



JAMAICA: Environmental Audits for Sustainable Tourism (EAST) Project



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Background

Jamaica's economy is heavily dependent on tourism, which is the nation's leading generator of foreign exchange earnings and revenue. Given the competitive nature of tourism in the Caribbean region, this sector is especially vulnerable to any degradation of its coastal resources. In recent years, negative impacts from poorly planned urban and tourism developments (poor solid waste and wastewater management practices, for example) have affected water quality and near shore ecosystems, especially in the important north and northwestern tourism destinations of Negril, Ocho Rios, and Montego Bay. In self-preservation, Jamaica's tourism industry has had to address the impacts of its own operations on the natural resources that sustain its wellbeing.

In other locations, such as Port Antonio in the northeastern parish of Portland, tourism and the general economy have been in steady decline. With both the railroad and local airport closed, the area is a mountainous road trip of 2-1/2 hours from Kingston. Capturing only 15,000 visitors out of an annual total of approximately 1.3 million to the island in recent years, and with occupancy rates significantly below 20 percent, some of the area's hotels and attractions have closed their doors, and many workers have migrated to other parts of the island in search of jobs. This is especially ironic in that Portland Parish was the birthplace of tourism in Jamaica, and was a favorite destination for Hollywood stars and writers in the 1950s and 1960s.

In 1997, with support from regional and local environmental initiatives (Caribbean Hotel Association/Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism, and the Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association), USAID launched a new, collaborative partnership to fund the introduction of environmental management systems and best practices in small (less than 100 rooms), locally owned hotels, which comprise more than three-quarters of all hotel properties in Jamaica. In recent years, as the project evolved, the project scope has been expanded to encompass – among other activities – an integrated, environmental destination program for the Port Antonio area.





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Objectives

The goal of USAID/Jamaica's environment program has been to improve natural resources quality in selected areas across Jamaica. Major project activities have focused on improving wastewater management, helping the government develop environmental policies, and promoting environmental best practices in coastal zone management, watershed management, and sustainable tourism.

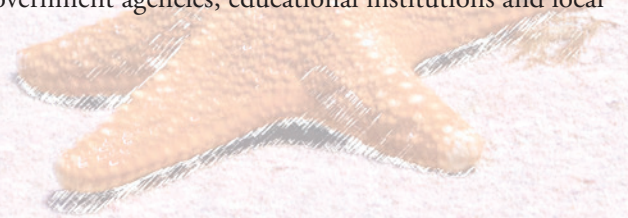
EAST project objectives:

- Demonstrate the benefits of improved environmental management in the hotel/tourist industry and manufacturing sector.
- Identify environmental champions in the hotel and manufacturing industries who will promote and encourage adoption of best environmental management practices by others in their industries.
- Build the capabilities of both Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association and the Jamaica Manufacturers Association to offer environmental management services.
- Work with vocational and tertiary institutions to include best environmental management practices in their hospitality and tourism curricula.
- Transfer the lessons learned from the first phase of the project to other businesses in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean.
- Design and implement a pilot plan for Port Antonio/Portland as a model for a sustainable tourism destination program

Approach

The EAST Project was implemented in three phases. The first identified the overall tourism product, developed training and environmental testing technologies, demonstrated the effectiveness of Environmental Management Systems (EMS) as a tool for cutting operating costs at five hotels in Jamaica, and pursued Green Globe Certification for these hotels. During Phase 2, EMS work and certification continued, EMS was demonstrated further in tourism facilities and attractions and initiated within the manufacturing sector, and the project developed a "green" curriculum for a local hotel training facility. In the third phase, work focused on promoting an integrated tourism development approach for Portland Parish on Jamaica's north coast.

To achieve the desired goals and objectives, and to ensure that there would be a sustainable strategic plan after the project ended, the project focused on capacity-building and institutional strengthening among relevant government agencies and non-government organizations, including hotels and attractions, tourism and other government agencies, educational institutions and local communities.





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Achievements

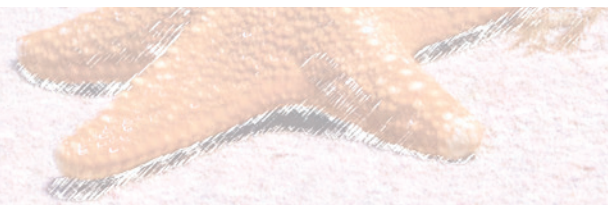
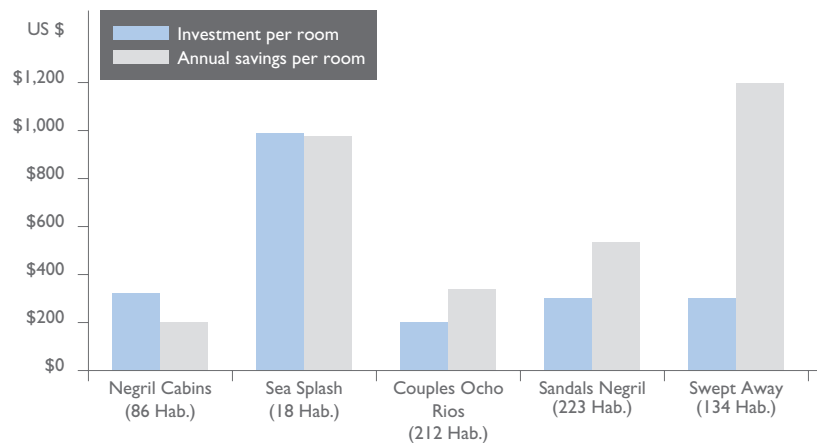
Broad accomplishments for the island include the introduction of Green Globe 21 Certification, introduction of a Certified Hotel Environmental Manager Program, “greening” of the curricula at the Runaway Bay HEART Hotel and Training Institute, the establishment of audit protocol for hotels, attractions, and manufacturers, training for locals in conducting environmental audits and assessments.

Implementation of the Destination Management Program developed for Portland Parish is repositioning the parish as a prime tourism destination. The project is promoting sound and coordinated planning by the government and private sector, and identifying new and innovative development opportunities for local communities. By achieving Green Globe 21 Benchmarking and Certification, Portland Parish can now market itself as a “green destination.”

After instituting environmental management systems, five Jamaican hotels have reduced energy use per guest night by 12%, water consumption by 50,000,000 gallons and energy use by 1,665,000 kWh. The dollar value of the efficiency gains for the five hotels was USD 616,555, or about USD 330,000 on an annual basis.

For each of the hotels, an EAST project team, consisting of engineers and hotel operations specialists, assessed the hotel's infrastructure, equipment, practices, and operations to determine the environmental performance baseline and identify opportunities to improve efficiency and reduce environmental impacts. Each hotel then used this information to create an Environmental Management System (EMS) – a tool to help incorporate environmental care in all key aspects of a facility's operations, management, and decision-making processes. Actions developed through implementation of the EMS helped hotels to reduce their use of water, energy, materials, and chemicals, and to realize significant monetary savings.

Hotels in Jamaica: Environmental Management





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Lessons Learned

The Jamaica experience provides some important lessons for other countries interested in introducing environmental management in the tourism sector and other industries:

Create incentives for voluntary action. EMS is an effective management tool, especially when applied to small hotel operations. Certification programs provide a necessary incentive to participate.

Demonstrate benefits locally. Little or no information on environmental performance at Jamaican hotels existed prior to EAST. Using specific examples of audit findings and EMS results from nearby hotels was much more powerful than referencing experiences from other countries or even destinations within the same country.

Create environmental champions in industry. The most effective spokespersons for improving environmental management are hoteliers who have gone through the process. Their testimonials are accorded great importance since they understand the attitudes and decision-making criteria of their peers in the industry. Environmental champions are needed at virtually all levels, from owners to line staff, to overcome barriers to change.

Publicize results. The hotel industry in Jamaica, as in other places, is very conscious about public relations. Coverage of the EAST Project, including documentary videos and national and international press coverage, has greatly raised awareness within the industry.

Empower stakeholders. Dialogue with and empowering stakeholders is essential, since their involvement is necessary to address environmental and social issues and they must adopt eventual ownership of the process.

Institutionalize programs. Perhaps the most important lesson is to introduce environmental management as part of an industry-wide initiative. On-site technical assistance must be supported by awareness and training activities. Housing the program in the Jamaican Hotel & Tourism Association provided an excellent way to expand membership services and help re-define the industry's reputation at home and abroad.

For Further Information:

<http://www.usaid.gov/jm>

<http://www.nric.net/tourism.htm>

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