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**DELIVERABLE NO. 2: GEOTOURISM NEEDS/THREATS
ANALYSIS FOR IZABAL, GUATEMALA**

MAY 2009

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

**DELIVERABLE NO. 2:
GEOTOURISM NEEDS/THREATS ANALYSIS FOR
IZABAL, GUATEMALA**

Subcontract No. EPP-I-04-03-00014-05

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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.

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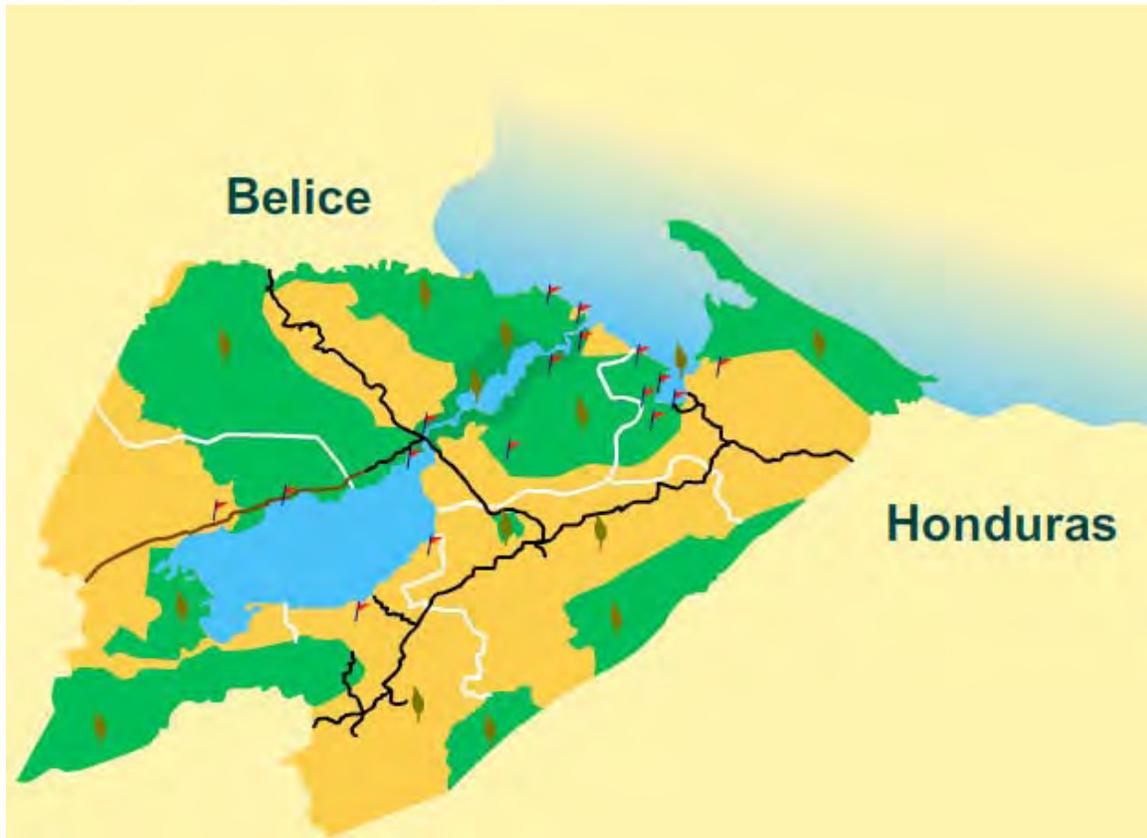
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PURPOSE

Solimar International is pleased to present this Geotourism needs/threats analysis that will lead to the creation of a Destination Management Organization in Izabal, Guatemala. This initiative is financed in part through the USAID-funded Conservation of the Central American Watershed (CCAW) program. The purpose of this assignment was to complete a detailed analysis of the needs and threats in Izabal. This document identifies the key priorities for the tourism cluster that will ultimately be supported by a Destination Management Organization (DMO). It is intended that this report will serve as the foundation for remaining activities in the program.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The information and recommendations presented in this document are intended to provide the stakeholders of Izabal with suggestions on how to best develop a successful destination management organization that will increase the competitiveness of sustainable tourism, generate increased revenue for tourism linked to conservation, and improve the environmental performance of tourism operations. These recommendations are intended to be a starting point for discussions and the plan will be validated and refined after feedback from local stakeholders is received.

SECTION I. DESTINATION OVERVIEW



From www.izabalonline.com

About 60km east of Estanzuela is the destination of Izabal, which holds the Mayan ruins of Quirigua, the Lago de Izabal (the country's largest lake), the jungle waterway of Rio Dulce, and Guatemala's only stretch of Caribbean coastline.

Santo Tomás de Castilla is a port city in Izabal Department, Guatemala directly across the bay from Puerto Barrios. The port in Santo Tomás de Castilla was built in 1976, after an earthquake had severely damaged the port of Puerto Barrios. Today, it is among the busiest in Central America and currently expanding. In 2004, Santo Tomás de Castilla began receiving cruise ships causing a tremendous boost to the neglected region's tourism industry. A number of cruise ships currently arrive to the port each month, carrying up to 1,500 passengers each. Passengers typically seek to explore Guatemala's Maya culture, spread throughout the country. For this reason Puerto Barrios Airport is currently being refurbished to carry ship passengers for day trips to Tikal or other places in Guatemala in the near future. Closer attractions include Rio Dulce, Lake Izabal, the towns of Puerto Barrios, Livingston and San Felipe Castle, and the Mayan ruins of Quirigua (a UNESCO world heritage site). Several community-based organizations also offer tours in the region; however, they are in need of training to improve their quality if they are to effectively compete with the more traditional products in the region.

SECTION II. SUPPLY SIDE OVERVIEW

The tables and lists below outline some of the tourism providers in the Izabal area. This list is not inclusive of all service providers in the area. During the next phase of work we will seek to identify more providers and include them in an information database.

Cruise Lines

Cruise ships visit Guatemala from October to May, which is the high season. The arrivals information presented in the chart below is from October 2008 through May 2009.

Name of Cruise Line	Name of Cruise Ship	Dates of Arrival	# pax on board	Tour Operators providing shore excursions
Norwegian Coastal Voyages	Fram	October 28	103	Kim Arrin
Holland American	Veendam	November 05	1,219	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Holland American	Veendam	November 13	1,254	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Holland American	Veendam	November 20	1,249	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Norwegian Cruise Line	Norwegian Spirit	November 26	2,316	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Holland American	Veendam	November 27	1,334	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Norwegian Cruise Line	Norwegian Spirit	December 03	2,000	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Holland American	Veendam	December 04	1,245	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
P & O Cruises	Artemis	December 09	1,099	Kim Arrin
Norwegian Cruise Line	Norwegian Spirit	December 10	2,005	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Holland American	Veendam	December 11	1,248	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Fred Olsen Cruises	Braemar	December 17	885	Gray Line
Norwegian Cruise Line	Norwegian Spirit	December 17	2,095	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Holland American	Veendam	December 18	1,333	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Holland American	Statendam	December 23	1,402	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Norwegian Cruise Line	Norwegian Spirit	December 24	2,345	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Regent (Radisson)	Seven Seas Navigator	December 24	388	Kim Arrin
Norwegian Cruise Line	Norwegian Spirit	December 31	2,350	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Norwegian Cruise Line	Norwegian Spirit	January 07	2,132	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Holland American	Veendam	January 08	1,310	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Norwegian Cruise Line	Norwegian Spirit	January 14	2,104	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Regent (Radisson)	Seven Seas Navigator	January 14	436	Kim Arrin
Holland American	Veendam	January 15	1,263	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Norwegian Cruise Line	Norwegian Spirit	January 21	2,080	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Holland American	Veendam	January 22	1,285	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Norwegian Cruise Line	Norwegian Spirit	January 28	2,069	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Holland American	Veendam	January 29	1,248	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
P & O Cruises	Artemis	February 03	1,118	Kim Arrin
Norwegian Cruise Line	Norwegian Spirit	February 04	2,045	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Holland American	Veendam	February 05	1,245	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
P & O Cruises	Artemis	February 11	1,143	Kim Arrin
Norwegian Cruise Line	Norwegian Spirit	February 11	2,161	Gray Line / Kim Arrin

Regent (Radisson)	Seven Seas Navigator	February 12	400	Kim Arrin
Holland American	Veendam	February 12	1,280	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Norwegian Cruise Line	Norwegian Spirit	February 18	2,194	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Holland American	Veendam	February 19	294	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Regent (Radisson)	Seven Seas Navigator	February 20	341	Kim Arrin
Norwegian Cruise Line	Norwegian Spirit	February 25	2,323	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Holland American	Veendam	February 26	1,285	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Fred Olsen Cruises	Braemar	February 28	368	Clark Tours
ResidenSea Miramar	Ms. The Wolrd	March 02	250	Kim Arrin
Norwegian Cruise Line	Norwegian Spirit	March 04	2,111	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Holland American	Veendam	March 05	1,278	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Norwegian Cruise Line	Norwegian Spirit	March 11	2,280	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Holland American	Veendam	March 12	1,278	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Norwegian Cruise Line	Norwegian Spirit	March 18	2,618	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Holland American	Veendam	March 19	1,368	Gray Line
Norwegian Cruise Line	Norwegian Spirit	March 25	2,340	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Norwegian Cruise Line	Norwegian Spirit	April 08	2,351	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
V-Ships	CLUB MED 2	April 09	245	Sin Fronteras
Norwegian Cruise Line	Norwegian Spirit	April 15	2,358	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
Norwegian Cruise Line	Norwegian Spirit	April 22	2,008	Gray Line / Kim Arrin
V-Ships	Explorer	May 13	443	Happy Fish/Sin Fronteras
V-Ships	Explorer	May 31		Happy Fish/Sin Fronteras

Total # of Cruise Ships during 2008/2009 high-season = 54
Total # of Passengers during 2008/2009 high-season = 76,819

Hotels

According to statistics provided by INGUAT, Izabal had 1,627,552 non-cruise visitors in 2007 and 1,715,426 visitors in 2008. The majority of these visitors stay overnight in either Rio Dulce or Livingston.

Hotels in the Izabal region include:

Name of Hotel	Number of Rooms	Location	Price Range (in US\$)
Amatique Bay	61	Puerto Barrios	From 70 to 170
Green Bay Resort	50	Puerto Barrios	From 115 to 160
Puerto Libre	41	Puerto Barrios	From 24 to 61
Mansion del Rio		Rio Dulce	From 50 to 70
Catamaran	38	Rio Dulce	From 40 to 60
Banana Palms	37	Rio Dulce	From 105 to 130

Hacienda Tijax	37	Rio Dulce	From 20 to 30
Nutria Marina	37	Rio Dulce	From 7 to 10
Hotel Ensenada	38	Rio Dulce	From 42 to 60
Back Packers	15	Rio Dulce	From 7 to 13
Brunos	15	Rio Dulce	From 50 to 80
Costa Azul	9	Rio Dulce	
Denny's Beach	9	Rio Dulce	
Gil Resort	11	Livingston	From 25 to 60
Villa Caribe	45	Livingston	From 75 to 115
Sierra Mar Ecolodge		Livingston	From 35 to 50
Casa Rosada	10	Livingston	From 10 to 20
Finca Tatin	8	Livingston	From 5 to 10
Salvador Gaviota	10	Livingston	From 10 to 20
Posada El Delfin	12	Livingston	From 65 to 150
Rio Dulce	15	Livingston	From 7 to 20
Siete Altares	8	Livingston	From 10 to 15

Tour Operators

The major tour operators in the destination include:

Cruise ship ground handlers:

- 1) Gray Line Tours
- 2) Kim Arrim
- 3) Clark Tours
- 4) Neys

Other tour operators in the Izabal Area:

- 1) Happy Fish
- 2) Posada el Delfín
- 3) Mar y sol
- 4) Izabal Adventure
- 5) Aldanamar
- 6) Exotic Travel
- 7) Turix
- 8) Paradise Tour
- 9) Caribbean Bay
- 10) Caribbean Tours

Transportation Companies

- 1) Litegua
- 2) Fuentes del Norte
- 3) Linea Dorada
- 4) ADN

SECTION III. ATTRACTIONS OVERVIEW

This lush little corner of Guatemala is packed with attractions. The Río Dulce–Lago de Izabal area is gorgeous and largely untouched. The Garífuna enclave of Lívingston shows a whole other side to Guatemala and the little-visited ruins at Quiriguá have some of the finest carvings in the country.

Protected Areas

More than 20 protected areas in the region make Izabal the “Green Caribbean”. The geography of the Green Caribbean is varied and surprising. Its elevations, which range between 0 and 2,000 meters above sea level, create diverse and impressive landscapes, dominated by the Las Minas, Santa Cruz, el Merendon and Espiritu Santo mountain ranges, as well as by the Polochic, Sarstun and Motagua rivers, and Lake Izabal, the largest in Guatemala. The following areas have been declared as protected areas for the region:

1. Cerro San Gil Water Springs Protected Reserve
2. Rio Dulce National Park
3. Chocon Machacas Biotope
4. Rio Sarstun Multiple Uses Area
5. Special Protected Area Santa Cruz Mountain Range
6. Quirigua Cultural Monument
7. Bocas del Polochic Wildlife Refuge
8. Sierra de las Minas Biosphere Reserve
9. Special Protected Area Espiritu Santo Mountain
10. Montaña Chiclera Regional Municipal Park
11. Sierra Caral Special Protected Area
12. Del Silvino Caves National Park
13. Santo Tomas Bay Definitive Prohibited Zone
14. Punta de Manabique Wildlife Refuge
15. Private Natural Reserves

Key Attractions



RIO DULCE

Description of Attraction

The area known as “Rio Dulce” begins at the mouth of the river on the Bahia de Amatique at the Garifuna town of Livingston. Going upriver, one passes through a spectacular steep walled canyon lined with jungle vegetation and wildlife. The river then widens into a small lake, El Golfete, the shores of which are lined with Mayan settlements and a manatee reserve. The river then narrows and passes the towns of Fronteras and El Relleno where there is an abundance of hotels, restaurants, marinas, services for boaters, medical care, communications and transportation. A little further and the river widens into Lake Izabal, the largest lake in Guatemala (590 square kilometers).

The Rio Dulce is a large river that is 500 to 1500 meters (1/3 to 1 mile) wide over much of its length. The narrowest spot is at a point called La Vaca where the river narrows to a little over 100 meters (300 feet) as it squeezes through The Canyon. The river and both lakes are navigable by boat. The river and lakes are fed by many smaller rivers and countless creeks and streams. Many of these rivers can be traveled for miles by dinghy or canoe through beautiful forests and grassy meadows.

The Rio Dulce is an aquatic community. The highway passing through Fronteras / El Relleno on its way up to the Peten is the only access road to the area. Outside the towns of Fronteras and El Relleno there are no roads or footpaths other than a road leading to San Felipe and El Estor. Getting around the different places on the Rio Dulce requires travel by boat. All homes and businesses on the Rio Dulce have a boat dock. Travelers arriving by land will need to hire a speedboat (lancha) to get around. Lanchas are as common as taxis and are relatively inexpensive.

You will find the people along the Rio Dulce to be among the friendliest you have ever encountered with a strong sense of community spirit, pride and service. The Rio Dulce is the favorite vacation spot for many wealthy Guatemalans. The emphasis is on boating and water sports but many backpackers and travelers from all parts of the world use the Rio Dulce as a jumping-off point for trips into the Peten, the rest of Guatemala, Belize and Honduras.

At any given time there are hundreds of cruisers moored and anchored along the Rio Dulce and the cruiser community sponsors many activities such as barbeques, potluck dinners, sailboat and canoe races and a weekly swap meet. Everyone is invited, whether or not they're a cruiser. It's easy to make many friends on the river.

Activities

- **Sailing** - The Rio Dulce is a sailor's paradise on hundreds of square kilometers of fresh water with countless bays, coves and lagoons to explore. Large sailboats can be chartered and small ones can be rented.
- **Hiking/Walking** trails exist in many places including the Biotopo de Chocon Machaca and on the south shore of Lake Izabal. There are also trails through a rubber plantation and virgin hardwood forests near Fronteras or just set off on your own.
- **Horseback riding** - Horses can be rented at Hacienda Tijax, a 500 acre tropical forest and rubber plantation near Fronteras and at Denny's Beach, located on the south shore of Lake Izabal.
- **Canoeing** - Modern lightweight canoes can be rented for hourly or daily rates.
- **Windsurfing** - The steady breeze in the afternoon is ideal for windsurfers and you have your choice of smooth or choppy water.
- **Fishing** is a continual activity on the Rio Dulce with up to 50 pound robalo (snook) and mojarra (a freshwater perch) that some say is the best tasting fish in the world. There are also river bass, catfish and other species. During the dry season, tarpon come up the river to spawn.
- **Birdwatching** - An astounding number of bird species inhabit the Rio Dulce area - more than 600 species. You can sit in one spot and identify dozens of species in an afternoon.
- **Swimming** is an obvious activity in the warm waters of the Rio Dulce and several hotels have swimming pools.

Scuba diving - The Spanish fought many battles with pirates along the Rio Dulce and commercial shipping has plied its waters for hundreds of years, so many artifacts litter the bottom. Scuba diving is possible but visibility near the bottom is zero. Look and touch but it is illegal to take anything. A certified scuba diving school is based in Rio Dulce and offers trips to the reefs off Belize.

Location of attraction and ease of access

Access to Rio Dulce from Puerto Santo Tomas or Puerto Barrios is available by speedboat (lancha). It takes approximately 30 to 35 minutes to get to the beginning of the river. It takes around 1 hour and 30 minutes to do the route through the river to the town called Fronteras.

Local tour operators offering a tour to this attraction

- 1) Happy Fish
- 2) Posada el Delfín
- 3) Mar y sol
- 4) Izabal Adventure
- 5) Aldanamar
- 6) Exotic Travel
- 7) Turix
- 8) Paradise Tour
- 9) Caribbean Bay
- 10) Caribbean Tours

<p>Price per traveler to experience this attraction An organized tour from Puerto Santo Tomas is about U\$50.00. Includes: Boat transportation, tour guide, entrance fee Not Included: Food and Drinks</p>
<p>Attraction availability Year-round</p>
<p>Markets likely to want to experience this attraction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For cruise passengers, this is one of the main destinations. Approximately 35% of the passengers taking excursions will take the river trip. • Organized packages can include overnight stays in Livingston, Puerto Barrios or Rio Dulce. • Backpackers take public boats to do the river trip, most of the visitors coming from the Peten area or Alta Verapaz. 60% of backpackers will visit the river on their way to Livingston. • Local tourism is not big in the area (represents approximately 2%). • Cruisers moored and anchored along the Rio Dulce.
<p>Environmental concerns surrounding this attraction Rio Dulce is one of 243 protected areas of Guatemala Endangered species: manatee Nesting area for over 600 bird species Waste management: not at all Over-crowding: prevalent in the area of Fronteras where the main marinas are established, and in the town with the same name For this and all attractions in Izabal, the carrying capacity of the local environment is threatened by large groups of cruise ship tourists descending on the attraction all at once.</p>
<p>Socio-cultural concerns surrounding this attraction The main community of the area is the Q'eqchi living along the riverbank. The main concern will be the boaters (sailboats) staying for long periods and changing some of the Q'eqchi family traditions, like food, celebration of foreign festivities like (4th of July, Thanksgiving, etc.) Land-tenure issues: Protected areas are where some of the Q'eqchi villages are and the main problem is the fight against agriculture for forest preservation. In some areas along the river, like Rio Tatin, the association Ak'tenamit has an education program for Q'eqchis, Achis, Pocomchis and other local communities.</p>
<p>How is the local community benefiting (or not benefiting) from this attraction? The main issue in the area of Rio Dulce is that besides the Ak'tenamit association that has two restaurants and one handicraft store (one at Livingston and the other at Rio Tatin where the association and school is based) and Lagunita Salvador where the community has an eco-lodge and a restaurant (this last not known at all), most of the communities of the river are not being benefited by tourism. Why? Because most of the tourism takes a boat at Livingston, Fronteras or Puerto Barrios and hardly stop in any place--just do the boat ride.</p>

Opportunities for tourists experiencing this attraction to contribute to a Travel Philanthropy Fund

Places helping the communities and nature preservation like hotels (Hacienda Tijax, Villa Caribe, etc.), restaurants (Ak´tenamit, Laguna Salvador, etc.), visitor centers (aguas calientes, Biotopo Chocon Machacas--in this case the NGO FUNDAECO), should be involved in the DMO and be identified by a logo a sign or that visitors will identify and know that they are part of a conservation project (culture, nature, folklore, etc.). Also, a donation box could be placed at the exit of the tour where they can give a direct contribution, which could be managed by the DMO.

Recommendations to improve this product

Training needs to be provided for businesses run by local communities (restaurants, lodges and lancheros)

Examples:

Ak´tenamit has a school with 650 students and they have two restaurants run by the same students. The day we went with the filming crew, the restaurant had known for a week we would be arriving for lunch. Before arriving we talked with the manager (a Q´eqchi) of one of the restaurants who went with us from Livingston, and when we got there they had the food ready and it was excellent. However, there were a few details that had been overlooked. For example, they did not have bottles of water and they only had a few drinks, the service was okay but not excellent.

Lancheros: There are a lot of tourists taking lanchas without a tour operator, so providing locals with training not as tour guides but with basic information of the area would improve tourists’ understanding of the area.

One of the main items needed is more information of businesses run by local communities to encourage tour operators, independent tourists, locals, etc. to use these services.



Description of Attraction

Located on the north bank of La Buga (the mouth) of the Rio Dulce is the colorful town of Livingston (La Buga is its original name). Livingston is protected by the Amatique Bay, which keeps it out of danger from tropical storms and hurricanes.

One of the most interesting characteristics of Livingston is that in this small town of

Guatemala, different ethnic groups coexist: the Garifunas that arrived around 1802, from the island of Roatan, Honduras, and are the founders of Livingston, the mestizos and Q'eqchi descendant from the Mayan group, and the Hindus that arrived from Belize. All these different social communities combine in harmony in Livingston, well-known in Guatemala as the Land of God.

Livingston is the gateway to the Rio Dulce and its main industries are fishing and tourism. Livingston has a port master, immigration office and police station. You will also find a post office, Guatel office (telephones) and a fuel dock. There are numerous hotels ranging from high-end to low-budget and a large number of restaurants serving an array of Guatemalan cuisine plus delicious seafood dishes.

Activities

- **Hiking/Walking** trails exist to visit Las Siete Altares (The Seven Altars), a series of beautiful waterfalls. Each fall forms a natural swimming pool. Siete Altares is a few kilometers walk up the beach from Livingston and slightly inland. Guided tours are best and can be easily arranged in Livingston.
- **Fishing** is a continuous activity in the area.
- **Swimming** is an obvious activity in the warm waters of the Caribbean. A certified scuba diving school is based in Rio Dulce and Livingston and offers trips to the reefs off Belize.

Boat trips: Rio Sarstún forms the natural border between Guatemala and Belize. This river can be explored without leaving Guatemalan waters by heading north along the coast. Sarstún in Mayan means "healing stone". All of the Mayan healers use these stones to heal and to communicate with their ancestors. The stones can have different shapes: circular, oval and rectangular shapes and there is a story behind each of these stones. It is said that the healing stones are not found, but seek out a particular owner. The father of the Mayan healers in this area is 105 years old and three healing stones have come to him.

Location of attraction and ease of access

Livingston from Puerto Santo Tomas or Puerto Barrios is accessible by boat (lancha). The trip takes 30 to 35 min.

Local tour operators offering this attraction

- 1) Happy Fish
- 2) Posada el Delfín
- 3) Mar y sol
- 4) Izabal Adventure
- 5) Aldanamar
- 6) Exotic Travel
- 7) Turix
- 8) Paradise Tour
- 9) Caribbean Bay
- 10) Caribbean Tours

<p>Price per traveler to experience this attraction An organized tour from Puerto Santo Tomas will be about U\$35.00. Includes: Boat transportation, tour guide, entrance fee Not Included: Food and Drinks</p>
<p>Attraction availability Year-round</p>
<p>Markets likely to want to experience this attraction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For cruise passengers Livingston is one of the most popular excursions. This trip is sometimes combined with the Rio Dulce trip (approximately 35% of the passengers taking excursions will take the river trip). • Organized packages can include overnight stays in Livingston, Puerto Barrios or Rio Dulce. • Backpackers take public boats to do the river trip or from Puerto Barrios and will stay in Livingston for more than one night. 60% of backpackers will visit Livingston. • Local tourism is not big in the area (represents about 2%).
<p>Environmental concerns surrounding this attraction Rio Dulce is one of 243 protected areas of Guatemala Endangered species: West Indian manatee Nesting area for over 600 bird species. In Livingston most of the places do not have an adequate waste management system. For this and all attractions in Izabal, the carrying capacity of the local environment is threatened by large groups of cruise ship tourists descending on the attraction all at once.</p>
<p>Socio-cultural concerns surrounding this attraction The main communities of the area are the Garifunas and Q'eqchi. The main concern for the Garifunas will be not losing their Afro Caribbean traditions like dances even though there is a local group called Hawani Garuna that encourages young Garifunas to keep dancing Punta, Yancunú, Samai, etc. The Q'eqchi people are the second largest group of the town They do not do any of their original traditions in the area like dances besides Mayan rituals.</p>
<p>How is the local community benefiting (or not benefitting) from this attraction? In this town tourism is one of the main sources of income. A large percentage of the population benefits directly or indirectly from tourism.</p>
<p>Opportunities for tourists experiencing this attraction to contribute to a Travel Philanthropy Fund Places helping the communities and nature preservation like hotels, restaurants, and tour operators should be involved in the DMO and be identified by a logo a sign or that visitors will identify and know that they are part of a conservation project (culture, nature, folklore, etc.). Also, a donation box could be placed at the exit of the tour where they can give a direct contribution, which could be managed by the DMO.</p>

Recommendations to improve this product

Training needs to be provided for businesses run by locals (restaurants, hotels, tour operators and lancheros)

Example:

Tour guides in Livingston: Even though Livingston is a town that receives tourists most of the year, the local tour guides that take travelers to Siete Altares and other attractions of the area do so without any formal training. They are able to do it because they have been doing it forever and they know the way to get there.

Lancheros: There are a lot of tourists taking lanchas without a tour operator, so providing locals with training not as tour guides but with basic information of the area would improve tourists' understanding of the area.

One of the main things needed will be more information of businesses run by local communities to encourage tour operators, independent tourists, locals, etc. to use these services.

CERRO SAN GIL SPRING WATER PROTECTED RESERVE (LAS ESCOBAS)



Description of Attraction

This is an important reserve that has the last remainder of the biggest tropical rain forests in Guatemala. A large diversity of species of flora and fauna are found here and it is a refuge for various endemic species of plants, frogs, beetles and birds. Its forests are an important migratory corridor as more than 90 species use them as resting and hibernation spots. Its streams carve spectacular paths as they flow toward the warm waters of the Caribbean. Apart from its biological importance, its water springs supply Puerto Barrios, Santo Tomas de Castilla, the port complex, and all the settlements within the protected area with drinkable water. The healthy condition of the reserve contributes to satisfying the necessities of water consumption by homes, industry and agriculture.

Cerro San Gil has been the center of investigation for the largest Birdlife Banding and Monitoring Program in Mesoamerica, with 15 consecutive years of bird monitoring and 27,000 banded specimens. This program has generated important information that has allowed charting of population changes of endangered migratory species.

The area was declared as protected in 1996 and is administered by a Local Executive Council, whose Executive Secretary is the Foundation for Ecological Development and Conservation (Fundación para el Ecodesarrollo y la Conservación-[FUNDAECO](#)).

<p>One of the places that can be visited in this protected area is:</p> <p>LAS ESCOBAS</p> <p>A walk through this protected area can be done through trails, bridges and wooden platforms to appreciate the varied fauna that inhabits the area, especially birds and the beautiful waterfalls.</p> <p>The site is open from Tuesday to Sunday, from 8:00 in the morning until 5:00 in the evening. The entrance fee is a donation that is used to manage and preserve the area.</p>
<p>Location of attraction and ease of access</p> <p>Las Escobas tourist attraction is located next to the village of Las Escobas, in Santo Tomas de Castilla. 15 minutes from the port. To get there, a dirt road is taken.</p>
<p>Local Tour Operators offering a tour to this attraction</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Happy Fish 2) Posada el Delfín 3) Mar y sol 4) Izabal Adventure 5) Aldanamar 6) Exotic Travel 7) Turix 8) Paradise Tour 9) Caribbean Bay 10) Caribbean Tours
<p>Price per traveler to experience this attraction</p> <p>An organized tour from Puerto Santo Tomas is about U\$45.00.</p> <p>Includes: Land transportation, tour guide, entrance fee</p> <p>Not Included: Food and Drinks</p>
<p>Attraction availability</p> <p>Year-round</p>
<p>Markets likely to want to experience this attraction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For cruise passengers, this is one of the main destinations. Approximately 25 to 30% of passengers taking excursions will take the Las Escobas trip. • Organized packages including Las Escobas can also include stays overnight at Livingston, Puerto Barrios or Rio Dulce. • Backpackers will visit Las Escobas if they know about it. Currently 5 to 10% will do the hike. • Local tourism is not big in the area (representing about 1%).
<p>Environmental concerns surrounding this attraction</p> <p>The main concern is a high number of the cruise passengers, representing a concentration of people in one area. But this area has been administrated by FUNDAECO and they are trying to maintain carrying capacity. They have undertaken a study of how many passengers the area can support per day, with a finding of about 420.</p>

Socio-cultural concerns surrounding this attraction

FUNDAECO is working with different communities of Cerro San Gil on activities to help conservation while providing alternative economic sources of revenue. Activities include training local tour guides, handicrafts, shate exportation, black and white pepper exportation, etc.

How is the local community benefiting (or not benefiting) from this attraction?

A visit to Las Escobas is done most of the time with local tour guides
Handicrafts are sold at the visitors center of Las Escobas and at the port when cruise ships arrive
Shate, black and white pepper exportation

Opportunities that exist for tourists experiencing this attraction to contribute to a Travel Philanthropy Fund

If FUNDAECO joins the DMO and can be identified by a logo a sign that visitors can identify, they will know that they are part of a conservation project (culture, nature, folklore, etc). Also, FUNDAECO could manage a donation box at its headquarters, which would benefit the Travel Philanthropy Fund.

Recommendations to improve this product

Las Escobas is well handled by FUNDAECO, but there is an opportunity to do an interpretative trail. They have a nice trail but no interpretation at all. When asked about interpretation, FUNDAECO answered that they did not wanted to fill up the place with signs, but if you take the trail without a tour guide you could get lost.

One of the main things needed will be more information of businesses run by local communities to encourage tour operators, independent tourists, locals, etc. to use these services.

**CERRO SAN GIL SPRING WATER
PROTECTED RESERVE
(ENSENADA VERDE)**



Description of Attraction

This is an important reserve that has the last remainder of the biggest tropical rain forests in Guatemala. A large diversity of species of flora and fauna are found here and it is a refuge for various endemic species of plants, frogs, beetles and birds. Its forests are an important migratory corridor as more than 90 species use them as resting and hibernation spots. Its streams carve spectacular paths as they flow toward the warm waters of the Caribbean. Apart from its biological importance, its water springs supply Puerto Barrios, Santo Tomas de Castilla, the port complex, and all the settlements within the protected area with drinkable water. The healthy condition of the reserve contributes to satisfying the necessities of water

<p>consumption by homes, industry and agriculture.</p> <p>Cerro San Gil has been the center of investigation for the largest Birdlife Banding and Monitoring Program in Mesoamerica, with 15 consecutive years of bird monitoring and 27,000 banded specimens. This program has generated important information that has allowed charting of population changes of endangered migratory species.</p> <p>The area was declared as protected in 1996 and is administered by a Local Executive Council, whose Executive Secretary is the Foundation for Ecological Development and Conservation (Fundación para el Ecodesarrollo y la Conservación-FUNDAECO).</p> <p>One of the places that can be visited in this protected area is:</p> <p>ENSENADA VERDE</p> <p>A place for relaxing with beautiful scenery, an exuberant jungle, and swimming in its warm waters, which served as refuge and hideout for pirates during their incursions to the area. Green Cove is being developed and it will have a visitor's center, snack bar, several lookout platforms, environmental interpretation, and kayak and equipment rental, among other things.</p>
<p>Location of attraction and ease of access</p> <p>Green Cove is located 10 min. from Puerto Santo Tomas or Puerto Barrios by boat.</p>
<p>Local tour operators offering a tour to this attraction</p> <p>None. Because it is undeveloped it has not been promoted.</p>
<p>Price per traveler to experience this attraction</p> <p>Because it has not been developed there is no price established.</p>
<p>Attraction availability</p> <p>Year-round</p>
<p>Markets likely to want to experience this attraction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For cruise ships it could be a nice destination, so close to the port.
<p>Environmental concerns surrounding this attraction</p> <p>The main concern is a high number of the cruise passengers, representing a concentration of people in one area. But this area has been administrated by FUNDAECO and they are trying to maintain carrying capacity. For this and all attractions in Izabal, the carrying capacity of the local environment is threatened by large groups of cruise ship tourists descending on the attraction all at once.</p>
<p>Socio-cultural concerns surrounding this attraction</p> <p>FUNDAECO has an important project in the different communities of Cerro San Gil and it includes local tour guides, handicraft providers, Shate exportation, black and white pepper exportation, etc. activities that are helping conservation.</p>
<p>How is the local community benefiting (or not benefiting) from this attraction?</p> <p>Local tour guides Handicrafts are sold at the visitors center of Green Cove and at the port when cruise ships arrive Shate, black and white pepper exportation Different services that will be provided at the visitors center when it opens</p>

Opportunities that exist for tourists experiencing this attraction to contribute to a Travel Philanthropy Fund

If FUNDAECO joins the DMO and can be identified by a logo a sign that visitors can identify, they will know that they are part of a conservation project (culture, nature, folklore, etc). Also, FUNDAECO could manage a donation box at its headquarters, which would benefit the Travel Philanthropy Fund.

Recommendations to improve this product

One of the main things needed will be more information of businesses run by local communities to encourage tour operators, independent tourists, locals, etc. to use these services.

QUIRIGUA



Description of Attraction

Through the lowlands of southeastern Guatemala, the Río Motagua winds toward the Caribbean. Beside broad farmlands and discrete river groves it flows between the smooth steep slopes of the Sierra de las Minas and the rugged Montaña Espíritu Santo. In a silent clearing among the trees, a thirty-five foot sandstone monolith rises from the still grasses of the Motagua basin. The hardness of the stone and the moderation of the elements have preserved its surface much as it was carved by the hand of man over 1,200 years ago.

This gigantic marker stands as a monument to the ancient Maya civilization, and to the Mayan lord of the forgotten city of Quiriguá who is depicted, over three times life size, on its face. His somber face, carved in the half-round, is unmistakably Mayan. His body is intricately adorned, from ornate boots to a full headdress. He holds the staff of authority, and looks down with immutable severity across his city, oblivious to its extinction. Who was he, and what power did he hold over the people of this small city? The mystery of the Maya is deep. We may never know how they achieved such a high degree of civilization in the Central American jungles, or why that civilization vanished so suddenly, so completely, and without a clue over 1,000 years ago.

Twenty-one other monuments -- the finest examples of Classic Mayan stone carving -- stand nearby. But the city itself has declined into piles of rubble, which archeologists are only now piecing into the temples and acropolis that enclosed the plaza of the monuments. The production of such monolithic stone monuments, called *stelae* (singular *stela*, or *stela*), with their dated texts of hieroglyphs, defines the beginnings -- and the end -- of the Classic Period of Maya Civilization, from about 300 to 900 AD. This golden age was also characterized by

<p>polychrome pottery and use of the corbeled, or 'false' arch in architecture. The <i>stelae</i> remain the principal written chronicles of this lost civilization, as well as the key to their highly advanced calendar system.</p>
<p>Location of attraction and ease of access Quirigua is located 1 hour and 30 minutes from Puerto Santo Tomas or Puerto Barrios by land.</p>
<p>Local tour operators offering a tour to this attraction</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Happy Fish 2) Posada el Delfín 3) Mar y sol 4) Izabal Adventure 5) Aldanamar 6) Exotic Travel 7) Turix 8) Paradise Tour 9) Caribbean Bay 10) Caribbean Tours
<p>Price per traveler to experience this attraction Organized tours from Puerto Santo Tomas are US\$60.00 Includes: Land transportation, tour guide, entrance fee Not Included: Food and Drinks</p>
<p>Attraction availability Year-round</p>
<p>Markets likely to want to experience this attraction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For cruise passengers it is one the main destinations and is sometimes combined with the Rio Dulce trip. Approximately 25% of the passengers taking excursions will take the river trip. • Organized packages including Quirigua can also include stays overnight at Livingston, Puerto Barrios or Rio Dulce. • Backpackers will visit Quirigua if they stay for a week or so in the area. Approximately 10% of backpackers visit Quirigua. • Local tourism is not big in the area (representing about 2%).
<p>Environmental concerns surrounding this attraction For this and all attractions in Izabal, the carrying capacity of the local environment is threatened by large groups of cruise ship tourists descending on the attraction all at once.</p>
<p>Socio-cultural concerns surrounding this attraction It will be interesting to have the people from the town Los Amates more involved in the archeological site.</p>
<p>How is the local community benefiting (or not benefiting) from this attraction? The community close to Quirigua is Los Amates, but it is not benefiting from the tourists</p>

visiting the area.

Opportunities that exist for tourists experiencing this attraction to contribute to a Travel Philanthropy Fund

If IDEAH joins the DMO and can be identified by a logo a sign that visitors can identify, they will know that they are part of a conservation project (culture, nature, folklore, etc). Also, IDEAH could manage a donation box at its headquarters, which would benefit the Travel Philanthropy Fund.

Recommendations to improve the product

Have local tour guides at Quirigua

Interpretative trails

Signs with a short description of the monuments

One of the main things needed is more information of businesses run by local communities to encourage tour operators, independent tourists, locals, etc. to use these services.

CASTILLO DE SAN FELIPE



Description of Attraction

The fortress of San Felipe de Lara was built in 1652 to keep pirates from looting the villages and commercial caravans of Izabal. Though it deterred the buccaneers a bit, a pirate force captured and burnt the fortress in 1686. By the end of the next century, pirates had disappeared from the Caribbean and the fort's sturdy walls served as a prison. Then it became a tourist attraction.

Location of attraction and ease of access

Castillo de San Felipe is located 1 hour and 45 min. from Puerto Santo Tomas or Puerto Barrios by river or 1 hour and 30 min. by land.

Local tour operators offering a tour to this attraction

- 1) Happy Fish
- 2) Posada el Delfín
- 3) Mar y Sol
- 4) Izabal Adventure
- 5) Aldanamar
- 6) Exotic Travel
- 7) Turix
- 8) Paradise Tour
- 9) Caribbean Bay

10) Caribbean Tours
<p>Price per traveler to experience this attraction An organized tour from Puerto Santo Tomas is around U\$60.00 Includes: Land or boat transportation, tour guide, entrance fee Not Included: Food and Drinks</p>
<p>Attraction availability Year-round</p>
<p>Markets likely to want to experience this attraction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For cruise passengers it is one the main destinations and is sometimes combined with the Rio Dulce trip. Approximately 25% of the passengers taking excursions will take the river trip. • Organized packages including Castillo de San Felipe can include stays overnight at Livingston, Puerto Barrios or Rio Dulce. • Backpackers will visit Castillo de San Felipe on their way to Livingston or if they are staying at Fronteras. • Local tourism is not big in the area (representing about 5%).
<p>Environmental concerns surrounding this attraction Rio Dulce is one of 243 protected areas of Guatemala Endangered species: manatee Nesting area for over 600 bird species Waste management: not at all Over-crowding: in the area of Fronteras where the main marinas are established, and in the town with the same name. For this and all attractions in Izabal, the carrying capacity of the local environment is threatened by large groups of cruise ship tourists descending on the attraction all at once.</p>
<p>Socio-cultural concerns surrounding this attraction It will be interesting to have the people from the town of Fronteras more involved in the site.</p>
<p>How is the local community benefiting (or not benefiting) from this attraction? The community close to Castillo de San Felipe is Fronteras, but it is not benefiting from the tourists visiting the area.</p>
<p>Opportunities that exist for tourists experiencing this attraction to contribute to a Travel Philanthropy Fund If INGUAT becomes involved with the DMO and can be identified by a logo a sign that visitors can identify, they will know that they are part of a conservation project (culture, nature, folklore, etc). Also, INGUAT could manage a donation box at its headquarters, which would benefit the Travel Philanthropy Fund.</p>
<p>Recommendations to improve this product Have local tour guides at the castle Signs with a short description of the monuments and history One of the main things needed will be more information of businesses run by local communities to encourage tour operators, independent tourists, locals, etc. to use these services.</p>

SECTION IV. NEEDS/THREATS ANALYSIS

Conservation Organizations Working in Izabal

1) FUNDAECO

The Foundation for Ecodevelopment and Conservation (FUNDAECO) was created in June of 1990 with the mission to protect the integrity, beauty and stability of nature through the creation and management of protected areas, the sustainable use of their natural resources and the improvement of the quality of life of its local inhabitants.

FUNDAECO specifically seeks to protect the Caribbean Rainforest Corridor of Guatemala (CORREDOR CARIBE), to establish the Ecological Metropolitan Belt of Guatemala City (CINTURÓN ECOLÓGICO METROPOLITANO) and to support the protection and restoration of the Biological Corridor of the South Coast of Guatemala (COBIOSUR). FUNDAECO is one of the most influential NGOs in the area and has a strong relationship with CONAP (the government entity for conservation). FUNDAECO is also the NGO that is responsible for the management of the Cerro San Gil protected area—one of the main destinations for cruise ship passengers.

2) ECORIO

In 1992, the Shell Oil Corporation arrived on the Rio Dulce, causing concern among local residents upon receiving a permit to explore the river basin. The oil company's presence in the area caused the group of residents to begin meeting informally, and eventually form the EcoRio organization. The organization began organizing regular meetings between the forest service and Shell. The group's first project was to do a mosaic of the Rio Dulce National Park, to raise awareness of the terrain and location of the various communities. Shell found oil in the region but it contained far too much sulphuric gas to be financially viable to extract and Shell Oil left the Rio.

Over the years, EcoRio has served as a local watchdog group for other environmental issues taking place in the Rio Dulce area—such as the Simpson Paper Company who set up large work camps with no latrines, no sanitary facilities and no medical assistance, causing many of the local surrounding communities to fall ill. More issues arose when the paper company wanted to “dynamite” the bends in the river to clear a passageway for the barges. Guatemalan President Álvaro Arzú terminated Simpson's plans by passing legislation “prohibiting the use of barges for extraction in the Rio Dulce management plan,” at which EcoRio and others breathed a sigh of relief.

EcoRio is still very active in monitoring the Rio Dulce National Park in cooperation with governmental agencies such as CONAP and representing the Rio in the Guatemalan Institute of Tourism. They are the only acting hotel association in the area, and charge a small fee for membership. Membership to EcoRio includes an association with the efforts of the organization and a listing on a website the group manages—<http://www.mayaparadise.com>.

3) Centro de Accion Legal – Ambiental y Social de Guatemala (CALAS)

CALAS is an environmental organization that engages in investigations, education and community support. It seeks to protect the environment, strengthen political participation in environmental decision-making and improve respect for the collective environmental rights of indigenous peoples. More specifically, CALAS has worked within the Guatemalan legal framework to demonstrate the environmental impact of mining and petroleum projects as well as to campaign against contamination of drinking water and occupation of nature reserves.

4) Fundacion Defensores de La Naturaleza

Fundación Defensores de la Naturaleza (Defensores) is non-profit organization working in conservation since 1983. The organization was given authority by the Guatemalan Congress to manage the operations and administration of four protected areas in Guatemala under supervision of the National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP). Defensores also plays a major role in the promotion of conservation and the management of natural resources and works with stakeholders at the community, non-governmental, and governmental levels.

MAJOR CONSERVATION THREATS

Limits to Environmental Carrying Capacity

The environmental carrying capacity of the Izabal area is exceeded by large groups of cruise ship tourists descending on attractions all at once. The limited number of sustainable tourism attractions in the area exacerbates this problem. With few attractions for tour operators to sell to cruise ship tourists, the attractions are sold at a rate that exceeds the local environment's ability to sustain. Potential solutions to mitigate this threat include:

- With the assistance of NGOs like FUNDAECO, the environmental carrying capacity of attractions could be analyzed. From that analysis a maximum daily amount of visitors could be established; and
- More sustainable tourism products could be developed to expand the available tours to sell to tourists.

Wastewater & Garbage

There are many hotels and tourism businesses (including restaurants, and marinas in particular) that do not have any waste management systems. Given the hundreds of boaters that stay along the rivers of Izabal, garbage control is also an issue—especially in the towns of Fronteras and Livingston. There are some initiatives in place (such as Rainforest Alliance's Best Management Practices Program) working on improving this issue. Potential solutions to mitigate this threat include:

- Lobbying the government to create a law and enforce marinas, hotels, restaurants, etc. to implement proper waste/sewage treatment and disposal systems; and
- Implementing programs in local schools and run public service announcements on local television and radio stations to education the local population about properly disposing of their garbage.

Violence

The Izabal region has some edgy aspects with hustlers operating there, trying to sweet-talk tourists into ‘lending’ money, paying up front for tours that do not happen, etc. Robberies are also fairly pervasive along the river. Take care with anyone who strikes up conversation for no obvious reason on the street or elsewhere. Like many coastal locations in Guatemala, Lívingston is also used as a puente (bridge) for northbound drug traffic. The beachfront between Lívingston and the Río Quehueche and Siete Altares had a bad reputation for some years, but is now safe for tourists. Potential solutions to mitigate this threat include:

- Increasing the benefits to local communities from tourism; and
- Strengthen EcoRio’s patrolling program along the Rio Dulce.

Unsustainable Farming

The main source of income for many local villagers is based around agriculture. Some of the negative impacts of agriculture on biodiversity in the area include the clearing of forests and natural vegetation; eliminating wild species from land to reduce the negative effects of pests, predators, and weeds; and the misuse or overuse of pesticides. Farmers also still practice slash-and-burn agriculture in the area and are putting an immense strain on water resources. Potential solutions to mitigate this threat include:

- Diversifying the incomes of local communities to include tourism, thus reducing the level at which those communities are engaged in unsustainable farming practices; and
- Use ecotourism as an incentive for the establishment of new protected areas, the additional protection of existing protected areas, and/or the creation of co-management agreements with local communities.

Unsustainable Development

Guatemalan and foreign investors are building more tourism infrastructure (particularly in the areas of Livingston and Fronteras) without proper environmental planning. Such unplanned and unregulated infrastructure development has the potential to cause major long-term damage to Izabal’s many unique and fragile ecosystems. Unregulated destruction of forests leads to the unimpeded release of surface run-off directly into the marine environment. Potential solutions to mitigate this threat include:

- Lobbying to include environmental codes in local construction laws.

To rank the environmental issues identified in order of the greatest threat to Izabal, the consultant spoke with several NGOs in the area, asked them to rank the threats according to their pervasiveness in the region (area), their potential impacts on the geotourism characteristics of the region (intensity), and the immediacy of the threat (urgency). These results were compiled by the consultant and aggregated in the chart below. Wastewater and garbage was determined to be the top conservation threat currently facing Izabal, followed by violence, unsustainable farming, and unsustainable development.

Threats		Criteria Ranking			Total Ranking
		Area	Intensity	Urgency	
A	Waste water & garbage	3	4	4	11
B	Violence	3	4	4	11
C	Agriculture Frontier	3	2	3	8
D	Unsustainable development	3	3	3	9
TOTAL		12	13	14	39

The major threats to conservation identified above can serve as priority actions for the destination management initiative—with funding dedicating to mitigating these threats provided by the Travel Philanthropy Fund.

SECTION V. OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION AND TRAVEL PHILANTHROPY TRUST

Opportunities Identified

Understanding that every destination is different, we began the USAID-CCAW Gulf of Honduras project with a rapid assessment to better understand the tourism demand, supply, conservation threats, issues, what groups are currently working to improve destination stewardship, and what organizations are best positioned for collaboration to better meet the objectives of the USAID-CCAW program. As Izabal currently has many environmental conservation initiatives in place, our goal is to provide technical assistance, share what other destinations around the world are doing, and apply sustainable business models that can help strengthen and move these initiatives forward.

While a tourism cluster is necessary to bring interrelated groups to the table, a DMO can provide the structure and revenue-generating capacity needed to move ideas forward and make a real impact. The proposed solution for Izabal is to establish a stewardship council that will be representative of all the stakeholders and move the DMO concept forward (with the help and direction of the USAID-CCAW program). A destination management organization for Izabal would serve as a collaborative group of public and private stakeholders that come together to address the major threats to the environment identified through the assessment and discussed above. With increased funding and support from local businesses, the organization could implement initiatives such as:

- Encourage wide-spread travel philanthropy from all visitors of Izabal through a coordinated travel philanthropy program and fund;
- Train cruise line ground handlers on environmental best practices to improve environmental performance;
- Train local guides and DMO staff how to incorporate environmental conservation awareness into tours and encourage travel philanthropy;
- Distribute a conservation awareness video and collateral materials to educate guests and encourage travel philanthropy;
- Form strategic alliances with the local police force to increase the level of monitoring and enforcement against violence (especially violence targeted at tourists);
- Educate tourists on traveling responsibly;
- Coordinate and carry out river clean-ups; and
- Implement environmental education programs in local communities.

Many of these initiatives will be implemented with the assistance of the USAID-CCAW program. It was also learned that there are many organizations already working in Izabal with similar objectives to the USAID-CCAW program. In order to build upon something that has already been started, Solimar will explore these organizations further in Deliverable #3 (a business strategy for a DMO) and articulate how to facilitate the

strengthening of an existing organization into a destination management organization and ensure its self-sustainability.