GEF-IWCAM Project
Integrating Watershed and Coastal Areas Management
GUIDE FOR POLICY MAKERS
Briefing Note #20

Hotels and Tourism: Finding a Balance

“The sustainability of Caribbean tourism is heavily dependent on the sustainable use of the region's water resources and, in particular the efficiency and effectiveness of its water and sewerage services.”

“Tourism, Water and Development”, Cecil Pemberton, April 2004

Tourism is a growing sector of the economy in many Caribbean countries. In addition to direct employment and investment, it generates jobs and revenues in surrounding communities and stimulates infrastructure investment. Sustainable tourism can also provide the impetus for conservation efforts. Yet it is the most fragile of industries. It depends on the availability of natural resources, landscapes and ecosystem services, chief among them water and biological diversity.

But did you know that...
• The construction of hotels, recreation and other facilities often leads to increased sewage pollution.
• Tourism requires increased water supply and sanitation services, which can divert water from other uses.
• In islands which are already considered “water scarce” tourism consumes large quantities of water. Tourist resorts use, on average, five to ten times more water than residential areas.
• Wastewater pollutes waterways and coastal areas adjacent to tourist attractions if not managed properly.
• Sewage runoff causes serious damage to coral reefs. It stimulates the growth of algae, which covers the filter-feeding corals and hinders their ability to survive.

How do we in the Caribbean not only find a balance but find the right balance for our culture, lifestyles and, most of all, our unique natural environment?

The answer is in the IWCAM approach, which stresses:

• Stakeholder, especially community, involvement in all stages of each project
• Scientific analysis
• Sharing information, results and best practices
• Thorough planning and participation, and
• Demonstration projects
Why Should the Hotel and Tourism Sector Get Involved in the IWCAM Approach:

1. It lengthens the life of the tourism product. Since most of the attractions in the Caribbean are natural and environmental, it is in your interest if you’re involved or earn your living from any aspect of the tourism sector, to help to preserve the environment. In almost every Caribbean country, tourism is the mainstay of economies and anything that hurts tourism will have a correspondingly damaging effect on quality of life and standard of living. It is our duty as Caribbean people to go beyond that. We owe our children and their children an environment that is no worse than the one we inherited from our fathers and forefathers. This land, regardless of how small or resource-poor, is our land. It is our duty to preserve, protect and prolong it.

   As long as tourism continues to attract visitors, countries will have the cash inflow for development. This will result in greater opportunities for self-employment and economic growth, benefitting not just the tourism industry, but locals as well.

2. Interaction between human beings and the environment can be beneficial or harmful. In tourism, when we take care of the environment, the environment takes care of us. The best “win-win” business model for tourism is one in which the environment is enhanced and not degraded. There is money to be made in tourism but not from an environment that is neglected or destroyed.

What the Hotel and Tourism Sector Can Do To Help Itself and Safeguard Its Future:

1. Be more proactive – being in the Hurricane Zone and experiencing the effects of extreme weather, everyone in the industry should prepare for extreme weather events by educating themselves and their guests, having adequate supplies of potable water, and using flood control methods.


3. Become involved in the protection of natural resources and public facilities that impact on the business e.g. reservoirs, watercourses, etc.

4. Consider joint investment in desalination, sewage treatment plants, etc.

5. Involve all the different individuals and groups who comprise the tourism industry in the country in developing water-related projects or support community efforts to improve the environment, protect mangroves and wetlands, minimise industrial discharge, conserve and harvest water, grow more trees, or deal with beach littering.

6. Promote commitment to a pristine environment and development of an action plan that will ensure that the industry is better prepared for future emergencies.