, 2009.

international arrivals in 2020, up from 1 billion in 2010.<sup>6</sup> In fact, though the tourism industry experienced strong contractions in 2008 and stagnation in 2009, many destinations are experiencing record setting years in 2010.<sup>7</sup> The Central American and Caribbean markets have lagged behind this recovery, though numbers are generally improving over the performance in the previous two years.<sup>8</sup>

## Site Assessment and Methodology

The purpose of this document is to assess the current status of the tourism industry within the Bay Islands/North Coast area of Honduras and the Moskitia coast trans-boundary region between Honduras and Nicaragua, and to analyze the opportunities for further expansion of sustainable tourism products and services. The information contained in this document was gleaned from desk research of current literature as well as extensive interviews with key stakeholders in coastal and marine tourism actors in the region. Interviews were conducted over a 19-day period from the 17<sup>th</sup> of January to the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February 2011 by Matthew Humke and Eric Lin from Solimar International with local business owners of hotels, restaurants, and tour operators, local organizations promoting sustainable tourism and conservation, and community members.<sup>9</sup> The consultants also assessed tourism infrastructure and available services such as health services, roads and transportation, electricity, communications (telephones, internet, cellular service, etc.), and tourism information centers. The resulting site assessment will synthesize this information to provide a clearer picture of the potential for sustainable tourism development in the region.

The elements of the destination considered within this site assessment are the following:

**Table 1: Site assessment considerations**

<b>Site Description</b>	A general overview of the region and its primary geographic and biological features.
<b>Attractions</b>	The drivers of tourist demand, these are what the tourists will come to see or experience. Attractions can be natural, man-made, or cultural.
<b>Infrastructure</b>	The means by which visitors can arrive to a destination and the services that will enable them to stay. Infrastructure will primarily include roads, rail, ports, docks, airports, water, health services, communications, lodging, and electricity.
<b>Demand</b>	The profile of the current tourism market segments that visit the region.
<b>Local Partners</b>	Local groups and organizations that are able to assist in the implementation of marketing initiatives, awareness campaigns, conservation activities or the creation of new businesses. These local partners would also be candidates for technical assistance.
<b>Conservation Threat Assessment</b>	An analysis of the known conservation threats and their causes that will help shape interventions tailored to the local context.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations World Tourism Organization, "Tourism 2020 Vision," (<http://unwto.org/facts/eng/vision.htm>), Accessed: November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010.

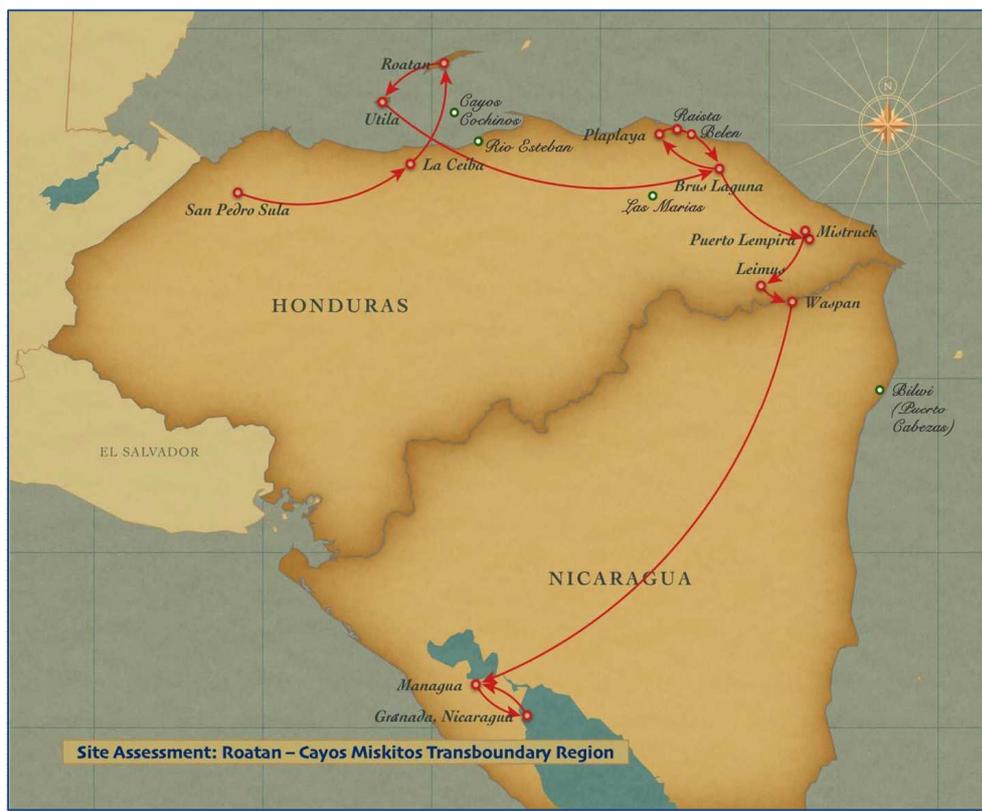
<sup>7</sup> United Nations World Tourism Organization, *UNWTO World Tourism Barometer: Interim Update, August 2010*, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations World Tourism Organization, *UNWTO World Tourism Barometer: Interim Update, August 2010*, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> For a complete list of interviews please refer to Annex 2

### 3.1 Site Description

#### Geography



**Figure 1: Map of the Roatan - Cayos Miskitos Trans-boundary Region Site Assessment**

The Bay Islands and the North Coast of Honduras (shown in figure 1 above with the northern Moskitia region of Nicaragua) are home to three main islands – Roatán, Utila, and Guanaja, as well as the Cayos Cochinos archipelago. The islands are part of the Mesoamerican Reef, the second largest coral reef in the world stretching over 1,000 km from tip of the Yucatan Peninsula, north of Cancun, to the Rio Plátano Biosphere Reserve in Honduras. The Mesoamerican Reef Ecoregion covers approximately 464,419 km<sup>2</sup> of 4 countries including Honduras.<sup>10</sup> The Bay Islands area is home to many marine protected areas including Sandy Bay/West End, Turtle Harbor, Cayos Utila, Cayos Cochinos, and three RAMSAR listed wetlands of international importance at Jeannette Kawas, Punta Izopo, and Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge. The major tourism hubs in the Bay Islands are on the island of Roatán in West End and the cruise ship ports at Coxen Hole and French Harbor, and on the Island of Utila. Both are popular destinations for scuba divers seeking relatively cheap diving in protected reefs. Cayos Cochinos is another destination in the area, though less visited than either Roatan or Utila, it caters more to volunteers and scientists working with the reefs and the biodiversity found inside the reefs.

<sup>10</sup> Healthy Reefs for Healthy People, *Report Card for the Mesoamerican Reef: An Evaluation of Ecosystem Health*, 2010, p. 2.

In La Moskitia, the area from the Rio Plátano Reserve in Honduras to Bilwi / Puerto Cabezas in the Región Autónoma del Atlántico Norte (RAAN) of Nicaragua stretches along over 200 miles of Caribbean Coastline. In addition to the Rio Plátano Biosphere Reserve, a protected area and a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the RAAN, the area is also home to the Laguna del Bacalar, a RAMSAR listed wetland in Batalla. There are systems of large freshwater lagoons interconnected through a network of streams called “Creekehs” in Miskito as well as savannah and pine forests. The Honduran Moskitia region is home to Honduras’ largest tropical forests, and Nicaragua’s Moskitia region was once home to the largest tropical forests in the Americas outside of the Amazon. This region has been called the lungs of Central America. The RAAN is the largest department in Nicaragua taking up nearly half of the Caribbean coastline and about 25% of the land surface though it contains less than 5% of the population.<sup>11</sup> The population in this area is almost all Miskito, though there are other ethnic groups including Pesh groups, the Garifuna communities along the coast and recently Ladinos have begun to settle in the larger cities of Brus Laguna and Puerto Lempira.



Figure 2: Pico Dama in the Rio Plátano Biosphere Reserve

### *Biodiversity*

The Bay Islands are the natural habitat of an incredible richness of biodiversity, and especially marine life. As part of the Mesoamerican Reef system the area includes seagrass meadows, coral reefs, mangrove forests, rivers and beach. Notably, in Cordelia Banks there is a surprising growth of staghorn coral that attracts spawning aggregations of grouper and snapper. This growth is surprising because it is located between two busy cruise ship ports and the urban areas near them at Coxen Hole and French Harbor in Roatan. The area is home to 6 MAREA target species (grouper, snapper, queen conch, spiny lobsters, sea turtles, and sharks). Whale sharks feed in the waters around Utila where there is a species of endemic Iguana. In Cayos Cochinos alone there are 226 reported species of reef fish including 37 commercial species living among the octocoral gardens and rocky coral that make up the regions coral reefs.<sup>12</sup> In addition the mangroves, seagrass beds, and reef, Cayos Cochinos are also host to 19 sea turtle nesting beaches.<sup>13</sup>



Figure 3: Cormorants in La Moskitia

In La Moskitia there are mangrove forests, savannah, fresh water lagoons, rivers, beach, pine forests, and Honduras’ largest remaining virgin tropical rainforest. In 1990, Nicaragua was home to the largest tropical forests in the Americas outside of the Amazon, and though decades of poor enforcement and an extremely damaging hurricane have destroyed much of these forests, they are still

<sup>11</sup> Nicaragua: Instituto Nacional de Información de Desarrollo, Census 2005, accessed 02/14/11: <http://www.inide.gob.ni/>

<sup>12</sup> Honduras Coral Reef Fund/TNC, *Plan de Manejo del Monumento Natural Marino Archipelago Cayos Cochinos, Honduras: 2008-2012*. 2008, p. 25-26.

<sup>13</sup> Honduras Coral Reef Fund/TNC, *Plan de Manejo del Monumento Natural Marino Archipelago Cayos Cochinos, Honduras: 2008-2012*. 2008, p. 31.

home to rich biodiversity. These natural features provide a habitat for over 300 species of birds including the Harpy Eagle and Neotropic Cormorants as the shown in Figure 3 as well as over 100 species of reptile including green, loggerhead, and leatherback sea turtles. Freshwater lagoons are also home to manatees. The commercial lobster fishing industry also comes to the area to harvest the region’s spiny lobsters.

### 3.2 Attractions

#### *Biodiversity*

These regions both have natural riches and biodiversity in a variety of distinct climates and ecosystems that would attract healthy numbers of ecotourists. In fact most of the tourism in the area is based in experiencing its biodiversity. The primary attractions in the Bay Islands are the reef ecosystems and their biodiversity experienced through scuba diving, and, while in the Moskitia culture and history are primary drivers, nature and the region’s biodiversity are hard to divorce from the cultural drivers for visitation.

#### *Sea Turtle Viewing*

Though there are hawksbill sea turtles in Cayos Cochinos and the logo of the Roatan Marine Park is a sea turtle, the Bay Islands do not have many options for sea turtle viewing. Sea turtles are not one of the primary target species researched at the Cayos Cochinos research station and though divers might see turtles feeding among the coral in Utila and Roatán there are no nesting beach tours. As one of the endangered species of focus for MAREA, this analysis seeks to incorporate sea turtle tourism whenever possible, though opportunities in the Bay Islands for development of these kinds of products is very limited.

In the Moskitia region of Honduras there is one site where the local community has formed an organization to guard and monitor sea turtle nesting at Plaplaya. However, the Plaplaya site has very few visitors each year and less than 50 nests laid per season. There is potential for the development of sea turtle tourism under best practices guidelines, but many of these products would still require technical assistance and some financing.

#### *Water Sports*

Aquatic activities are the primary driver of tourist arrivals to the Bay Islands. Utila and Roatán’s West End are premier scuba diving destinations both for the quality of the reef and because diving is offered for some of the most affordable prices in the world. Figure 4 shows a scuba diver in the reefs off the coast of Roatán. Participants of Cayos Cochinos’ research volunteer program are required to have at least a PADI open water scuba diving certification or equivalent. Cruise ship passengers arriving in one of Roatán’s two terminals almost never stay more than daylight hours of one day, leaving little time for scuba lessons, and though many do scuba dive they are more likely to take a boat tour, go snorkeling, or relax on the beach.



Figure 4: Scuba diver hunting invasive lionfish in Roatan

Water sports are the primary draw for tourists visiting La Moskitia though much of their trip occurs riding in motorized dugout canoes known locally as “pipantes.” There are also a variety of ancillary tour products including kayaking, tubing and fishing.

### Hiking

Hiking tours are not commonly sought after attractions in the Bay Islands. The North Coast of Honduras does have spectacular views and hiking trails a short drive from La Ceiba in the Pico Bonito National Park. However, the Bay Islands hold few developed tour offerings for hikers. A local NGO, BICA Utila, will sometimes do informal hiking tours or visitors could take self-guided hikes up Pumpkin Hill or through the island’s mangroves to the Iguana sanctuary.

In contrast with the Bay Islands, hiking is one of the more important excursions for visitors in La Moskitia. Visitors can do an overnight jungle trek, and walk along medicinal plant trails and nature trails where you could see monkeys, tapirs, manatees, some of the estimated 2,000 plant species, or some of the 300 species of birds found in the region including parrots, macaws, and the harpy eagle.

### Cultural Attractions

The Bay Islands are typically known as a destination for diving, snorkeling, and enjoying the beach, however the islands are also home to numerous Garifuna communities including Chachahuate and Rio Esteban in the Cayos Cochinos region and Punta Gorda in Roatán. While these cultural assets are less well known and not as heavily marketed to visitors, visitors do sometimes seek out Garifuna dancing exhibitions and community tours or home stays. Operation Wallacea, the primary sales channel for Cayos Cochinos’ volunteer program, organize a community experience in Rio Esteban for their groups. As a stepping off point, volunteers stay with families in the community, eat local cuisine, and see a dancing group perform at night before leaving for the research station.



Figure 5: Miskito Indians Traveling by Pipante in the Rio Plátano Biosphere Reserve’s network of creeks, rivers, and lagoons

In La Moskitia cultural experiences with local indigenous groups is the primary driver of visitation. Tourists that travel into La Moskitia have a chance to visit with Miskito, Pech, and Garifuna communities. Cultural experiences abound with rides in traditional dugout canoes seen in Figure 5, medicinal plant hikes, local cuisine, and performances by traditional dancing groups all part of the experience for visitors.

## 3.3 Infrastructure

### Accommodations

The accommodations offered in the Bay Islands and the North Coast of Honduras are varied though different markets are segmented geographically. Utila has more of a “backpacker” atmosphere with the hostels and lower-range hotels to accommodate backpacker budgets though there are also apartment and house rentals and some higher-range hotel/resorts. Roatán caters more to quality conscious travelers with mid to high-range hotels and B&B’s around West End and resorts concentrated in West Bay, Sandy Bay, and French Harbor. With the accommodation types available on the island described in table 1.

Type of Accommodation	Description	Market Segment Served
-----------------------	-------------	-----------------------

<b>Mid-Range Hotels and B&amp;Bs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private rooms with private baths</li> <li>• Some will provide air conditioning</li> <li>• Most will include breakfast in the price of the room</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Middle-income travelers and divers</li> </ul>
<b>High-End Hotel and Resorts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Luxury accommodations</li> <li>• Some offer packages including 3 meals a day with accommodations</li> <li>• Most are located outside of town in more remote areas</li> <li>• Many have dive shops on the premises</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-income travelers and divers</li> </ul>
<b>Vacation home and condo rentals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete furnished living areas with multiple rooms and kitchens</li> <li>• Priced by the week or month</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travelers on extended stays</li> <li>• Traveling families</li> </ul>

**Table 2: Accommodations in Roatán, Honduras**

In Utila accommodations range from hostels to luxury, all-inclusive, diving/yoga resorts. Most beds are in hostels, and many of these are connected to dive shops. Table 2 describes the accommodations found on the island.

Type of Accommodation	Description	Market Segment Served
<b>Hostels</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dormitory-style rooms with shared or private bathrooms</li> <li>• Private rooms</li> <li>• Some have air conditioning</li> <li>• Low cost (\$5 - \$20 per person per night)</li> <li>• Many are associated with dive shops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Backpackers</li> <li>• Gap-year travelers</li> </ul>
<b>Mid-Range Hotels and B&amp;Bs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private rooms with private baths</li> <li>• Some will provide air conditioning</li> <li>• Most will include breakfast in the price of the room</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Middle-income travelers and divers</li> </ul>
<b>High-End Hotel and Resorts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Luxury accommodations</li> <li>• Some offer packages including 3 meals a day with accommodations</li> <li>• Most are located outside of town in more remote areas</li> <li>• Many have dive shops on the premises</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High-income travelers and divers</li> </ul>
<b>Vacation home and condo rentals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete furnished living areas with multiple rooms and kitchens</li> <li>• Priced by the week or month</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travelers on extended stays</li> <li>• Traveling families</li> </ul>

**Table 3: Accommodations in Utila, Honduras**

The accommodations offered in the Moskitia are much more limited. There are some modest hotels (one in Brus Laguna and one in Puerto Lempira), and a series of community-owned cabañas such as the ones seen in figure 6. Table 3 describes the accommodations found in this region.



Figure 6: “La Ruta Moskitia” lodging and dining facilities in Brus Laguna

Type of	Description	Market Segment
---------	-------------	----------------

Accommodation		Served
<b>Mid-Range Hotels</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private rooms with private baths</li> <li>• Some will provide air conditioning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business travelers and NGO staff</li> </ul>
<b>Community-Owned Cabañas</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rustic but clean wooden cabañas with thatched roofs</li> <li>• Most are located in more remote areas some can only be accessed by boat ride up creeks and rivers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiential travelers</li> </ul>

**Table 4: Accommodations in La Moskitia**

*Transportation*

Transportation in the Bay Islands is also highly developed. Roatán has an international airport receiving daily connections from San Salvador, Tegucigalpa, and San Pedro Sula. The Roatan airport also receives transferring flights from Newark, Houston, Miami, and Atlanta several times a week. Utila also has an airport as well mostly serving as a connection between Utila and La Ceiba with flights leaving three times a week. Between the islands the primary means of transportation is by ferry via La Ceiba making for a relatively long journey, though there is also a catamaran service running daily for around \$55 per person, and puddle jumper aircraft available for charter for around \$200-\$300 per plane.

In la Moskitia transportation options are surprisingly varied, though infrastructure is significantly less developed. The most convenient way to move from region to region is by plane with Aerolineas Sosa running flights three times a week to Brus Laguna and flights from La Ceiba to Puerto Lempira from Monday through Saturday. Aerocaribe also runs flights between La Ceiba, Puerto Lempira, and Brus Laguna. The overland route takes a full day in a series of buses and boats from La Ceiba through Tocoa and Batalla before reaching la Moskitia in Raista, Belen or Brus Laguna.

Likewise there are flights from Brus Laguna to Puerto Lempira running irregularly (see Figure 7), mainly determined by necessity on days with flights to Puerto Lempira. The trip overland between Brus Laguna and Puerto Lempira is also possible with boats from Brus Laguna to the Patalaya landing in Ahuas, a 2.5 hours ride, a 30 minute crossing over land to La Torre and then a 3 hour boat ride to Puerto Lempira.



Figure 7: Brus Laguna airport/landing strip

To reach Nicaragua taxis can be hired to transit the 3-hour trip from Puerto Lempira to Leimus on the Rio Coco. The river can be crossed in dugout canoes and transportation can be arranged to bring travelers from Leimus to Waspam approximately 40 minutes away. At the airport in Waspam, there are daily flights to Managua or travelers can choose to take the bus that leave daily from the park reaching Managua about 14 hours later. The border crossing should currently be open for any travelers with a C-4 tourist visa. Meaning entering Honduras means visitors do not need a visa to cross into Nicaragua, however during this site assessment consultants faced a militarized border crossing staffed by soldiers who were apparently unaware of regulations concerning tourist movement at that border crossing, and no knowledge of how to treat tourists. In the future official letters or directives explaining regulations concerning border crossings will need to be left with military commanders in charge of the Waspam garrison to avoid similar problems for travelers.

*Utilities/Services*

All utilities and services are available in the Bay Islands of Honduras including 24-hour electricity, running water, phone and cell phone service, internet, banks, ATMs, and stores. Healthcare facilities are

also available with a public and a private hospital on Roatan, a capable health clinic in Utila connected to the hyperbolic chamber, and hospitals on the mainland in La Ceiba.

Utilities and services in La Moskitia are much more limited, with electricity running intermittently, though some hotels and service providers have generators this should not be expected, there is generally no shortage of rain, so running water is not generally a problem, some stores do operate in larger towns though travelers will want to make sure they keep some food and water supplies in case of delays or unforeseen events. Telecommunications are extremely limited though cellular phone service networks are expanding in the area. Internet service exists but access is also extremely limited.

### 3.4 Demand Characteristics

#### *Visitor Profiles*

Visitors to the region fall into four general categories:

1. Domestic tourists
2. Backpackers/gap year travelers
3. Experiential travelers
4. Expatriate residents.

This analysis will focus on groups visiting Honduras in the North Coast (around La Ceiba and Cayos Cochinos), the Bay Islands (Roatán and Utila), and the Honduran side of the Moskitia Region (from the Rio Plátano reserve to Puerto Lempira). Nicaragua does not factor into this analysis as the Moskitia region of Nicaragua is virtually undeveloped for tourism and visitor demand profiles and visitation patterns are not discernible. Tour operators running excursions in the country based in Granada were asked about products promoted in this region and these operators unanimously stated that there were no developed products in the region. One tour operator representative at MP Tours reported that there is no tourism movement along the Atlantic Coast except for the Corn Islands. For this reason the demand analysis will focus on Honduran tourist profiles.

#### *Cruise Ship Tourists*

Comprised of mainly older tourists seeking a relatively low-cost travel and packaged tours, this category represents a large portion of arrivals to Roatán and Honduras' North Coast, specifically. With two cruise ship ports (Port of Roatan and Mahogany Bay) and talks of expansion of infrastructure, Roatán is one of the primary Caribbean day-stops for cruise ships in the region, the only other port is at Port Castilla near Trujillo. Together these three ports see the arrival of nearly half a million tourists per year with Carnival Cruise Lines bringing in nearly 70% of these arrivals with 100 stops spread over five ships each year.<sup>14</sup>, Figure 8 shows the size of these cruise ships as compared to a three story building at a cruise ship port in Roatán.



Figure 8: Cruise Ship port in Roatan, Honduras

<sup>14</sup> Instituto Hondureño de Turismo, Boletín de Estadísticas Turísticas: 2005 – 2009, August 2010, pp. 47-49. (Accessed: March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2011: <http://www.iht.hn/?q=node/154>)

Cruise ship passengers typically dock in the early morning and eat breakfast on the ship before debarking around 8am and spending the daylight hours exploring Roatán or relaxing on a beach. Typically cruise ships leave port in the afternoon between 3pm and 5pm. The limited time allotted to these visitors drives them to participating mostly in pre-packaged tours and excursions, and a industry has developed around these services providing catamaran sailing tours, snorkeling and diving packages, canopy tours, or even community tours.

Cruise ship passengers are a controversial segment of the tourism population with different destination seeing different trends in actual daily expenditures per guest. These expenditures on average tend to be lower than for overnight visitors and with many packaged tours purchased onboard the ship local receipts vary highly depending on the profile of visitor and the arrangement between local authorities and cruise ship executives. In Roatán, anecdotal evidence seems to indicate that cruise ship passengers do create many positive economic benefits to the local economy employing hundreds of people and generating revenue from souvenir sales. The Roatán Marine Park receives 12% of its annual revenue from sales of bracelets and merchandise to cruise ship passengers.

#### *Sun and Sand Resort Tourists*

There is some overlap between these tourists and cruise ship passengers though this group intended here as a representation of the visitors to the resorts in Roatán's West Bay, French Harbor, and Sandy Bay areas. These visitors typically buy packaged vacations, though many packages are not all-inclusive. In the Bay Islands it is hard to divorce any segment from the diving offered on the islands, and even in this segment of the market, diving is a market driver with many resorts operating dive centers on the premises. Figure 9 shows mangrove destruction often driven by coastal developments related to sun and sand resorts.



Figure 9: Mangrove Destruction for Coastal Development

#### *Scuba Divers*

This is a crosscutting market that includes other market segments, however, it is impossible to discuss market trends in the Bay Islands without discussing perhaps the most important driver of visitation. In fact, 6.2% of visitors to all of Honduras between 2005 and 2009 dove during their trip and diving essentially only exists in the Bay Islands and Honduras' North Coast. This figure represents 8.5% of North American visitors and 12.5% of European visitors to the whole of Honduras.<sup>15</sup>

Among this market are backpackers and gap-year travelers who are likely from 20 – 25 years of age staying in hostels and working towards a PADI scuba diving certification in one of the dive shops in Utila or Roatán's West End. This sub-segment are not likely diving as part of a longer trip and not likely to spend much time doing other activities while in their course or diving. Some may be working towards a divemaster or instructor certification and choose to stay on after the course to work at a dive shop for an extended period of time, during site visits the consultants met with one divemaster who stayed for 3 years.

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 36.

Also represented in this group are sun-and-sand visitor staying in one of the Bay Islands' resorts and dive centers where they typically incorporate other activities into their primary activity of diving over a week or two week trip. This group tends to be older from 30 – 50 years of age and tend to be in higher income strata. This sub-segment would be more likely to incorporate a community tour, or donate to travel philanthropy funds.

Finally, there is a sub-segment of divers that arrive to Honduras' North Coast in groups organized by Operation Wallacea to assist in reef research in the Cayos Cochinos Natural Monument. These visitors come in a structured package that includes a stop over in the Rio Esteban Garifuna community and other community tourism experiences, however their primary activity is working and researching reef and biodiversity health in the Cayos Cochinos National Park.

The Moskitia region does not receive recreational divers and has no facilities or plans to build such facilities. Though there are lobster divers in the communities these men are almost never trained by any certifying body and would be unfit to lead groups of recreational divers or teach courses without further skills development. In fact lobster divers would be dangerous as group leaders as they are accustomed to diving without gauges to unknown depths often more than 10 times a day leading to many cases of decompression sickness and diving related injuries.

#### *Backpackers/Gap-Year Travelers*

In the diverse tourism landscape of Honduras' North Coast and the Bay Islands this market segment is another staple represented by younger travelers generally known for traveling as inexpensively as possible. This group will tend to stay in hostels and while they are less discouraged by challenging logistics or a lack of amenities, they are easily discouraged by higher prices. These travelers will be more likely participate in voluntourism though they are not likely to pay very much towards travel philanthropy funds. While there are some independent backpackers who travel through the Moskitia region the costs are high even without guides and arranged transportation and logistical hurdles are extremely challenging, making travel through that region a highly desired, but seldom explored opportunity for this segment of the Honduran tourism market.

A sub-segment of this group are the organized groups of volunteers who come to perform research or participate in community development and conservation projects, such as the project in Cayos Cochinos. This program receives around 500 visitors each year. This is the largest and most organized volunteer program along the northern Honduran coast.

#### *Experiential Travelers*

Experiential travelers are the Holy Grail for sustainable tourism in the area. As a market segment their size is hard to determine though as a proxy measurement the Honduran Institute of Tourism reports around 5.4% of visitors come for "nature and adventure." Indicating a relative size for experiential travelers around 5-6% of total arrivals.

This group has a higher ability to spend and is more willing to spend money on quality experiences with nature and local communities. Global data indicates that this market tend to range from 30 – 60 years of age and travel makes up a part of their lifestyle. This group is also likely to organize travel to a destination independently, using internet resources and travel guides, and are more inclined to take advantage of sustainable inbound operators to organize excursions and trips once in country. This group is also more likely to contribute to conservation funds and travel philanthropy funds.

The tourist arrivals to the Moskitia region are almost entirely comprised of experiential travelers. Though some backpackers will make this trip, logistics are extremely difficult and without a guide this trip can be

not only difficult but also risky. However, experiential travelers are more willing to spend the money necessary to organize guided trips through the Moskitia region.

### 3.5 Overall Demand Analysis

Honduras is the least developed of the Central American countries in terms of tourism arrivals. It receives around 900,000 visitors per year, representing about 11% of total Central American Tourism arrivals. In terms of tourism revenues, however, Honduras ranks 4<sup>th</sup> behind Guatemala, receiving over US\$600 million per year.<sup>16</sup> This speaks to the tourism profile in Honduras in that on average tourists are spending a great deal more than in other Central American destinations.

In the Bay Islands, cruise ship tourists and divers dominate the market, which makes for an interesting contrast in demand profiles. Cruise ship passengers do not generally know very much about sustainability in tourism operations or conservation. They are typically seeking primarily leisure activities and interactions with nature of local communities, while pleasant, are not a primary driver of visitation. For the divers conservation is a concern especially when it regards marine ecosystems and specifically reefs. The local communities are the ones who less directly involved in tourism in these markets, meaning that while tourism arrivals from cruise ships and divers provides an economic motor driving job creation in tourism services, demand for community tourism products is not as strong as driver as beaches and reefs. This is not to say demand does not exist, as products in Chachaguata, Rio Esteban, Punta Gorda, and Oak Ridge demonstrate. However, these kinds of products are not the primary motivating factor for most tourists in this region.

The tourism profile of the Moskitia area is essentially driven by experiential travelers. The most popular operators organizing tours through the Moskitia region are Moskitia Ecoaventuras and La Ruta Moskitia. The strength of this market is that visitors are specifically seeking out interactions with local communities in natural surroundings. As a global market segment ecotourism and cultural tourism represent the most dynamic and fastest growing segment of the largest service sector industry in the world. These travelers are looking to learn about cultural histories and the environment in which they developed throughout the generations. This market then provides a strong opportunity for direct community involvement in tourism as not only employees but as managers and owners of enterprises. The tradeoff implied is that while communities have the opportunity to develop tourism enterprises on their own terms and to be empowered as managers and entrepreneurs through those enterprises, the market size is small and the slow pace of infrastructure development will limit growth prospects.

However, short and medium-term growth is possible, especially when taking into account the recent collapse of tourism to the region caused by the three-headed attack of a military coup and the swine flu pandemic striking in the second half of 2009 and the deepening of the global economic downturn that reached its lowest point in 2009. In the short-term tourism in La Moskitia has not yet fully recovered, though the worldwide tourism market has, meaning that growth prospects for La Ruta Moskitia could reasonably be expected to reach at least 2008 peak levels with renewed marketing and promotions. In the medium-term, there is still room for growth and expansion though tourism in this region will likely never see levels of receipts and arrivals like those of its neighboring region in the Bay Islands.

Overall coastal tourism in Nicaragua focuses on visitation to the Pacific coast and along the Atlantic coast tourism is primarily limited to the Corn Islands, a popular beach and scuba diving destination. There are currently no tour operators organizing tours through the RAAN. Some travelers do find their way to the RAAN; these tourists are typically very adventurous independent travelers, however this tourist

---

<sup>16</sup> Instituto Hondureño de Turismo, *Boletín de Estadísticas Turísticas 2005-2009*. August 2010, p. 6. (Accessed: March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2011: <http://www.iht.hn/?q=node/154>). (citing data from SITCA).

demographic are extremely small. The region is home to some of Central America’s largest primary forests, teeming with life. The RAAN is also home to several ethnic groups each with rich cultural histories. Additionally, the Nicaraguan Moskitia region is home to the kinds of beaches, waterways, and islands that typically act as anchors for other destinations in Central America. This is to say that the potential for tourism development exists in the RAAN. However, improvements in infrastructure need to be developed, reliable tourist transportation networks need to be developed, migration regulations must be clarified with soldiers posted at the border, and other logistical challenges need to be overcome before the time-intensive process of enterprise development can begin.

### 3.6 Situational SWOT Methodology

The SWOT analysis examines the elements of four factors in determining the present state and future potential of a project, organization, or a destination. This tool enables the identification of both external conditions and internal characteristics. The four factors analyzed – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats - are explained in more depth below:

- **Strengths:** Internal characteristics that make the group or destination more competitive;
- **Weaknesses:** Internal characteristics that limit the competitiveness of the group or destination;
- **Opportunities:** Situational/environmental conditions that make growth possible;
- **Threats:** External conditions that can be obstacles to sustained growth and pose risks.

The SWOT analysis as applied to the analyzed regions is represented in tables 4 and 5 below.

SWOT Analysis for the tourism market of the Bay Islands and the Honduran North Coast	
<p><b>Strengths:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Travelers in Honduras spend more money on average than travelers to other Central American Countries</li> <li>• Scuba divers are another primary market and they are very active in reef conservation</li> <li>• Cruise ship arrivals and sun-and-sand tourism move lots of tourists and employ many locals</li> <li>• High volume of visitors means small donations can add up to significant funds for conservation</li> <li>• Natural beauty of Protected areas and marine reserves</li> </ul>	<p><b>Opportunities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cruise ship passengers and sun-and-sand are not necessarily unreceptive to conservation awareness messaging.</li> <li>• Community tourism projects or the potential for community projects exist in many sites</li> <li>• Strong core of conservation NGOs have cultivated a culture disposed to support conservation</li> <li>• Construction of a new cruise ship dock in Trujillo represents an increase in the amount of arrivals to the region in the medium term</li> </ul>
<p><b>Weaknesses:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Honduras receives the fewest international visitors out of all Central American countries</li> <li>• Cruise ship passengers do not typically seek out cultural experiences with local communities.</li> <li>• Divers do not typically seek out cultural experiences with local communities</li> <li>• Communities are not well prepared to offer a competitive option</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cruise ship passengers are the most numerous visitors and are not generally aware of sustainability or conservation.</li> <li>• Cruise ships themselves are very resource consumptive and pose threats of reef destruction and pollution</li> <li>• Mass tourism negatively impacts the environment especially when infrastructure does not keep pace with growth</li> <li>• Drug trafficking especially in the Moskitia region is a growing and ever more ubiquitous problem; while not typically a direct threat to tourists, it could at best discourage visitation, and at worst destabilize the region and make</li> </ul>

	travel unsafe.
--	----------------

Table 5: SWOT Analysis, Bay Islands

SWOT Analysis for the tourism market of the La Moskitia	
<p><b>Strengths:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiential tourists, who dominate the market, tend to respect local cultures and the environment</li> <li>• Experiential travelers tend to seek out cultural experiences with communities on the communities’ terms not on theirs.</li> <li>• Inquiries regarding trips did not significantly decline despite various external threats</li> </ul>	<p><b>Opportunities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global growth potential for cultural and ecotourism is high</li> <li>• Experiential travelers are seeking to learn about cultural and natural history</li> <li>• There is strong potential for empowered community involvement in tourism development.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Weaknesses:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current market and future prospects for growth are not likely to create large scale employment</li> <li>• Even adventurous market segments are dissuaded to visit by political instability</li> <li>• Visitation has not yet rebounded</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uncontrolled expansion could be detrimental to communities</li> <li>• If growth outpaces infrastructure tourism could represent a conservation threat</li> </ul>

Table 6: SWOT Analysis, Honduran Moskitia

The identification of these four elements permits a deeper examination of situational and internal factors that illuminate relationships and enable the establishment of strategies that use internal factors to address external ones. This illustrates clear focal points toward which efforts and future work should be aimed. An example of this matrix is presented below in Table 6:

	Opportunities (List) (+)	Threats (List) (-)
Strengths (List) (+)	<p>SO Strategies</p> <p>Use strengths to take advantage of Opportunities</p> <p>Guiding questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can this strength help to take advantage of this opportunity?</li> </ul>	<p>ST Strategies</p> <p>Use Strengths to avoid Threats</p> <p>Guiding question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can this strength help to eliminate this threat?</li> </ul>
Weaknesses ((List) (-)	<p>WO Strategies</p> <p>Use Opportunities to mitigate Weaknesses</p> <p>Guiding question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can this opportunity help to address this weakness?</li> </ul>	<p>WT Strategies</p> <p>Reduce Weaknesses and avoid Threats</p> <p>Guiding question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does addressing this weakness help mitigate this threat?</li> </ul>

Table 7: SWOT Linkage Analysis Methodology

In this analysis as shown in tables 7 and 8 below, the connections between conditional factors and characteristics are examined and given a value from 0-4 with 0 being completely unrelated and 4 being directly linked. This evaluation will clearly show which conditional factors can be taken advantage of or mitigated with internal characteristics. Below specific connections that represent strong opportunities for interventions are highlighted, selections were based on strong linkages between highly linked rows and columns in each quadrant.

SWOT Linkage Analysis for the tourism market of the Bay Islands and Honduras' North Coast						
	<b>Opportunities:</b>			<b>Threats:</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cruise ship passengers and sun-and-sand are not necessarily unresponsive to conservation awareness messaging.</li> <li>Strong core of conservation NGOs have cultivated a culture disposed to support conservation</li> <li>Community tourism projects or the potential for community projects exist in many sites</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cruise ship passengers are the most numerous visitors and are not generally aware of sustainability or conservation.</li> <li>Cruise ships themselves are very resource consumptive and pose threats of reef destruction and pollution</li> <li>Mass tourism negatively impacts the environment especially when infrastructure does not keep pace with growth</li> </ul>		
<b>Strengths:</b>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Travelers in Honduras spend more money on average than travelers to other Central American Countries</li> <li>Scuba divers are another primary market and they are very active in reef conservation</li> <li>Cruise ship arrivals and sun-and-sand tourism move lots of tourists and employ many locals</li> <li>High volume of visitors means small donations can add up to significant funds for conservation</li> </ul>	2	2	4	1	1	1
	0	3	2	0	0	1
	3	1	3	1	1	1
	3	3	3	2	1	1
<b>Weaknesses:</b>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Honduras receives the fewest international visitors out of all Central American countries</li> <li>Cruise ship passengers do not typically seek out cultural experiences with local communities.</li> <li>Divers do not typically seek out cultural experiences with local communities</li> </ul>	0	0	3	0	0	0
	1	3	2	3	0	0
	0	2	2	0	0	0

Table 8: SWOT Linkage Analysis for the Bay Islands and Honduras' North Coast

Important linkages to highlight include:

Strength-Opportunity Linkages:

1. Take advantage of relatively higher-spending visitors to Honduras to create more employment opportunities for local communities.
  - a. Enterprise development
  - b. Increase training to improve quality of services to add value to products.
2. Leverage the propensity of divers to support reef conservation to strengthen the culture of conservation and call them to action in active support of conservation.
3. Use the higher volume of arrivals to increase benefits for conservation:
  - a. Leverage funding for conservation initiatives
  - b. Channel visitors to community enterprises

Weakness-Opportunity Linkages:

1. Take the opportunity of creating strong community-based tourism products and market them to high volume cruise ship passengers.

Weakness-Threat Linkages:

1. Increase awareness of conservation issues and community development among cruise ship passengers to strengthen outcomes for both.

SWOT Linkage Analysis for the tourism market of La Moskitia						
	Opportunities:			Threats:		
	● Global growth potential for cultural and ecotourism is high	● Experiential travelers are seeking to learn about cultural and natural history	● There is strong potential for empowered community involvement in tourism development.	● Uncontrolled expansion could be detrimental to communities	● If growth outpaces infrastructure tourism could represent a conservation threat	
<b>Strengths:</b>						
● Experiential tourists, who dominate the market, tend to respect local cultures and the environment	1	4	4	4	2	
● Experiential travelers tend to seek out cultural experiences with communities on the communities' terms not on theirs.	3	4	4	3	2	
● Inquiries regarding trips did not significantly decline despite various external threats	4	3	3	2	2	
<b>Weaknesses:</b>						
● Current market and future prospects for growth are not likely to create large scale employment	1	1	1	2	0	
● Even adventurous market segments are dissuaded to visit by political instability	1	1	1	1	1	
● Visitation has not yet rebounded	4	2	2	0	0	

Table 9: SWOT Linkage Analysis for the tourism market of La Moskitia

*Important linkages to highlight:*

Strength-Opportunity Linkages:

1. Take advantage of the experiential tourist market that values cultural and natural history to develop tourism that not only employs local communities, but also empowers them as owners and operators.
2. Using promotions and marketing transform high interest in tours to growth and increased arrivals.

### Weakness-Opportunity Linkages:

1. Take advantage of the strong resumption of growth in the worldwide travel market to bring travelers back to La Moskitia
  - a. Marketing and promotions
  - b. Trade shows and conventions

### Strength-Threat Linkages:

1. Use marketing to make outreach to sustainable tourists who respect conservation and local cultures, mitigating much of the threats associated with uncontrolled growth.

## **3.7 Project Partners**

Interventions will need to enlist the support of local partner organizations in order to succeed. Potential partnerships can be formed with actors in the private and public sectors as well as with local NGOs, international NGOs and community-based organizations. The following list is not exhaustive, but includes major potential partners and the possible points of collaboration between the MAREA Program and the organization.

### Private Sector

#### *Scuba Dive Shops*

Dozens of dive shops can be found in Roatán and Utila, and many are inclined to actively support conservation. In Roatán many of the dive shops are supporters of the Roatán Marine Park and sell bracelets to help the RMP raise funds. In Utila, the dive shops are obligated to charge a “Reef Fee” that is channeled through a municipal environmental unit. Dive shops make natural partners for marine conservation as certain activities can only be done on scuba (reef health monitoring, reef plastic cleanups, etc.) while scuba makes others much easier (lionfish hunting). However, since dive shops are primarily tourism businesses any activities will have to be structured in such a way to be at least interesting if not fun for divemasters and visitors. Figure 10 shows West End Divers, a dive shop in Roatán that is a supporter of the Roatán Marine Park.

Potential points for collaboration:

- Reef cleanups
- Materials placement for diving best practices
- Participation in regional marketing websites

#### *La Ruta Moskitia Tourism Network*

La Ruta Moskitia is a tour operator consisting of a network of community-owned tourism enterprises in the Rio Plátano Biosphere Reserve. The group offers 4-day, 6-day, 7-day, 8-day, and 9-day itineraries through the Biosphere while staying in rustic cabañas in natural settings and interacting with Miskito communities. Activities include kayaking, hiking, cultural exhibitions, crocodile safaris, and archeological discoveries. The group has won various prestigious awards for excellence in tourism and was on a solid upward trajectory until they were hit with a 3-pronged attack in 2009 due to the deepening of the global financial crisis, the swine flu outbreak, and the Honduran Constitutional Crisis. This began a 6-month period where not a single tourist arrived, though inquiries remained constant. The group is now seeing slow recovery, though they have not yet regained their 2008 peak levels. Figure 11 shows a group of clients traveling in La Ruta Moskitia canoes.



Figure 10: Dive Shop and Roatán Marine Park Supporter

Potential points of collaboration:

- Marketing and promotions support
- Product expansion with new sites
- Community outreach
- Enterprise development technical assistance recipients

### Public Sector

#### *Utila Municipal Environment Unit (UMA)*

The UMA is a municipal government office in charge of environmental policy and enforcement. The office administers solid waste disposal, sanitation infrastructure, the municipal no-take MPA (Turtle Bay), and part of the \$3 “reef fee” charged to divers. The UMA works with communities and NGOs like BICA Utila on conservation. The UMA has a coral garden project with Healthy Reefs for Healthy People to replant coral in the reef, and a mangrove replanting project with BICA and the Utila power company.

Potential points for collaboration:

- Awareness building
- Community outreach
- Permitting for community enterprises
- Support for community enterprise development

#### *PROCORREDOR Project*

The Proyecto de Gestión Sostenible de los Recursos Naturales y Cuencas del Corredor Biológico Mesoamericano en el Atlántico Hondureño (PROCORREDOR) is a cooperative project between the European Union and the Honduran Secretariat of the Environment as well as 6 municipal governments. The project is working on poverty alleviation, land use issues, and natural resource management. Working in mainly inland national parks the strategy of the project is to define a biological corridor and focus conservation efforts within that range. There is some work with tourism, as the project intends to form and support a self-sustaining organization called Fundación Credia, which will act as a coordinating body for tourism development. Fundación Credia has not yet been formed officially and its exact functions and interventions are not clear. The PROCORREDOR project is scheduled to close in 2012 with contracts and fieldwork essentially closing at the end of 2011. Given its focus on mostly inland ecosystems and its upcoming closure, collaborations with PROCORREDOR may be limited.

Potential points for collaboration:

- Sharing information and documentation
- Networking

#### *Alcaldeza of Brus Laguna*

The municipal government of Brus Laguna also includes the territorial area of most of the La Ruta Moskitia sites. The Municipal government is supportive of tourism development if it is done in the style that the La Ruta Moskitia was done.

Potential points for collaboration:

- Permitting support for expansion of the La Ruta Moskitia network
- Community outreach



Figure 11: Visitors traveling with community-owned La Ruta Moskitia

*Instituto Hondureño de Turismo – Proyecto Manejo Ambiental de Islas de la Bahía (PMAIB)*

The Instituto Hondureño de Turismo (IHT) is working with the Inter-American Development Bank on the Programa Manejo Ambiental de Islas de la Bahía, which seeks to consolidate the regional environmental and sustainable tourism framework, expand sanitation infrastructure, and strengthen protected area management. The program will work with stakeholders at various levels including community groups, municipal governments, civil society organizations, and national government. This project will also seek to strengthen an executive commission for sustainable tourism in the Bay Islands and its technical unit. Outreach was made to the project but as it is still in its nascent phase it was not ready to commit to any real points of collaboration with the MAREA Program. Below are listed potential points of collaboration based only on seemingly shared interests.

Potential Points for Collaboration:

- Community outreach
- Regional coordination
- Policy normalization
- DMO strengthening

NGOs

*Roatán Marine Park*

Roatán Marine Park (RMP) is one of the NGO co-managers of the West End/Sandy Bay Marine Reserve. The RMP's primary activities include the management of a system of mooring buoys and patrols of the Marine Reserve to ensure compliance with regulations. In addition to these primary activities RMP also does conservation outreach and gives talks at schools on conservation, and liaise with other NGOs and local businesses to enlist allies in support of conservation of the Sandy Bay/West End Marine Reserve. The RMP is also the sole organization authorized to issue lionfish spearing licenses and to sell Hawaiian sling spears as spear fishing is banned in the marine reserve. In order to support their conservation activities RMP has a variety of fundraising strategies that fully support their core activities. Primarily, funds are raised through a voluntary contribution from divers and other visitors who are given silicone bracelets as keepsakes. RMP also sells branded merchandise and rents snorkel equipment from a storefront in West End. Membership fees and grants also cover parts of their budget. Figure 12 shows the Roatán Marine Park's storefront and office where they sell branded merchandise, license spearfishers to hunt lionfish, and coordinate patrols of the MPA.



Figure 12: Roatán Marine Park Storefront

Potential points for collaboration:

- Conservation campaign material distribution and promotions
- Partner in regional website, part of a regional Geostewardship council
- Support and sales point for community tourism enterprises on Roatán

*Coral Reef Alliance (CORAL)*

CORAL is a conservation NGO with a strong presence in the Bay Islands working with numerous other local NGOs to minimize the impacts of tourism and protect local marine ecosystems. Currently CORAL is working on awareness campaigns on responsible seafood and visitor codes of conduct. They are also

implementing a voluntary environmental assessment process with local marine tourism businesses using a comprehensive set of voluntary standards, developed by CORAL with industry input for broad application throughout the destinations along the Mesoamerican Reef. CORAL also supports community enterprise creation and would like to develop guide-training programs. CORAL is also working to establish a protected area at Cordelia Banks where recently a surprisingly strong and vibrant growth of Staghorn Coral was discovered sandwiched between the channels used by cruise ships on approach to their ports. CORAL also give small grants to local partners for conservation and awareness building activities.

Potential points for collaboration:

- Awareness campaign expansions
- Support on sustainability evaluations for regional website
- Protection of sensitive ecosystems
- Guide trainings
- Enterprise development support

#### *Healthy Reefs for Healthy People Initiative*

Founded in 2004 by a consortium consisting of World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the Meso-American Barrier Reef System Project (MBRS), the World Bank, the Summit Foundation and Perigee Environmental, the Healthy Reefs for Healthy People Initiative is focused on measuring the health of the Mesoamerican Reef throughout its range and making recommendations for civil society groups and policymakers. Among other projects, the Healthy Reefs for Healthy People Initiative publishes a biennial report card of reef health which grades the health of reef based on a 5 point ranking system taking into account reef health, highlighting successful conservation efforts and new discoveries, and reporting on threats, particularly anthropogenic threats to the reef.

Potential points for collaboration:

- Awareness campaign expansions
- Support on sustainability evaluations for regional website
- Benchmarking reef health
- Identification of threats, and necessary interventions
- Community outreach

#### *BICA Roatán*

BICA Roatán is the parent organization of a separate group of the same name in Utila. BICA is also the original holder of the co-management agreement for Sandy Bay/West End Marine Reserve with the ICF. BICA engages in environmental education, patrols, community outreach, and small business support. BICA Roatán also lobbies the government for increased protection of sensitive area.

Potential points for collaboration:

- Enterprise development support
- Awareness campaign material expansions
- Environmental education programs

#### *BICA Utila*

BICA Utila is a sister organization to BICA Roatán. Though the two share a name, goals, and are



Figure 13: Figure 10: BICA Utila's Environmental Education Classroom

affiliated legally they generally handle separate funding and projects. BICA Utila focuses their on environmental education, co-management of a municipal reserve, patrolling, and the maintenance of a system of mooring buoys with the Municipal Environment Unit. Their patrols, as a citizen group, are more focused on informing people about regulations and laws rather than enforcement, though they can request for violators to release live illegal catch. They do take some visitors on hiking tours, though they are not organized official products, more at the convenience of BICA staff. They also work on awareness campaigns for fishing regulations and other marine conservation issues. Figure 13 shows BICA Utila's classroom where they have after-school programs for schoolchildren.

Potential points for collaboration:

- Enterprise development support
- Environmental education programs
- Awareness campaign expansion

#### *Utila Center for Marine Ecology (UCME)*

The UCME is an NGO focused on conservation of marine ecosystems through increased scientific research of ecosystems and working with communities. UCME also works with Utila's divers by running informal educational presentations for divers and by doing one-on-one outreach with divers to do reef monitoring. They also support sustainable seafood initiatives and are searching for a way to solidify a lionfish supply-chain.

Potential points of collaboration:

- Environmental education programs
- Community outreach
- Dive shop outreach

#### *Spiny Lobster Initiative*

The Spiny Lobster Initiative is a part of the Global Fish Alliance and its purpose is to engage stakeholders on all levels to address the collapsing spiny lobster fisheries in the Caribbean. The Spiny lobster Initiative works with boat captains, divers, restaurant groups, fisheries departments, naval forces, Miskito communities, and NGOs to update and improve legislation and support alternative economic activities. Collaboration will be limited as the project is set to close soon.

Potential points of collaboration:

- Networking and facilitating communication with group members
- Providing access to any research performed for the Initiative

#### *World Wildlife Fund (WWF)*

WWF is a worldwide leader in conservation. The NGO has over 50 years of experience and works in nearly all aspects of conservation. In Honduras, WWF's work focuses a lot on lobster fisheries. However, WWF also works with tourism development and awareness building. WWF also has a series of seafood guides for different regions of the world, though currently none exists for Central America.

Potential points for collaboration:

- Seafood awareness campaign
- Support on tourism enterprise development

#### *The Nature Conservancy (TNC)*

TNC is a world-renowned conservation NGO working in over 30 countries including Honduras and Nicaragua. With a regional headquarter in La Ceiba, Honduras, TNC focuses on fisheries management and the protection of critical ecosystems. Their strategies include the promotion of payments for environmental services (PES) systems with linkages to tourism as a non-extractive alternative usage of natural resources within these systems.

Potential points for collaboration:

- Collaboration on developing tourism focused PES projects
- Awareness campaigns in protected areas

#### *Honduras Coral Reef Fund (HCRF)*

The HCRF works almost exclusively on conservation of the Cayos Cochinos area. The HCRF is the co-manager of the Cayos Cochinos MPA and administers funding, organizes research groups, coordinates patrols with the Honduran Navy, and develops the management plan. A new management plan for the park was recently published; it was the culmination of 2 years of consultations with actors in the public and private sectors. Working with Operation Wallacea the HCRF has brought groups of scientific volunteers to a research station built with support from the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in 1995 to study the reef's ecology and understand the marine ecosystems in the national park. In recent years, the HCRF has also worked with local communities in Chachahuate, East End, and Rio Esteban to develop community tourism enterprises that are integrated into the volunteer programs' itineraries.

Potential points for collaboration:

- Sales support for community enterprises
- Awareness campaign expansion

#### *Grupo de Apoyo al Desarrollo (GAD)*

GAD is an NGO working in the Northern Coast of Honduras focusing on education, conservation, and sustainable economic development. GAD has formed a working relationship with the HCRF and is supporting the creation of a sustainable, community-based tourism enterprise in the Rio Esteban community.

Potential points of collaboration:

- Enterprise development support in Rio Esteban

#### *Nepenthes*

Nepenthes is a Danish NGO focusing on conservation focusing on forests. In Honduras they are working with national parks and they are also doing some work with tourism. Nepenthes has started a process to form a kind of DMO by working with the Red de Comunidades Turisticas de Honduras (RECOTURH) and the Honduras National Chamber of Commerce (CANATUH) and 3 municipalities to form a council that will coordinate tourism development. The purpose of this DMO is to develop reasons why visitors should stay more time in La Ceiba, as the currently mostly use La Ceiba as a launch pad to other destinations. Nepenthes has also done some work with sustainable tourism criteria, basing a model off of the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria ([www.sustainabletourismcriteria.org/](http://www.sustainabletourismcriteria.org/)).

Potential points for collaboration:

- DMO strengthening
- Regional marketing website
- Sustainable tourism criteria

#### *Comité de Conservación de Tortugas Marinas – Plaplaya Community*

The Plaplaya community is a member of the La Ruta Moskitia network, but do not currently have a product that is being actively marketed and sold by the La Ruta Moskitia. Previously, some visitors looking to have a chance to see sea turtles have been sent to Plaplaya to help the community on night patrols however the community did not have lodging options and still do not have cooking or food service facilities. In 2007, the community organization, el Comité de Conservación de Tortugas Marinas worked with UNDP's small grants program to build two rustic wooden cabañas to house visitors and volunteers. The beach where the community has worked under the supervision of a volunteer, Bonnie Larsen, and a biologist named Marco Tulio to monitor and protect sea turtles receives around 40 leatherback nests per year between April and June. The patrols used to be funded by WWF through a regional NGO, MOPAWI, but funding has been cut and they have not worked the beaches in 2010. Some community members even traveled to Costa Rica to receive training from the Sea Turtle Conservancy, formerly Caribbean Conservation Corporation, at their facilities in Tortuguero. The group is now hoping that tourism arrivals could bring a source of income for the community to substitute for the grant financing and enable them to diversify incomes.

Potential points for collaboration:

- Support in seeking \$10-15K in financing for kitchens and food service areas
- Product development and training support via Solimar's "Tourism Toolkit" resources
- Inclusion into the La Ruta Moskitia promotion and product offerings

#### *Dakni Tak Aslika*

Their name means "all groups" in Miskito; this NGO is an umbrella group consisting of 10 or 11 member organizations including La Ruta Moskitia. Dakni works with lobster divers, artisans, environmental conservation, fisheries, alternative livelihoods, and forestry management. With a wide and varied portfolio of supported projects, Dakni helps member organizations write grants and administer projects. They had 7 projects with UNDP's small grants program at the time of the interview and maintain a close working relationship with UNDP's offices working both in Tegucigalpa and Puerto Lempira.

Potential points of collaboration:

- Community outreach
- Networking
- Support for product development funding

#### *United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)*

UNDP is the United Nations' global development organization, focusing on crosscutting issues of human rights and the empowerment of women. In the Moskitia region UNDP is deeply invested in working to promote economic alternatives. They work with Proyecto Verdes, the IDB project Programa Pronegocios, and other funding organizations. They supported a tourism project for the Mistruk community on the road to Nicaragua out of Puerto Lempira. They are also interested in working with artisans.

Potential points for collaboration:

- Community outreach
- Financial support for community tourism infrastructure development
- Development of artisan products and other value-added tourism products

#### *Comité de Ecoturismo Mistruk (COECOMIS)*

The Mistruk community is about 40 minutes outside of Puerto Lempira by taxi, and sits just beside the Caratasca Lagoon. Most community members make a living subsisting on yucca and camote, and selling firewood in Puerto Lempira for cash. COECOMIS is a community organization responsible for cleaning the beach, cooking food, guiding visitors, and collecting water. There are about 35 families involved in COECOMIS and about 50 lobster divers among them. The community currently has 4 cabins for visitors, and a kitchen and eating area, though all installations are in disrepair. The current arrivals of tourism are highly undesirable. Locals from Puerto Lempira come to the lagoon over Semana Santa to engage in heavy drinking. The community does not really want this kind of tourism however it has trouble accessing other markets. Installations could be repaired with relatively little funding though marketing and selling the product would be a much greater logistical challenge for the group. Despite the obvious challenges lots of charm and cultural history still remain in the community where most of the children do not even speak Spanish. There is interest from the alcalde of Puerto Lempira, GEF, and DAKNI in supporting this project. They also work with an Italian NGO, GVC, and the Irish NGO, GOAL.

Potential points of collaboration:

- Product development
- Infrastructure improvements
- Product development and training support via Solimar's "Tourism Toolkit" resources
- Inclusion into the La Ruta Moskitia promotion and product offerings

#### *GOAL*

GOAL is an international humanitarian agency with a presence in la Moskitia. The technical officer, Daniel Torres is highly respected by the Mistruk community. GOAL is headquartered in Tegucigalpa and works closely with UNDP and UNESCO. The organization started the local NGO MOPAWI after Hurricane Mitch in 2000 to support work in disaster preparedness.

Potential points of collaboration:

- Community outreach
- Networking
- Long-term technical assistance to new enterprises

### 3.8 Conservation Threat Assessment

#### Overview

Solimar’s site assessment objectives included the development of conservation threat assessment models to better define the direct and indirect conservation threats that exist in the Bay Islands and the Moskitia region, as well as the role that local communities play within those threats (and therefore, also in the potential solutions).

The Solimar’s conservation threat assessment approach is similar to that used by international conservation organizations such as The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and their Conservation Action Planning (CAP) approach.

Conservation threat data was collected during the site assessment through interviews with a variety of long-term local stakeholders including scientists, NGO representatives, protected area managers, community leaders, and private sector representatives. Conservation threat data was collected after the site assessment through follow-up discussions with these individuals, as well as through research.

#### Threat Assessment Model

The threat assessment model is built around the cause and effect relationships between indirect threats (such as lack of economic alternatives or lack of conservation awareness), direct threats (such as illegal logging or wildlife harassment), and a site-specific target species or habitat as shown in Figure 14.

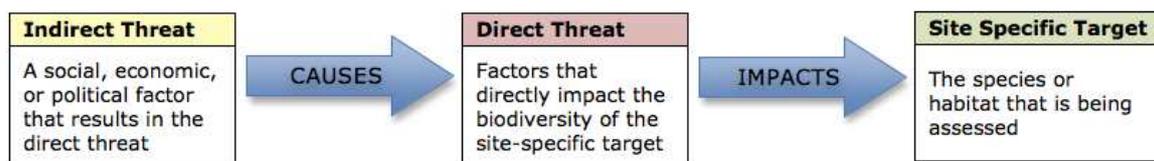


Figure 14: Conservation Threat causal chain

For example, the demand of sea turtle eggs for human consumption is a ubiquitous conservation threat that occurs throughout Central America. The threat assessment model for sea turtle egg consumption would look something like the flow chart depicted in Figure 15:



Figure 15: Conservation Threat causal chain example

In this causal chain there are two indirect threats, lack of conservation awareness and customs & traditions, which result in the direct threat of illegal trade of species (e.g. selling turtle eggs to consumers). This direct threat obviously impacts the site-specific target of sea turtle eggs.

#### Bay Islands Threat Assessment Model

The Solimar site assessment team focused the Bay Islands threat assessment’s site-specific targets on the MAREA Program species and habitats found in the region, specifically:

- Species: grouper, snapper, lobster, shark, conch, and sea turtles
- Habitat: mangroves, reefs, and beaches

The primary threats to conservation posed by tourism in the Bay Islands have to do with visitor conduct and the rapid growth of tourism, especially the cruise ship market, which has not allowed infrastructure development to keep pace and leads to the clearing of mangroves along the coast. The Bay Islands conservation threat assessment is included in its entirety illustrated as Figure 16 below.

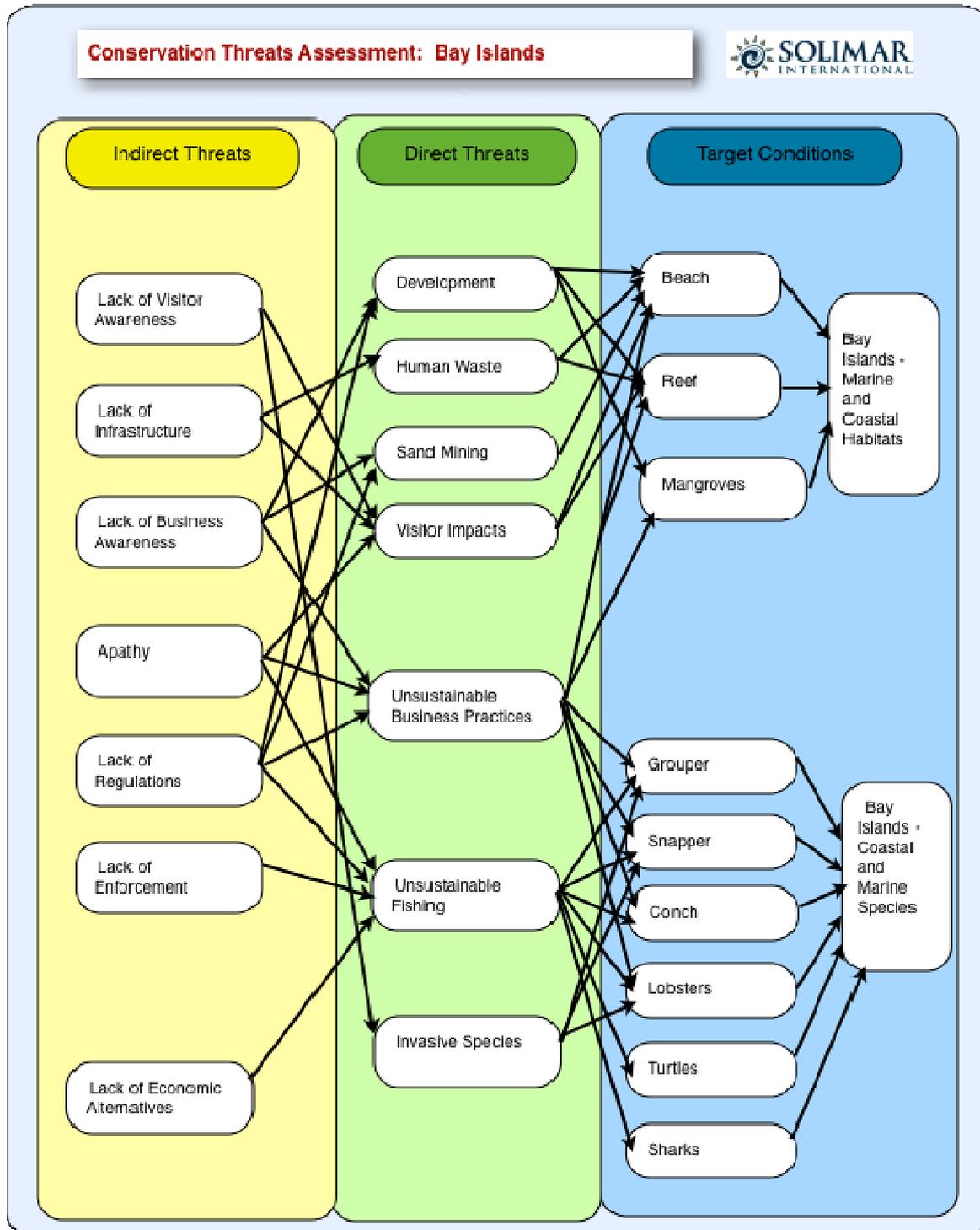


Figure 16: Conservation Threats Assessment: Bay Islands

*Honduran Moskitia Threat Assessment Model*

The Solimar site assessment team focused the Honduran Moskitia threat assessment’s site-specific targets on the MAREA project species and habitats found in the region, specifically:

- Species: manatees, lobster, and sea turtles
- Habitat: beaches, lagoons, streams and marshes, and forests

The primary threats to conservation in La Moskitia are driven by a lack of economic alternatives, except the solid waste that washes up on the regions beaches, which mostly has to do with the behaviors of large ships in the shipping lanes off the coast that dump trash in the sea. The Moskitia conservation threat assessment is included in its entirety below, Figure 17.

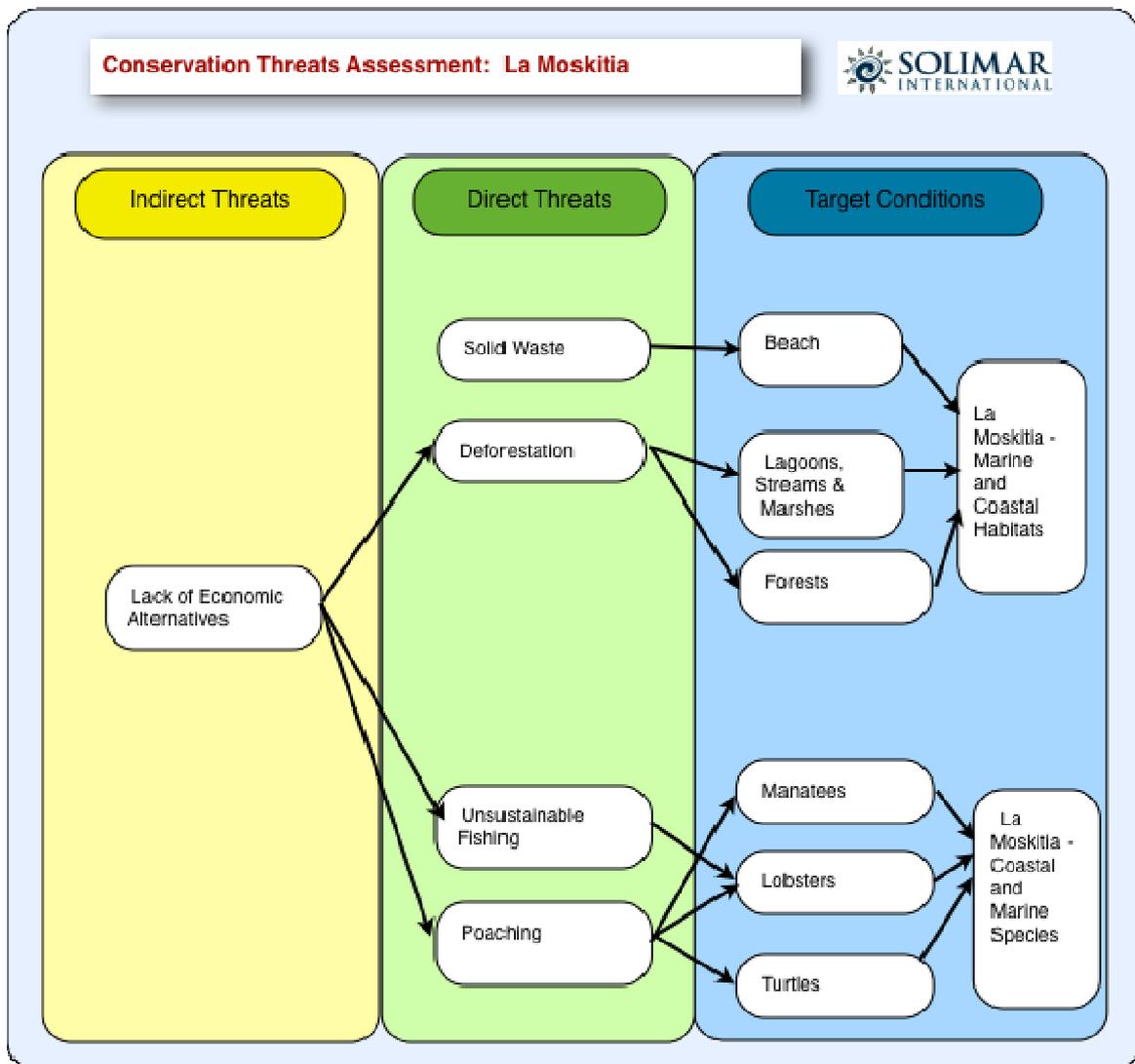


Figure 17 : Conservation Threats Assessment: La Moskitia

### 3.9 Tourism Conservation Strategies

Based on in-depth interviews with a variety of local stakeholders including scientists, NGO representatives, protected area managers, community leaders, and private sector representatives certain threats were identified and potential interventions were identified to address those threats.

Primarily these activities are divided among three general categories:

1. Enterprise Development
2. Training
3. Marketing and Promotion

#### 1. Enterprise Development

With very narrow opportunities for income generation, many communities rely on resource extraction in order to survive. A lack of economic alternatives drives communities to overexploit fisheries, cut down forests, and poach illegally for threatened or endangered animals. Providing non-extractive income sources is very important for conservation, to relieve the pressure placed on natural resources in traditional economies. Solimar International’s approach to sustainable tourism development also produces a resource even more powerful than money from profits or travel philanthropy programs, which is the **time** and **involvement** of local communities in conservation. The flow chart in figure 18 illustrates how the enterprise development process pairs technical assistance with financial assistance to produce successful tourism enterprises, which in turn generate time and money, which are then invested in supporting conservation.

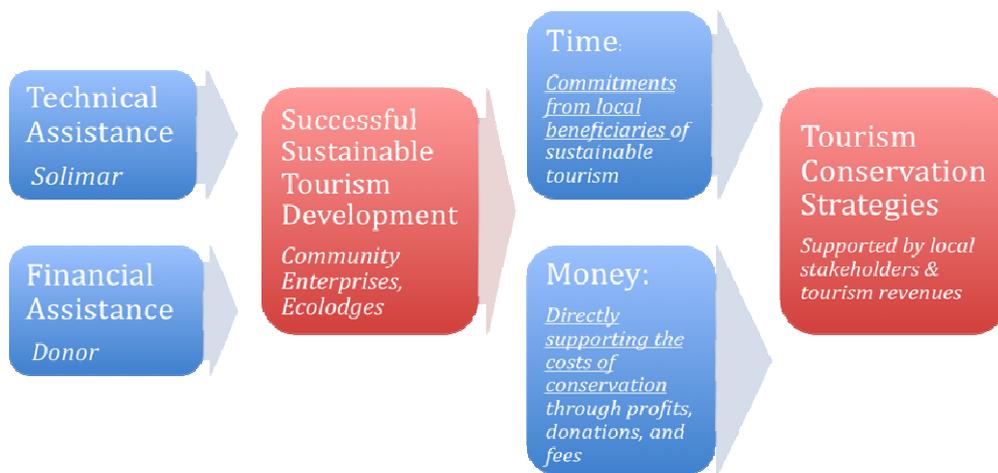


Figure 18: Using Tourism to Support Conservation

By developing economic alternatives for local communities that inherently depend upon the *protection* of natural resources (such as sea turtles) rather than their *extraction*, new incentives and opportunities for local communities open up that bring value to conservation.

The foundation of Solimar’s unique approach to sustainable tourism development is built upon a number of business development manuals and training programs, from business planning to operations and management to sales and marketing. Solimar’s “Tourism Toolkit” will capture these critical tools to share with MAREA Program participants. This toolkit, combined with well-documented tourism conservation strategies, will enable Solimar and the MAREA Program to develop and promote a network of tourism enterprises in Central America that are actively supporting marine and coastal conservation. Table 9 below outlines the direct and indirect threats that can be addressed by enterprise development.

Project Activity	Indirect Threats	Direct Threats	Site Specific Target	Project Activity Example
<b>Enterprise development</b>	Lack of Economic Alternatives	- Deforestation	<u>Species</u> - Grouper - Snapper - Lobster - Conch - Manatee - Turtles	- Develop community tourism enterprises
		- Unsustainable Fishing Practices	<u>Habitat</u> - Lagoons - Streams - Marshes	- Expand and improve promotions for current community tourism enterprises
		- Poaching	- Forests	

**Table 9: Enterprise Development**

*La Ruta Moskitia Community Tourism Enterprise Network:* La Ruta Moskitia (logo featured in figure 19) provides a stepping-stone on which to base future interventions in the Moskitia region for sustainable tourism development. The product already has developed infrastructure and logistical solutions for challenging transportation and supply chain situations. The enterprise at its peak made nearly \$100,000 in annual sales. The rejuvenation of this enterprise would create a source of income for numerous communities and its continued growth and expansion would bring even greater benefits to the region.

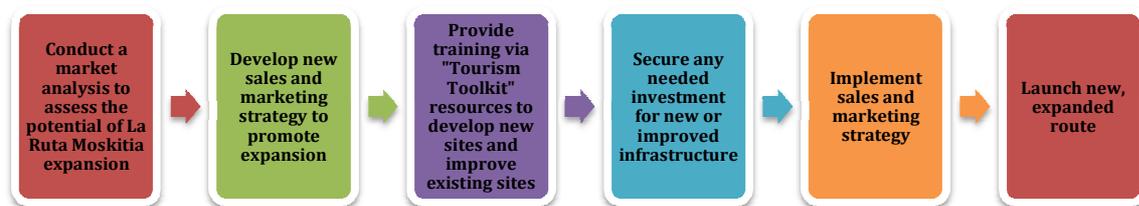


Figure 19: Logo of La Ruta Moskitia community-owned and operated tourism network

Three of the four existing La Ruta Moskitia's are coastal communities (Brus Laguna, Raista, Belen, ) that have historically created employment opportunity for targeted groups such as fisherman and their families in an effort to present economic alternatives to the unsustainable fishing practices both with the lobster industry as well as with fresh water species in La Moskitia's lagoons and rivers.

In addition to these existing LARUMO member communities, a great opportunity exists to expand the La Ruta Moskitia community tourism network south into Nicaragua to include other coastal fishing communities (Plaplaya, Puerto Lempira, Mistruk, Aurata, Mocoron, Rus Rus). Such an expansion would meet the increasing demand that backpacker and other travelers in the region have shown for a route that would allow them to travel from the North Coast/Bay Islands region of Honduras south to the Managua/Granada region of Nicaragua without having to "retrace" their steps back through San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa via bus (the most common current travel pattern). In addition, this expanded La Ruta Moskitia route south to Nicaragua could be aggressively marketed as an "adventurous, culturally enriching, nature-based alternative" to the bus option that now exists. These expansions should not only include new sites for the route but also an expansion of sales channels currently promoting LARUMO. Additional sales channels can be pursued for major tourism hubs in Nicaragua, including Grenada and Leon, as well as other operators in Honduras including La Moskitia Ecoaventuras.

The following figure 20 outlines the major steps to supporting the existing and/or new La Ruta Moskitia member sites:



**Figure 20: La Ruta Moskitia enterprise development process**

#### *Rio Esteban/Cayos Cochinos Community-Based Tourism Enterprises*

The Garifuna community in Rio Esteban near Cayos Cochinos on the north coast of Honduras currently serves as a stopover point for groups of volunteers participating in the Operation Wallacea volunteer program in Cayos Cochinos. Rio Esteban is ideally situated for this role as a Garifuna village on the mainland approximately 15 miles from Cayos Cochinos. Volunteers currently spend a night in this community with local families, eating traditionally prepared foods and living with community members; at night there are cultural exhibitions and dancing performances. In the morning fishermen bring volunteers to the Cayos Cochinos research station. This current market represents approximately 500 tourist arrivals each year.

There exists an opportunity for the Rio Esteban and Cayos Cochinos communities to expand their reach and attract other groups outside of volunteers from Operation Wallacea. The strategy would focus on:

- Expanding the partnership with Operation Wallacea to extend the stay of some volunteers to do extra scuba diving or offering uncertified volunteers an opportunity to attain the PADI open water certification needed for participation in the program
- Attracting other divers and independent travelers to visit Rio Esteban
- Packaging and promoting multi-day tours that would visit both Rio Esteban as well as Cayos Cochinos communities
- Packaging these multi-day tours with La Ruta Moskitia’s multi-day tours

The community has received support from GAD and secured a source of financing to purchase scuba diving equipment and train locals as PADI dive instructors.

Their primary enterprise development need is in promoting the community tours and products to a wider market. This supports MAREA indicators for supporting training of fishermen and supporting training in sustainable tourism, as well as in communication efforts represented by the marketing initiatives, and finally in increased sales revenue. In order to develop the project further there will need to be a more in-depth feasibility study as well as the design of marketing and promotional plans and materials.

#### *Bay Islands Community-Based Tourism Enterprises*

In the Bay Islands, tourism is much more developed than in other sites considered in this site assessment, though community tourism product offerings are still lacking. During the site assessment three interesting opportunities for enterprise development assistance presented themselves. Two product possibilities are located on the island of Roatán and one on Utila.

In Utila, conversations with local UCME representative and conservationist, Andrzej Narozanski, revealed the strong possibility of developing snorkel tours with local fishermen who are currently overfishing Utila’s reefs. The tours would bring snorkelers and divers to sites where the local fisherman/boat drivers know sharks like to congregate. Such “shark tours” (particularly the non-

aggressive Nurse sharks) are an extremely popular and successful tourism product in nearby destinations like Belize.

A day tour option would focus on the snorkeling/diving, while an overnight option where visitors would spend the evening with local “homestays” in the fishing communities close to the shark dive sites would also generate additional employment and income by also involving other members of the communities who could provide dining and lodging services.

The sales and marketing strategy for the shark tours would be simple and low-cost. Sale agreements could be established with all of the local dive shops, who would be responsible for promoting the tours with their clients and including the shark dive tours in their existing multi-day packages.

On Roatán, tourism is well divided into budget divers concentrated in West End, resort tourists and divers in the island’s many resorts scattered around West Bay, Sandy Bay and other locations, and the cruise ship tourists docking at Coxen Hole and Mahogany Bay. There are not many tourists that venture in to see community tourism products. Two potential products that can be developed exist at Punta Gorda and Oak Ridge.

Punta Gorda is the first Garifuna settlement in Central America, and the community presents an interesting opportunity to develop a cultural community tour on Roatán Island. The product would be aimed at attracting day trips from cruise ship passengers as well as potentially overnight stays for more intrepid divers. WWF is looking to assist the Punta Gorda community to develop some tourism products, and as part of this assistance WWF has done a basic feasibility study for tourism in the region including a brief section on Punta Gorda.

Oak Ridge is located just across the island from Punta Gorda and here the water taxis have developed marine tours, however, they lack training in tourism and would benefit from trainings in everything from customer service, to guiding, transportation as a tourism service, and marketing and promotions.

In all these cases it will be necessary to partner with local NGOs to develop technical capacity among community members. The tourism toolkit developed for the MAREA Program could be used as the basis for delivering this technical assistance. Feasibilities studies need to be performed on all three products, including a deepening of the preliminary study done by WWF for Punta Gorda.

## 2. Training

Cruise ships and their passengers represent one of the primary threats to conservation in the Bay Islands. Training guides in industry best practices and in improved interpretation techniques will raise awareness among visitors and the guides themselves regarding marine and coastal ecosystem conservation and its importance. Training will also help to improve services and may lead to increased income for guides. Guide training would also be beneficial to guides in La Moskitia in interpretation and conservation messaging.

Training can also be extended to local businesses to socialize them to industry best practices. The purpose of these trainings would be to increase business awareness and to reduce unsustainable business practices. CORAL has developed an environmental walkthrough program with voluntary guidelines based on the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria<sup>17</sup> that guides businesses through best practices. By pairing these kinds of activities with trainings and marketing support businesses will be able to improve

---

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.sustainabletourismcriteria.org/>

operational sustainability and have some incentive to make bigger changes. Table 10 below outlines how guide training affects indirect and direct threats, and gives examples of potential project activities.

Finally training will be an essential part of enterprise development support. Community enterprises often require additional training in operations, management, customer service, marketing and promotions, and food service, in addition to the guide training already mentioned above.

Project Activity	Indirect Threats	Direct Threats	Site Specific Target	Project Activity Example
<b>Guide training</b> - Cruise ship guides - Nature guides - Community members	Lack of Business Awareness	- Unsustainable business practices - Sand mining - Uncontrolled development	<u>Habitat</u> - Beaches - Reefs  <u>Species</u> - Sea Turtles - Lobsters - Manatees	- Train businesses and evaluate operations based on sustainability criteria
	Lack of <i>Visitor</i> Conservation Awareness	- Solid Waste - Visitor Impacts - Wildlife Harassment		- Train cruise ship guides in interpretation and conservation messaging.
	Lack of economic alternatives	- Unsustainable fishing - Poaching - Deforestation		- Train naturalist guides in la Moskitia and cruise ship guides in interpretative techniques and conservation messaging to increase awareness among guides and visitors
<b>Enterprise Development Training</b> - Community enterprises	Lack of economic alternatives	- Unsustainable fishing - Poaching - Deforestation		- Train community members and existing community enterprises using the Tourism Toolkit.

Table 10: Training

### 3. Marketing and Promotion:

Marketing does not only have an impact on raising incomes and generating added revenue, it can also be used as a motivator to incentivize the adoption of sustainable business practices by local enterprises. This is especially important when the adoption of certain practices may be seen as reducing revenues or limiting and confining the operations of tourism enterprises. At other times there may be costs involved with the adoption of certain sustainability criteria. These costs can be offset by increased promotions and advertising for businesses that agree to adopt sustainability standards for operations. Below, table 11 outlines how increased promotions and marketing can directly and indirectly impact habitats and species.

Project Activity	Indirect Threats	Direct Threats	Site Specific Target	Project Activity Example
<b>- Increased Marketing and Promotion</b>	Apathy	- Unsustainable business practices - Visitor Impacts - Unsustainable fishing	<u>Habitat</u> - Beaches - Reefs	- Incentivize good behavior, not by appealing to a sense of the general good, but by creating economic incentives to comply
	Lack of <i>business</i> awareness	- Unsustainable business practices - Sand mining - Uncontrolled development	<u>Species</u> - Sea Turtles - Lobsters - Manatees	- Promote businesses that agree to adopt sustainable operations criteria

	Lack of <i>visitor</i> conservation awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Solid Waste</li> <li>- Visitor Impacts</li> <li>- Wildlife Harassment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Inform visitors on codes of conduct, and promote to visitors the businesses that comply with these standards</i></li> </ul>
	Lack of economic alternatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unsustainable fishing</li> <li>- Poaching</li> <li>- Deforestation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Raise revenues and incomes through increased and improved promotions and marketing</i></li> </ul>

**Table 11: Marketing & Promotion**

*National Geographic/MAREA Promotional Website*

In order to achieve the above effects on conservation threats a regional marketing initiative, developed in partnership with National Geographic, would link conservation-oriented operations with increased marketing exposure. An opportunity has been identified to potentially increase visibility and effectiveness of marketing efforts by partnering with a strongly recognizable brand in the creation of this web-based marketing platform.

The central intention of the marketing platform will be to create market-based incentives for local tourism operators, hotels, restaurants, transportation service providers, and community enterprises to adopt sustainable best practices in their operations in exchange for increased promotions leading to increased revenues. The creation of this marketing platform could also provide feedback mechanisms where visitors could report back on the veracity of declared sustainable businesses creating not only incentives but a market-based enforcement mechanism as well. Finally this web-based tool can help to distribute campaign materials, tourism development tools, and information for visitors, locals, and entrepreneurs to increase the reach of conservation messaging.

## Works Cited:

- Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria, *Criteria History and Background*. Web. November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010. ([http://www.sustainabletourismcriteria.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=164&Itemid=348](http://www.sustainabletourismcriteria.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=164&Itemid=348)).
- Healthy Reefs for Healthy People, *Report Card for the Mesoamerican Reef: An Evaluation of Ecosystem Health*. 2010. Print
- Honduras Coral Reef Fund/TNC, *Plan de Manejo del Monumento Natural Marino Archipelago Cayos Cochinos, Honduras: 2008-2012*. 2008. Print
- Instituto Hondureño de Turismo, *Boletín de Estadísticas Turísticas: 2005 – 2009*, August 2010. Web. March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2011. (<http://www.iht.hn/?q=node/154>).
- Nicaragua: Instituto Nacional de Información de Desarrollo, *Census 2005*. Web. 02/14/11. (<http://www.inide.gob.ni/>).
- SNV Netherlands Development Organization, *The Market for Responsible Tourism Products*, 2009. Print.
- The International Ecotourism Society, *What is Ecotourism*, Web. November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010. ([http://www.ecotourism.org/site/c.orLQKXPCLmF/b.4835303/k.BEB9/What\\_is\\_Ecotourism\\_The\\_International\\_Ecotourism\\_Society.htm](http://www.ecotourism.org/site/c.orLQKXPCLmF/b.4835303/k.BEB9/What_is_Ecotourism_The_International_Ecotourism_Society.htm)).
- United Nations World Tourism Organization, *Tourism 2020 Vision*. Web. November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010. (<http://unwto.org/facts/eng/vision.htm>).
- United Nations World Tourism Organization, *UNWTO World Tourism Barometer: Interim Update, August 2010*. Print.
- Sustainable Tourism Criteria. Web. November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010. (<http://www.sustainabletourismcriteria.org/>).

## Annex 1:

### Organizational Profile: La Ruta Moskitia

La Ruta Moskitia is a tour operator developed by Rare Conservation with financial assistance from the UNDP Small Grants Program in Honduras in a participatory process started in 2002 and culminating in the product's launch in 2006. La Ruta Moskitia is a network of four indigenous communities who own and operate a series of tourism enterprises in the Rio Plátano Biosphere Reserve. The full group includes members from communities in Raista, Belen, Las Marias, and Brus Laguna in the Biosphere Reserve. These groups coordinate activities and communicate with one another to organize tours that are sold through a website and a sales office in La Ceiba.

Typical visitors are North Americans arriving as couples or in groups of 4, and engage in activities include kayaking, hiking, cultural exhibitions, crocodile safaris, and archeological discoveries including a petroglyph believed to be over 1,000 years old. The group offers 4-day, 6-day, 7-day, 8-day, and 9-day itineraries through the Biosphere while staying in rustic cabañas in natural settings and interacting with Garifuna, Miskito Tawahka, and Pech communities.

The group has won various prestigious awards for excellence in tourism from Conde Nast, Virgin Holidays, Tourism for Tomorrow, and National Geographic Adventure. Sales were growing each year building on successes of the previous year until June 2009. La Ruta Moskitia experienced growth even in spite of the serious risks posed by the deepening global economic downturn and the swine flu pandemic, which had significant impacts on travel markets in Central America and Mexico, but it did not survive the constitutional crisis in Honduras in June of 2009. For 9 months, despite steady inquiries, not a single tourist purchased a tour from La Ruta Moskitia. In March of 2010, sales began to pick up again, though sales currently remain lower than 2008-2009 peaks. In the 9 months of inactivity La Ruta Moskitia lost some employees and some of its lodging and dining infrastructure is in disrepair.

La Ruta Moskitia is now again receiving visitors and would like to expand its network to include nearby communities in Plaplaya based on the sea turtle that nest on their beaches, as well as with other communities south into Nicaragua. They are also seeking ways to include more value-added products such as artisan products and traditional products like cedar oils and bataña, a traditional remedy based on palm oils. There is another project seeking to train artisan groups in the tradition method of making textiles called *tunu* from the bark of a specific kind of palm. These products are in response to repeated requests by visitors looking for souvenirs or mementos and find none along the route.

Potential points for collaboration:

- Product development – route expansion, artisan products
- Refresher trainings in lodging, dining, transportation and guiding for existing members as well as for new member communities
- Marketing support



Figure 16: Tunu Palms in La Moskitia

## Annex 2: List of Interviews:

Names	Organization	Email Addresses	Location
Nick Bach	Roatan Marine Park	<a href="mailto:Nic.bach@roatanmarinepark.net">Nic.bach@roatanmarinepark.net</a>	Roatan, West End
Jenny Myton	CORAL	<a href="mailto:jmyton@coral.org">jmyton@coral.org</a>	Roatan, West End
Ian Drysdale	Healthy Reefs	<a href="mailto:drysdale@healthyreefs.org">drysdale@healthyreefs.org</a>	<a href="#">Roatan, West End</a>
Grazzia Matamoros	Roatan Marine Park	<a href="mailto:grazzia.matamoros@roatanmarinepark.net">grazzia.matamoros@roatanmarinepark.net</a>	Roatan, West End
Andrea Rivera	Sol	<a href="mailto:oceandrea@gmail.com">oceandrea@gmail.com</a>	Roatan, Sandy Bay
Irma Brady	BICA Roatan	<a href="mailto:bicarootan@yahoo.com">bicarootan@yahoo.com</a>	Roatan, Sandy Bay
Patricia Steffan	BICA Utila	<a href="mailto:Patricia.steffan@bicautila.org">Patricia.steffan@bicautila.org</a>	Utila
Monica Perez	BICA Utila	<a href="mailto:Monica.perez@bicautila.org">Monica.perez@bicautila.org</a>	Utila
Andrzej Narozanski	Utila Center for Marine Conservation	<a href="mailto:andrzej@utilaecology.org">andrzej@utilaecology.org</a>	Utila
Michelle Fernandez	Utila Municipal Unidad de Manejo Ambiental		Utila
Pepe Herrero	Former COP USAID-MIRA	<a href="mailto:pepenordico@yahoo.com">pepenordico@yahoo.com</a>	La Ceiba
Jimmy Andino	Spiny Lobster Initiative	<a href="mailto:andinomejia@yahoo.es">andinomejia@yahoo.es</a>	La Ceiba
Claudia Ordoñez	La Ruta Moskitia	<a href="mailto:info@larutamoskitia.com">info@larutamoskitia.com</a>	La Ceiba
Pablo Rico	WWF	<a href="mailto:prico@wwfca.org">prico@wwfca.org</a>	La Ceiba
Alicia Medina	WWF	<a href="mailto:amedina@wwfca.org">amedina@wwfca.org</a>	La Ceiba
Francisco Cabañas	Guaruma/Solimar	<a href="mailto:cabanafco@gmail.com">cabanafco@gmail.com</a>	La Ceiba
Adrian Oviedo	Fundación Cayos Cochinos	<a href="mailto:aeoviedo@psinet.hn">aeoviedo@psinet.hn</a>	La Ceiba
Adoni Cubas	PROCORREDOR/GAD/MAREA	<a href="mailto:Caribe.esmeralda@gmail.com">Caribe.esmeralda@gmail.com</a>	La Ceiba
Anthony Ives	GAD	<a href="mailto:a.ives@yahoo.com">a.ives@yahoo.com</a>	La Ceiba
Humberto Van der Zaal	PROCORREDOR	<a href="mailto:Humberto.vanderzel@gmail.com">Humberto.vanderzel@gmail.com</a>	La Ceiba
Berit Rachnagel	Nepentes	<a href="mailto:beritrechnagel@gmail.com">beritrechnagel@gmail.com</a>	La Ceiba
Elmor Wood	La Ruta Moskitia, Ministerio de Cultura, Artes, y Deportes de Honduras	<a href="mailto:brus_yakal@yahoo.com">brus_yakal@yahoo.com</a>	
Dorcas Wood, Macoy Wood	La Ruta Moskitia	<a href="mailto:info@larutamoskitia.com">info@larutamoskitia.com</a>	Brus Laguna

Dra. Marissa Bordas Astin	Alcaldeza de Brus Laguna		Brus Laguna
Patrocinia Blanco	La Ruta Moskitia (Grupo Plaplaya)	<a href="mailto:info@larutamoskitia.com">info@larutamoskitia.com</a>	Plaplaya
Cora Casildo	La Ruta Moskitia (Grupo Plaplaya)	Contact Patrocinia	Plaplaya
Elma Bodden y Meliza Bodden	La Ruta Moskitia (Grupo Raista)	<a href="mailto:info@larutamoskitia.com">info@larutamoskitia.com</a>	Raista
Mario Miller	La Ruta Moskitia (Grupo Belen)	<a href="mailto:info@larutamoskitia.com">info@larutamoskitia.com</a>	Belen
Aventnico Walden Mendoza	DAKNI	<a href="mailto:sulakiamp@hotmail.com">sulakiamp@hotmail.com</a> <a href="mailto:daknitakaslika@gmail.com">daknitakaslika@gmail.com</a>	Puerto Lempira
	MIMAT	<a href="mailto:mimatmoskitia@yahoo.com">mimatmoskitia@yahoo.com</a>	Puerto Lempira
Luigi Loddo	UNDP/GEF	<a href="mailto:luigi.loddo@undpaffiliates.org">luigi.loddo@undpaffiliates.org</a>	Puerto Lempira
Yachimán Pedro & Adonis Pedro	Community enterprise Mistruk, COECOMIS		Mistruk, Honduras
Daniel Torres	GOAL	<a href="mailto:dtorrez@goalhonduras.com">dtorrez@goalhonduras.com</a>	Puerto Lempira
Truman Cunningham	Seek the Lamb		Waspam, Nicaragua
Xochilt Salazar	NCR Travel	<a href="mailto:ncr@comturer.com">ncr@comturer.com</a>	Granada, Nicaragua
Cesar Ramirez	MP Tours	<a href="mailto:salesnica@mptravel-agency.com">salesnica@mptravel-agency.com</a>	Granada, Nicaragua
David	Opportunity International		Granada, Nicaragua
Leo	Leo Tours	<a href="http://www.leotourscomunitarios.com">http://www.leotourscomunitarios.com</a>	Granada, Nicaragua
Anthony Enrique Largaespada	Tierra Tours	<a href="mailto:tierratour@gmail.com">tierratour@gmail.com</a>	Granada, Nicaragua
Mariela Ochoa	Instituto Hondureño de Turismo	<a href="mailto:mariellochoa@gmail.com">mariellochoa@gmail.com</a>	Tegucigalpa, Honduras