Community-Based Tourism as a Sustainable Development Strategy
With a Focus on the Caribbean Region

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The travel and tourism industry continues to grow steadily and is one of the largest industries globally based on GDP contributions. Tourism is a significant part of the Caribbean region’s economy and has many socio-economic and environmental benefits. However, without proper management, risks associated with climate change and inequity persist and may increase. Balancing the necessity of attracting tourists to sustain and improve livelihoods while protecting biodiversity and managing environmental assets is challenging.

This study focuses on how Community-Based Tourism (CBT) can be a viable development and conservation strategy within the tourism value chain by mitigating some of the associated risks. Community-Based Tourism is an emerging type of sustainable tourism model that aims to empower and sustain the local community in addition to promoting conservation and responsible consumption. In CBT models, enterprises are typically owned and managed by locals. CBT models focus more on equity of benefits through redistributive measures, and the profits directly benefit the local community.

The client for this project is Caribe Maya, a multi-destination, sustainable, Community-Based Tourism (CBT) initiative along the Caribbean coast that was established with the assistance of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). This initiative supports small scale community enterprises, as a conservation strategy within the tourism value chain but faces the challenge of being a network of small businesses competing globally. This paper includes a market analysis, marketing strategy, and implementation plan for Caribe Maya as well as an evaluation of a sustainable environmental measurement system used by tourism locations. The methods utilized during this study include interviews with travel industry experts, a custom market research survey, and a supplemental literature review.

The results of this project include identifying an ideal consumer segment and marketing strategy for Caribe Maya that focuses on attracting more visitors to the region. The recommendation is focused on the following five categories:

- **Product/Experience** – sustain unique product offerings, highlight value proposition
- **Target Customer** – prioritize adventure-mindset tourists from the U.S. and Asia with high interest
- **Promotional Channels** – target consumer segment through social media and digital ads
• Website User Experience – increase accessibility and improve messaging
• Partnerships – partner with providers of “authentic” experiences

In addition, this paper includes an evaluation of the existing barriers associated with sustainable environmental measurement systems often used by tourism operators or destinations. Specifically, the primary focus was on criteria established by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), a non-profit organization responsible for setting the global baseline standards for sustainable travel and providing accreditation for tourism certification bodies. The results reveal the challenges and mitigation strategies associated with data collection, incentives for community participation, and the need for prioritization of indicators based on the volume of tourists and environmental impacts.

For Community-Based Tourism locations to be successful, there needs to be both a strong marketing strategy to attract tourists and a prioritization of environmental indicators that evolve. Balancing the promotion and protection of assets is essential to obtaining long-term sustainable development.
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INTRODUCTION

The travel and tourism industry continues to grow steadily and is one of the largest industries globally, directly contributing ~2.89 trillion USD and in total contributing ~9.26 trillion USD to global GDP in 2019.\(^i\) In the Caribbean, tourism is a significant part of a region’s economy and a “primary source of employment, foreign direct investment, and GDP.”\(^ii\) Furthermore, tourism “improves livelihoods, promotes poverty alleviation, enhances the protection of biodiversity and cultural heritage development, and helps to build peace.”\(^iii\) However, without proper management of tourism, risks associated with climate change and inequity persist and may increase.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) indicates that there is a critical need to monitor and promote environmental sustainability while also driving economic growth and preserving socio-cultural development.\(^iv\) Managing tourism has become increasingly important as it plays a crucial role in supporting the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is just one model that strives to promote sustainable economic, social, and environmental growth and is covered more in-depth in the “Literature Review” section.

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF), a non-governmental organization (NGO) focused on wildlife and wilderness conservation, works with its partners to protect ecosystems and cultural living from mass tourism in the Caribbean region. As part of this mission, in 2016, Caribe Maya was established as a multi-destination, sustainable, Community-Based Tourism (CBT) initiative along the Caribbean coast of Guatemala and Honduras, specifically in protected areas in the Mesoamerican Reef Ecoregion (MAR). This initiative supports small scale community enterprises as a conservation strategy within the tourism value chain. Specifically, 12 rural communities across five protected areas create a network of “enterprises” that are owned or managed by the local community. This is intended to deliver more comprehensive community benefits, offering sustainable livelihoods to locals as well as actively enhancing natural resource conservation. Enterprises include local restaurants, tour operators, and lodges/hotels. Caribe Maya faces the challenge of being a network of small businesses competing globally but is supported by community members and WWF staff.
PROJECT OUTLINE

Holistically, this paper focuses on two essential aspects of Community-Based Tourism – balancing the need to increase visitation to destinations while also appropriately managing and protecting the existing assets through sustainable measurement tools. This project is separated into two parts that include 1) creating a market strategy for the client, Caribe Maya, and 2) evaluating a sustainable environmental measurement system for tourism locations.

Part 1: Market Strategy

Part 1 focuses on identifying a key consumer segment and marketing strategy for the WWF partner and client, Caribe Maya, within Guatemala and Honduras. This includes insights from research and recommendations regarding a marketing strategy as well as a long-term strategy of partnerships and opportunities to help ensure Caribe Maya’s enterprises and community can attract a broader audience and be independently sustainable in the long-term.

The goal is to create a strategy that supports a sustainable revenue stream and increases the demand for Caribe Maya enterprises by leveraging WWF’s strengths of global scale and brand recognition. A market and industry analysis, as well as an implementation plan, will be discussed in the following sections.

Part 2: Sustainable Environmental Measurement Systems

This part of the project focuses on researching the broader sustainable tourism industry as a tool used for conservation. Specifically, regarding tracking the environment, social and economic impacts within tourism areas. This includes a better understanding of the implications and challenges associated with the current management systems used in small remote communities for the conservation of protected areas. Additionally, this section is informed through several interviews from experts on sustainable criteria/certifications and Caribbean destination management. This section also includes recommended mitigation strategies associated with data collection, community participation, and the prioritization of environmental indicators.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism Industry Overview
The travel and tourism sector continues to grow by 3.3 percent per year, which has steadily outpaced the growth of the global economy for the past nine years. The industry accounts for over 10 percent of the world’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with 1 in 10 jobs (330 million jobs) worldwide provided by tourism. Furthermore, the UNWTO estimates that by 2030, 1.8 billion tourists per year will travel across borders, and 15.6 billion tourists per year will travel domestically. While this data appears to be favorable for job creation and economic growth, without proper management, risks associated with climate change exist.

Tourism is especially relevant for the Caribbean region and developing regions with small islands. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) found that the tourism industry contributes to ~15% of the Caribbean’s GDP and ~14% of employment, significantly supporting the region’s economy. These locations have robust tourism assets due to the rich culture and unique biodiversity. However, these areas face challenges as “their remoteness affects their ability to be part of the global supply chain, increases import costs, especially for energy, and limits their competitiveness in the tourist industry.” In addition, exposure to hurricanes and rising sea levels are increasingly common vulnerabilities.

Although not always fully recognized or understood by society, tourism “depends on the environment, the social and economic structures, including employment, and governance. It is of vital interest for the sector to sustain the basis of its prosperity, the tourism destinations, in all its dimensions.” Stakeholders such as governments, destination managers, NGOs, travel companies or organizations, and communities, face the challenge of balancing tourism development with maintaining resilient ecosystems and sustaining livelihoods.

Porter’s 5 Forces Industry Analysis
The Five Forces framework, created by Michael E. Porter and often used throughout business, was used to analyze the ecotourism and sustainable tourism industry. The five forces model is used to better understand the strengths and weaknesses and profitability of a market or sector through measuring competitiveness. The five forces detailed below are competitive rivalry, threat of new entrants, threat of substitution, buyer power, and supplier power.
Porter’s Five Forces Industry Analysis

Competitive Rivalry
Ecotourism industry relatively fragmented.
Few true providers of ecotourism that benefit the local economy & protect the natural resources and the local people.
Many options in the general travel industry that employ green-washing marketing w/out being a true provider of ecotourism.
Moderate competition, true rivalry includes large hotels and outfitters that are using ecotourism language and branding.
Travel search engines that focus on the eco or sustainably minded traveler are direct competition.

Buyer Power
Strong buyer power among travelers due to the high number of travel options.
Ecotravel fits within the leisure travel industry, which is expected to reach 1.18 billion USD by 2030.
Growing interest in responsible travel.
Large amount of options for travelers with disposable income for leisure travel, buyers have unencumbered power in terms of choice.

Threat of New Entrants
Many potential entrants in the travel industry. Risk of entry is medium due to skills & resources needed to launch an ecotourism location.
Risk dependent upon city or country’s economic landscape.
Threat of company creating a platform for ecotourism is high. In addition to the current eco travel search engines, existing competitors such as Kayak.com, Hotels.com, etc. could potentially add ecotourism search functions to existing platforms.

Threat of Substitution
Many substitutes exist, many options for travel that are not consider ‘eco or sustainable’
Lack of accreditation or understanding of accreditation for ecotourism providers has led to a confusing and fragmented mix of terms used to describe the industry.
Offerings by competitors, the media, and travelers include: “green travel, nature travel, responsible travel, ethical travel, mindful travel, conscious travel, pro-poor tourism”

Supplier Power
Main supplier categories: hotel accommodations or activities & tour operators.
Authentic ecotourism experiences provided by local labor force for the betterment of the community while preserving nature.
Local labor force has alternative forms of employment that could be harmful to the community or the environment. The goal is to provide a sustainable livable wage to provide an appealing alternative to destructive practices.
Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism broadly encompasses mass and niche tourism segments and includes a balance between environmental, economic, and socio-cultural development aspects to achieve long-term sustainability. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) states that “sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus-building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process, and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary.” Furthermore, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) has identified seven areas of focus regarding sustainable growth. Most of the topics emphasize environmental management through education, partnerships, sustainable reporting, and promotion of best practices. The term “destination stewardship” has become popular over the last several years as growth in travel and tourism has caused overcrowding of popular locations. Other areas of focus include creating quality jobs, mitigating illegal wildlife trade, and eliminating human trafficking.

Another vital element of sustainable tourism is tracking and reducing the emissions emitted from travel to and from locations. A recent research study by the UNWTO and International Transport Forum (ITF) estimates that by 2030 “transport-related CO₂ emissions from tourism will grow 25% from 2016 levels (from 1,597 Mt [million tonnes] of CO₂ to 1,998 Mt of CO₂). This growth in CO₂ emissions will represent 5.3% of all human-made emissions in 2030.” While transportation-related emissions from tourism are a critical concern as it relates to climate change, the focus of this project is on sustainable tourism development through destination management.

Similar to sustainable tourism, ecotourism is a term that refers to a type of travel behavior, a movement that began to form during the 1980s. Though there are many terms used to describe this movement, “ecotourism” is the most common. Ecotourism represents a philosophy “in which tourists experience, appreciate and enjoy the nature and culture of [the] destination. The negative impacts of tourism are minimized while an incentive for conserving natural and cultural features is provided.” While occasionally used interchangeably, ecotourism, and sustainable tourism are travel experiences that the Community-Based Tourism model encompasses.
Community-Based Tourism (CBT)

Community-Based Tourism is an emerging type of sustainable tourism model that aims to empower and sustain the local community in addition to promoting conservation and responsible consumption. In CBT models, enterprises are typically owned and managed by locals, focus more on the equity of benefits through redistributive measures and profits directly benefit the local community. This is in contrast to tourism in general, as the majority of profits often leave the community due to operations from a few private travel companies. Through CBT development, the local people have the opportunity to gain financial benefits from the natural resources that exist in the area in which they live. In addition, cultural preservation is a unique element of CBT, and offerings from enterprises often incorporate interactions between locals and tourists. For example, local cuisine cooking classes, cultural dance lessons, or other authentic experiences. CBT is considered an efficient, sustainable development strategy through the means of alleviating poverty, providing social justice, and protecting environmental resources.

While CBT has numerous intended benefits, education of the local community and subsequent participation is fundamental to long-term success. Furthermore, the CBT model is often focused on developing countries and rural locations, which present additional challenges such as lack of market access, limited financial resources, political instability, and environmental vulnerabilities. In addition, managing, tracking, and reporting the social, economic, and environmental impacts are often difficult and overwhelming for communities. While these challenges pose a risk to the viability of CBT as a sustainable development strategy, helpful resources exist through organizations such as the Global Sustainable Tourism Council that was formed through partnerships in 2007 to create international standards and consensus for sustainable travel.

Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), a non-profit organization, is responsible for setting the global baseline standards for sustainable travel and providing accreditation for tourism certification bodies. The universal criteria set by the GSTC covers destinations and industry (hotels and tour operators) and aims to “protect and sustain the world’s natural and cultural resources while ensuring tourism meets its potential as a tool for conservation and poverty alleviation.”
While the GSTC does not certify destinations or hotel/tour operators themselves, they provide accreditation to certification bodies. The criteria and standards can be used for certification, educational purposes, creation of new policies, or raising awareness in general. The requirements are strongly aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They are based on four pillars of sustainability: sustainable management, social and economic practices, cultural respect and conservation, and environmental impacts. The environmental impacts pillar includes “consumption of resources, reducing pollution, and conserving biodiversity and landscapes.”

Numerous organizations provide advice, training, and measurement criteria for sustainable tourism development. However, the GSTC is considered the most robust and widely used global standards throughout the industry. The indicators created by most organizations are aligned with the UN SDGs, each with a specific focus or variation of criteria. Because certification can be time consuming and expensive, many smaller destinations and operators use these as guidelines or to establish a baseline.

The GSTC logo, obtained through certification bodies, is becoming valuable for operators and destinations. For example, in 2016, Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd. announced that they would give preferential buying treatment to onshore excursion operators that are certified as sustainable. In the last four years, the Royal Caribbean cruise line has proven its commitment to operate sustainably by offering over 1,400 sustainably certified tour options to guests. This provides a strong incentive for enterprises and operators within the Caribe Maya network, as well as other CBT locations, to obtain certification as a long-term goal.

**Guatemala and Honduras Tourism Statistics**

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), in 2019, the contribution of travel and tourism to GDP was 6.2% of the total economy for Guatemala and 11.7% for Honduras. In general, Guatemala and Honduras receive the majority of tourists from the surrounding Central American region as well as from North America. Inbound arrivals to Guatemala and Honduras in 2019 include ~35% from the United States and 38% from neighboring countries such as El Salvador and Nicaragua. Additional information regarding tourism statistics from the UNWTO is included in Appendix C.
METHODS

The methods used during this project include both primary and secondary research. The primary tools utilized included interviews with travel and sustainability industry experts, and a custom created market survey. Additional research was gathered from sources such as academic papers, trade associations, tourism reports, and industry articles to supplement the data collected.

Market Survey

The survey conducted for this project is further referred to in the paper as the “Travel Market Research Survey.” The survey was designed via a web-based platform, Qualtrics, and its purpose was to gather market data regarding consumer travel preferences, consumer knowledge of sustainable travel, and interest regarding the broader ecotourism industry. The survey consisted of 18 questions, included randomized ordering, and received over 430 responses from 19 countries, with a wide range of demographics. This data revealed the top motivations for traveling, planning tools utilized for travel, and applicable demographics, especially among populations that had a higher interest in traveling to the Guatemala and Honduras region. Appendix A includes the survey questions and a summary of data.

Industry Interviews

This paper was informed by 12 interviews from various tourism organizations, industry experts, and practitioners. A list of interviewee organizations and takeaways is included in Appendix B. In addition, subsequent interviews were conducted with local booking centers in Guatemala and Honduras that work closely with the Caribe Maya enterprises for reservations.

Limitations and Challenges

In determining who to interview, I desired a sample of 15-20 people from a variety of stakeholders in the tourism field. For the marketing analysis, I reached out to people with a mix of the following backgrounds: destination ownership/management, social media/advertising experience, travel agencies, partnerships, sustainable tourism, and conservation organizations. For the sustainable environmental measurement analysis, I sought to interview people with backgrounds in tourism policy, CBT development experience, destination management, sustainable certification organizations, tourism research, sustainable travel agencies, and environmentally focused NGOs. While the sample size from the survey was large, the number of interviews conducted was smaller than anticipated and preferred.
Ideally, these interviews would have further informed several case studies of specific CBT destinations and incorporated a more thorough analysis of CBT development and environmental measurement systems in the Caribbean region. However, after reaching out to numerous contacts in the industry over several months, many emails went unanswered. The lack of responses was unfortunate but revealed some of the challenges these locations face, such as people being stretched too thin and having limited resources. Constraints such as the language barrier and unreliable access to cell reception or internet connection highlight additional hurdles that will need to be addressed if these locations desire to attract international tourists. While this sample of 12 interviews is not fully representative of the success of the CBT model, it does reveal opportunities and expose challenges that these CBT locations and the broader sustainable tourism industry encounter.

**MARKET ANALYSIS**

To create a marketing strategy, it was necessary first to understand the current status, then identify the ideal consumer segment of Caribe Maya’s offerings. The ideal consumer segment would be one that can provide both a reliable income stream and considerations for environmental impacts. To determine the target consumer profile for Caribe Maya as well as the best avenues in which to increase traveler’s awareness of the region Caribe Maya encompasses, a Travel Market Research Survey was conducted.

**Current Status**

Based on data provided from the local booking centers in Guatemala and Honduras, the current consumer segment for Caribe Maya visitors is predominantly domestic and regional. Furthermore, currently, the consumer experience path to reservations relies heavily on word-of-mouth and promotion by the booking centers. However, this does not draw enough tourists to sustain the community long-term; therefore, a new consumer segment should be targeted. Also, challenges regarding the current system include language barriers, reliable internet access, and booking limitations as they can only be made via phone calls. Furthermore, based on the Travel Market Research Survey results, average interest in travel to the Caribe Maya areas of Guatemala and Honduras is low compared to other Caribbean countries.
As depicted in Figure 1 shown below, the average interest in traveling to Guatemala and Honduras equates to 1.60 and 1.52 on a 0-4 point scale. This reveals that other countries in Central America or the Caribbean region are more attractive to travelers. Currently, Costa Rica and Belize are the most popular destinations of choice based on the survey results.

Figure 1: Travel Market Research Survey Questions 2 & 3 – Interest in Travel to Caribbean Region

Target Consumer

Based on the Travel Market Research Survey results (Figure 2) and additional research, the primary target consumers identified are North American citizens that have the highest current interest in travel to the Caribbean region. Specifically, travelers between 25-34 years old (Millennials), on average, have the highest interest levels in traveling to Guatemala and Honduras. With elevated annual income between $75,000-$100,000, they have slightly higher budgets than traditional “backpackers”. In addition, based on an interview with the owner of a “unique experience” focused travel company, the American traveler has an extensive list of expectations and amenities when traveling. This is especially important with regard to clearly communicating expectations and streamlining the travel planning process.
Another segment that could be a future target consumer includes Chinese citizens that express the highest current interest in traveling to the Caribbean region (Figure 3). This is further supported by the expectation that China will be the largest source of outbound tourism demand by 2022.xxvii Furthermore, the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) indicates that Chinese adventure tourists are “young and wealthy and are interested in visiting exotic destinations that deliver exceptional photographic memories for them to share on social media.”xxviii
A common theme observed from the survey results is international tourists are seeking culture, exploration, adventure, and cuisine during their travel (Figure 4). Survey respondents that indicated they were interested in traveling to Central America were most likely to select culture, exploration, adventure, and food as their biggest motivations for traveling. Therefore, it is recommended to use these keywords in all Caribe Maya marketing and messaging.

Figure 4: Travel Market Research Survey Question 4 – Personal Motivations for Leisure Travel

Based on the findings discussed above, it is recommended to split the target market into two segments – “The Great Explorer,” which will be the primary focus for target marketing and the “Local Cruiser,” which will be the secondary focus. The Great Explorer market consists of travelers that are well-traveled and looking for the next adventure, a storyteller seeking authentic experiences. They are not considered a typical “tourist” but rather a traveler with an adventure-mindset. The Local Cruiser consists of domestic travelers and day visitors and includes excursions that match port schedules. Typically day visitors leave a smaller footprint while also providing a steady stream of revenue.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Part 1: Market Strategy
Having identified two ideal consumer segments, effectively reaching them through a strong marketing strategy is crucial to the long-term success and sustainability of the Caribe Maya community and enterprises. The marketing strategy recommendations are divided into five categories: product/experience, target customer, promotional channels, website user experience, partnerships.

Product/Experience
Caribe Maya enterprises have a wide variety of assets and should sustain these unique product offerings. It is recommended to highlight these unique assets and the value proposition on the home page of the website to gain additional recognition and attract visitors.

Target Customer
Based on the market analysis previously discussed, Caribe Maya should focus on attracting international tourists in addition to the current local visitors. This can be achieved through prioritizing adventure-mindset tourists from the U.S. and Asia with high interest in the Caribbean region. Targeting both segments of tourists seeking adventure experiences is a viable strategy as it has been suggested that typically adventure travelers are the early adopters that can scale a market.

Promotion Channels
To reach the target customer identified, it is recommended to communicate through Instagram, Trip Advisor, Google Ads with key search terms, and travel organizations. This is based on the graph of survey results, included in Appendix A, indicating that the top three ways consumers gain ideas about travel include: word-of-mouth, internet searches, and travel booking sites (e.g., Trip Advisor). Furthermore, the most influential social media channel for travel ideas is Instagram, and ~80% of survey respondents considered booking through travel organizations. It is recommended to target visitors with seasonal Google Ads campaigns during peak booking months (October-November) and using key search terms such as "Travel to Guatemala/Honduras".
Website User Experience

In addition to strengthening promotional channels, Caribe Maya should increase accessibility by improving the user experience on the website. This can be achieved through improving messaging on the homepage and including additional information that tourists desire to know, such as regarding safety and transportation since the regions are remote.

Partnerships

In addition to reaching the target consumer through various avenues, it can be beneficial to establish partnerships with travel organizations to develop brand recognition and attract more visitors. It is essential to cultivate partnerships with similar missions and providers of “authentic” experiences. Examples include Solimar International, Intrepid Travel, Airbnb, ATTA, and The Travel Foundation. This will further drive interest in adventure tourism and ensure the long-term sustainability of existing assets. While traditional travel agencies serve a purpose, they typically charge high commissions and focus more on high-end travelers, which is not the target consumer identified. Furthermore, leveraging the WWF Panda brand can provide credibility.

As funding and time are limited, prioritization is key to successful implementation. Figure 5 shown below is a representation for prioritizing recommendations based on timing, the level of impact, and the resources required. Start by implementing changes that are considered the “low hanging fruit” in the short-term such as social media updates, campaign ads, and website improvements. These actions have a meaningful impact and do not require a lot of monetary resources. Then, in the long-term shift, focus on establishing partnerships, destination management strategy, and capacity analysis.
Focusing on the five categories discussed for the marketing strategy will help Caribe Maya in connecting visitors with the culture and people of Guatemala and Honduras. This will create lasting memories and reinforce the word-of-mouth loop by encouraging sharing on social media and cultivating ambassadors for the communities and enterprises of Caribe Maya.

Part 2: Analysis of Sustainable Environmental Measurement Systems

In addition to determining the ideal target consumer to attract tourists, it is essential to have measurement systems for protecting biodiversity and destinations. While the attraction of tourists is necessary for economic growth and stability, “tourism is both highly vulnerable to climate change while at the same time contributing to it. Threats for the sector are diverse, including direct and indirect impacts such as more extreme weather events, increasing insurance costs and safety concerns, water shortages, biodiversity loss and damage to assets and attractions at destinations.”

To effectively manage a destination or a specific environmental asset, it is necessary to establish a baseline and be able to gather and track data efficiently. As discussed previously, numerous organizations certify or provide criteria for operators or destinations regarding sustainable management. This section discusses the complexities and barriers that were found to exist in managing the environmental impacts related to tourism.
Existing Barriers and Mitigation Strategies

Managing environmental impacts is complex, as numerous constraints exist. In general, a hurdle that small remote locations encounter regularly is the language barrier. This could be addressed by hiring a multilingual consultant with technical, environmental knowledge, and multilingual tour guides to help in attracting international visitors. Political stability also played a role in the success of destination management, especially when involvement from local governments is present.

Challenges and mitigation strategies associated with data collection, incentives for community participation, and the need for prioritization of indicators based on the volume of tourists are discussed below.

Data Collection

While the GSTC criteria and indicators provide a starting point for determining what should be tracked, there are over 173 indicators.\textsuperscript{15} For small remote communities, gathering reliable data on a consistent basis can be overwhelming as it is time-consuming and challenging. Based on interviews with a GSTC expert and two Caribbean destination managers, many CBT locations and sustainable tourism locations obtain some this information through the use of surveys and field interviews with community enterprise owners. However, there is a sense of survey fatigue, and surveys are not always electronically available or accessible due to remote locations with limited cell reception or internet connection. In addition, often, some of the questions are difficult to understand by untrained community members leading to diminished participation over time.

Due to a lack of centralization among enterprises and standardization within the industry, gathering consistent and accurate data is difficult. To combat this, some sustainable tourism locations such as Maya Ka’an in Mexico, highlight the importance of creating a local Destination Management Organization (DMO), that is responsible for monitoring and managing the impacts of tourism as well as promotion to benefit the community. Specifically, for Caribe Maya, creating a centralized location for gathering data such as within the booking centers, offering training, and appointing a community member as the destination manager would be beneficial. Partnering with other collectors of data such as utilities and water companies, or other NGOs collecting data for similar purposes can be helpful.
Incentives to Participate

In addition to data collection, Community-Based Tourism locations, such as Caribe Maya, have struggled to gain participation and consistent tracking of sustainable indicators. There appears to be a lack of incentives for community enterprises to cooperate or desire to be involved. To encourage enterprises to participate and foster accountability, “buy-in” from the community is necessary. If enterprises are hesitant to participate or share information, it is important to understand their specific concerns, explain the goals of the data gathering, and tailor incentives to motivate their collaboration. Targeted incentives can be applied to motivate data collection, such as through marketing benefits, financial support, or by providing educational materials and training for local enterprise owners. Marketing benefits can include certification logos or promotion via the branded network and various media channels. Financial support could be obtained through tax incentives tied to data collection conditions, further supporting why local government involvement is beneficial.

Furthermore, stakeholder engagement is critical throughout and especially at the beginning to ensure the community enterprises involved have input, understand the purposes for which the data will be used and are well informed about the long-term strategy and subsequent benefits of the sustainable initiatives.

Prioritization of Indicators

Data collection and community involvement are essential; however, due to rural locations and limited resources, destinations have been unsuccessful in continuously tracking the large number of criteria set by the GSTC. Due to these constraints, it is recommended that Caribe Maya and CBT destinations prioritize which indicators to track. It would be more beneficial to focus on two to three metrics at a time and add more as visitor volume increases, and the impacts can be measured on a larger scale. For example, initially focusing on sustainable economic growth through implementing the marketing recommendations discussed previously. As the volume of tourists increases and the environmental impacts grow, begin to shift to focusing more on resource efficiency and environmental protection. Specifically, regarding resource efficiency, communities can start by focusing on categories such as harvesting rainwater, trail maintenance, or waste management and aim to establish a baseline. Then, move to more substantial matters such as energy consumption or renewable development that are aligned more with long-term destination management.
One model of prioritization in practice is from Go Blue Bay Islands, a partnership between National Geographic and several NGOs. This project is dedicated to supporting small enterprises on the islands of Utila and Roatan, Honduras, to improve their ecological impact through marketing incentives. They present a great example of applying prioritization values discussed previously by working with small businesses to collect and report data. Their indicator set is smaller than the full GSTC criteria, and their verification process is short of the formal certification. Nevertheless, the program is introducing businesses to concepts of data collection and reporting, and verifying businesses' compliance with standards, at a scale that is appropriate to their context in the near term. As capacity grows within the program, they can then consider aligning with the more comprehensive GSTC framework and potentially seek certification.

For communities new to data collection, creating and institutionalizing protocols and systems can be especially challenging. It is important to take an incremental approach, starting with a small set of indicators, and expanding criteria incrementally over time. However, as mentioned previously, it is crucial to include training and educational opportunities as part of the strategy for implementing a sustainable environmental measurement system.

CONCLUSION

Through effective environmental measurement systems and strong destination management, sustainable “tourism has demonstrated its capacity to support job creation, promote inclusive social integration, protect natural and cultural heritage, conserve biodiversity, generate sustainable livelihoods, and improve human wellbeing. As the sector is experiencing tremendous growth, collective efforts to ensure long-term sustainability are essential." In conclusion, for Community-Based Tourism locations to be successful, there needs to be both a viable marketing strategy to attract tourists and a prioritization of environmental indicators that evolve. Balancing the promotion and protection of assets is essential to obtaining long-term sustainable development.
APPENDIX

A. Travel Market Research Survey
   • Questions
   • Data Summary
B. Interview Takeaways
C. UNWTO Guatemala and Honduras Tourism Statistics
D. References
A. Travel Market Research Survey Questions

1. Have you traveled to any of the following areas of the world? (please select all that apply)
   a. Africa
   b. Asia
   c. Caribbean
   d. Central America (excluding Mexico)
   e. Eastern Europe
   f. European Union (Western)
   g. Middle East
   h. North America (including Mexico and Canada)
   i. Oceania (Australia, Pacific Islands, etc.)
   j. South America

2. Please rank your interest in traveling to the regions of the world in the next 5-7 years.
   a. Africa
   b. Asia
   c. Caribbean
   d. Central America (excluding Mexico)
   e. Eastern Europe
   f. European Union (Western)
   g. Middle East
   h. North America (including Mexico and Canada)
   i. Oceania (Australia, Pacific Islands, etc.)
   j. South America

3. If you were considering traveling to Central America in the next 5-7 years, what countries would you be interested in traveling to?
   a. Belize
   b. Costa Rica
   c. El Salvador
   d. Guatemala
   e. Honduras
   f. Nicaragua
   g. Panama

4. What are your top three personal motivations when you travel for leisure? (please select a maximum of 3 choices)
   a. Adventure
   b. Culture
   c. Nature
d. Food  
e. Exploration  
f. Personal Growth  
g. Relaxation  
h. Strengthen personal relationships  
i. Educational experiences  
j. Connecting with local community members  
k. Other  

5. Do any of the following options influence your decisions when booking travel plans? (please select all that apply)  
a. Ecotourism (supports conservation efforts and observe wildlife)  
b. Community-based tourism (visitors connect closely with the community)  
c. Sustainable-tourism (a policy of impact on the environment and local economy)  
d. Green-tourism (reduce negative environmental and societal impacts of tourism operations)  
e. Voluntourism (help others while exploring a different country or culture)  
f. I am not familiar with any of these terms  
g. These are not considerations  

6. If available, would you be interested in travel experiences that partnered with any of the following organizations? (please select all that apply)  
a. National Geographic  
b. World Wildlife Fund  
c. The Nature Conservancy  
d. Rainforest Alliance  
e. Lonely Planet  
f. REI Co-op  
g. Intrepid Travel  
h. Earthchangers  
i. I am not familiar with any of these organizations  
j. I am not interested in any of these organizations  

7. Where do you most frequently seek new ideas for travel planning? (please select a maximum of 3 choices)  
a. Travel Booking websites (e.g. TripAdvisor, etc.)  
b. Travel Deals & Mailing lists (e.g. The Points Guy, Lastminute.com, etc.)  
c. Travel Agents  
d. Magazines (e.g. Travel + Leisure, Traveler, etc.)  
e. Books (e.g. Lonely Planet, Fodor's)  
f. Friends or family  
g. Facebook  
h. Instagram  
i. Pinterest
j. Twitter
k. Internet Search
l. Other, please specify:

8. How often do you travel for leisure for at least 3 days or more?
9. When you travel for leisure, what length of time would you typically travel for?
10. Imagine you are planning a trip to Central America, what length of time would you plan to visit?
11. During this trip to Central America mentioned above, what would be your expected total budget per person? ($USD, excluding airfare or transportation)
12. Imagine you are planning a trip to Central America, how would you prefer to plan your trip?
13. "What style of accommodation do you typically use when traveling? (please select a maximum of 3 options)
   a. Cruises
   b. All-inclusive resorts
   c. International Hotel Brands (Marriott, Hilton, etc.)
   d. Boutique Hotels and Bed & Breakfasts
   e. Private rentals (Airbnb, VRBO, etc.)
   f. Hostels
   g. Other

14. Of what country are you a citizen? - Country
15. Of what country are you a citizen? - State or Province (if applicable)
16. What is your age?
17. What is your annual household income? (if you are currently a student, please reference your most recent salary)
18. What is your gender identity?
Summary of Survey Data

Where Do You Find Ideas for Travel?

- Friends or family
- Internet Search
- Travel Booking websites (e.g., TripAdvisor, etc)
- Instagram
- Books (e.g., Lonely Planet, Fodor’s)
- Magazines (e.g., Travel + Leisure, Traveler, etc)
- Pinterest
- Travel Deals & Mailing lists (e.g., The Points Guy, Lastminute.com, etc)
- Facebook
- Travel Agents
- Twitter
## B. Interview Takeaways

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title &amp; Company</th>
<th>Take Away</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Travel Blogger, Top 2% of Trip Advisor Users | - Trip advisor is the gateway to the traveler, especially for Western and European travelers. Clear messaging and an easy to use website with clear understanding of the organization and what they have to offer is a must.  
  - When and how to post, proper hashtags are important when upload on Social Media. |
| Former Director of UGA Costa Rica | - Promote activities such as birdwatching and fishing.  
  - Emphasis on cultural diversity, engage the community in their households. Provides homestay experience, make tortillas, help with the farm, textiles weaving, travelers get hands dirty and participate in the local economy.  
  - Travelers plants trees, especially native fruits trees provide food for birds, helping restore carbon related with the travel and connecting with the local community. |
| VP, Travel, Tourism and Conservation at WWF | - A Destination Strategy is the important first step before marketing implementation  
  - Branding and consistent messaging is extremely important  
  - Underlying influences like government needs attention  
  - Adventure travelers are the early adopters that can scale a market  
  - Fully leverage the tools of the Adventure Travel Trade Association (attend the summit) |
| Manager, Travel Tourism and Conservation at WWF | - Talk to tour operators to learn what they are already visiting  
  - Might want to focus on Americans due to WWF relationships and recognition  
  - Determine average time at port to adjust experience offerings and timing |
| Travel Agent, Jetsetting Families | - The following notes apply to Americans that use travel agents for travel planning  
  - American clients have high expectations, especially as the budget increases  
  - Safety and accessibility are some of the biggest concerns  
  - Higher budget travelers want an “exotic” feel, but with the comforts of home  
  - Focus is on relaxation and making memories |
| Chief Explorer, Globe+Tribe | - The following notes apply to clients of Globe+Tribe (luxury global travelers)  
  - Well-traveled visitors are looking for places that other people haven’t been (the next “big” place to see)  
  - Motivations are centered around being able to tell a story around the dinner table  
  - Americans come with many expectations  
  - There is minimal ROI on social media “influencers” and they can feel less authentic. Considering partnering with a legitimate media outlet  
  - Go to ATTA summit! |
| Head of Partnerships, The Travel Foundation | - Destination management is the first step to a successful marketing strategy, helps ensure you are finding the “right” kind of traveler  
  - Utilize the Adventure Travel Trade Association  
  - Capacity Analysis is key to ensure we don’t degrade the natural resources |
| Owner, Rancho Pacífico, Resort | - Be careful about using social media influencers. Check if their followers meet your targeted demographic. ROI is difficult to determine.  
  - “Eco-tourism” term isn’t necessarily a main factor in why visitors are coming to location, more interested in amenities and adventures  
  - Provide sample itineraries & bucket activities - romance, adventure, experiential (cultural) and wellness packages  
  - Track visitor demographics from initial bookings online, use google analytics and Trip Advisor (upgraded account to receive data) |
| Special Projects, Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) | Go Blue Bay Islands is a great example of small enterprises using GSTC as guidance. Crucial to prioritize indicators. Stakeholder involvement and education, trainings. Target incentives to local needs. |
| Program Coordinator, Maya Ka’an, Mexico | Working on the creation of a Mexican Standard that contributes to the study of the Acceptable Limit of Change and Carrying Capacity in community tourism companies within Protected Natural Areas.  
  - Importance of creating a Destination Management Agency (DMO), which will be in charge of monitoring / managing the impacts on tourism, among other issues such as promotion, benefit to the community |
| Galapagos/Ecuador, WWF | Importance of getting local government involved. |
C. Guatemala and Honduras Tourism Statistics

**Guatemala - Inbound Profile 2018**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International Tourist Arrivals</th>
<th>International Tourism Receipts</th>
<th>International Tourism Exports</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.8 million</td>
<td>1.5 USD billion</td>
<td>1.6 USD billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change (%)</td>
<td>Change (% in real terms)</td>
<td>Tourism as % of Exports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2%</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average annual growth past 10 years: 2%

**Honduras - Inbound Profile 2018**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>International Tourism Receipts</th>
<th>International Tourism Exports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.9 million</td>
<td>0.7 USD billion</td>
<td>0.7 USD billion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change (%)</td>
<td>Change (% in real terms)</td>
<td>Tourism as % of Exports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-0%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average annual growth past 10 years: -0%

https://www.unwto.org/country-profile-inbound-tourism
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