



Environmentally Sound Tourism In the Wider Caribbean Region

1998

Background

In the Latin America and Caribbean region, 26% of coastlines are under high potential threat of degradation and a further 24% under moderate threat from coastal development. Domestic sewage, coastal erosion, industrial waste, mining and sediment run-off and tourism growth are all cited as causes of increasing stress.

Tourism has long been recognised an important part of the social and economical development of the Wider Caribbean. The industry heavily depends on the maintenance of the health of the region's marine and coastal ecosystems and its living resources. Almost 60% of the world's scuba diving tours are in the Caribbean. Coastal habitats in the region are areas of unique levels of biodiversity and of a high percentage of endemism. The Caribbean hosts the second largest barrier reef in the world stretching some 220km, mainly off Belize.

The rapid growth experienced by the tourism industry in the Caribbean during the last decade has demonstrated the need for greater integration of the sector in the planning and management of coastal areas. In 1996, the region received 25.5 million visitors (14.8 million tourist arrivals and 10.7 million cruise passenger visits) and counted with 183.6 thousand hotel rooms in 32 countries.

To achieve sound environmental practices for tourism requires coordinated approaches, sharing of information, available instruction materials, and incentives for the sector. Direct and detrimental impacts of tourism, although

usually known have not been quantified. There is a need for better knowledge about the carrying capacity of ecosystems, the impacts of tourism, and the benefits of environmental enhancement.

The Caribbean Environment Programme and its linkages to Tourism

The CEP has embarked on a project to support and improve environmental practices in the tourism industry in the region - The Caribbean Environmental Network (CEN) Project.

The aim is that of optimal use and maintenance of coastal and marine resources as part and parcel of a sustainable tourism strategy in the Wider Caribbean.

The CEN Project is a new, but integral component of the subprogramme of CEP on Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA) and is a joint venture with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in Jamaica.

It is the goal of the CEN Project to improve environmental quality and coastal and marine natural resource protection in the Wider Caribbean Region by:

- *Promoting the use of environmentally sound practices by the tourism industry and*
- *reducing environmental impacts by tourism on coastal and marine resources*

As a means of achieving the above goals, the activities of the Project are being carried out in close partnership with relevant organizations from the private, public and academic sectors in the region.

Activities of the CEP on Tourism

The following is a brief summary of activities that are being carried out to support the development of tourism as an environmentally sustainable industry in the Caribbean region:

- promotion of a variety of best management practices and application of “green” technologies within the tourism industry, particularly the hotel sector;
- implementation of training programmes with associated manuals as a tool for strengthening human capacities within the tourism industry in the areas of: Solid Waste and Waste Water Management, Integrated Coastal Area Management and Siting and Design of Tourist Facilities;
- implementation of pilot demonstration studies on minimizing the impacts of tourism development in the coastal and marine environment;
- production of publications on key topics of interest for dissemination and awareness building within the tourism industry such as booklets, manuals and technical reports.

A number of regional organisations have embarked on programmes to improve the environmental practices of the tourism industry. It is the goal of the CEP to contribute to these efforts in support of rational use and conservation of coastal zones

and resources in the Wider Caribbean region so as to promote:

Tourism not only as an environmentally, but also economically and socially sustainable industry in the Wider Caribbean region



For additional information, visit the CEP website at www.cep.unep.org/ or contact:

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