

# Dominica's Economic Future

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May 2007 - Following years of colonialism & dependence, Dominica finds herself on a difficult journey in a new globally competitive world with neither map nor compass.

Due to difficult mountainous terrain, few white sandy beaches and an overabundance of rainfall, Dominica remains "largely underdeveloped" in comparison with its Caribbean neighbors. Hitherto, the escape valve has been massive outward migration which has resulted in the loss of a large segment of the productive population.

Political leaders, under the weight of pressing economic challenges and political cycles are forced to focus only on short term emergency action at the expense of a more sensible and sustainable long term development strategy.

If Dominicans are indeed serious about the long term economic development of our island, we must take a hard look at the realities of our situation and find a consistent, consensual sustainable development strategy. The challenge is: what is the best way to move Dominica forward from relative poverty to prosperity that will be shared by all, taking into account the harsh realities before us?

In the search for Dominica's greatest potential, it is only prudent that we begin by identifying our areas of competitive economic advantage (the lowest hanging fruit at our disposal), especially in light of the new globally competitive environment. In an almost ironic twist, the explosion of eco-adventure tourism and the thirst for unspoiled destinations/locations for leisure travel has now placed Dominica in the unique position of being voraciously sought after by tourists and investors alike, who are in awe of the island's pristine natural environment. Many of today's tourists are tired of the traditional Caribbean brand of "sun and sand" being offered by our neighbors. Many investors are noticing the potential of this emerging market and Dominica's enormous advantage in this niche. A growing number of these potential investors are deciding to make a significant gamble on Dominica's future. There are currently three major tourism investments (along with several smaller investments) in advance stages which will bring over 2,000 sustainable jobs and new markets for our farmers small businesses. Once these investments get started other investors will take note bringing even more investment to Dominica in the not too distant future. These investments will bring a significant improvement to the living standards of the people of our island in the not too distant future. It must be clearly noted that a significant factor in all proposed tourism investments to date is the assumption that the government recognizes enormous potential for eco/ adventure tourism in Dominica and is pursuing a national policy that is consistent with the preservation of the natural environment. Dominica's pristine environment is based largely on perception. This perception can

be destroyed in a cyber moment if the country fails to act in a manner that is consistent with the image of a pristine destination. Since the tourism product of most other Caribbean destinations do not depend on the perception of them as being pristine certain activities that they may have allowed cannot be accommodated in Dominica. The entire world is trying to reverse decades of bad environmental decisions; our Caribbean neighbors are no exception. Unfortunately, in the past, other Caribbean islands had been forced to choose between the preservation of their natural environments and their economic survival. Fortunately for us, the preservation of our natural environment is the key to our economic development, to creating jobs and opportunities for the economic advancement of our people so we are in the enviable position of being able to have our cake and eat it at the same time. It is about time that All Dominicans begin to recognize and embrace this good fortune.

A Practical Example: In addition to providing tremendous tourism attractions our continuous volcanic activity presents a tremendous opportunity for Dominica to propel itself into international prominence as the first country to rely solely on renewable geothermal energy for all of its electricity needs. A national commitment to achieve this goal by 2012 would result in unprecedented international attention. Even in the short term the public relations hysteria from such an announcement would result in an enormous boost in our tourism industry from both visitors and potential investors. The implementation of this commitment would result in a significant reduction in the electric bills of non tourism businesses, improving their competitiveness and most importantly it would bring much needed relief to "de masses".

I have been fortunate to be associated with a new eco-tourism development, Jungle Bay Resort & Spa, which was designed to complement the natural environment with structures made of wood and stone, carefully perched on stilts between the trees allowing for minimal disturbance to the surrounding coastal forest. Over the past year we have been able to attract thousands of visitors to Dominica to mingle with the wonderful people of the south east and to enjoy our pristine rivers & waterfalls, sulfur springs, clean coastal waters, etc, etc. Without exception, they leave Dominica eager to tell friends about this newly discovered paradise and also planning to return themselves. Jungle Bay is part of Dominica's growing trend of eco/adventure resorts that clearly demonstrate the economic viability of ecologically friendly tourism facilities even in the most remote places of Dominica. In addition to employing 58 full time employees, the property regularly purchase huge quantities of fresh fruits and vegetables from local farmers, fish from local fishermen, other goods from local vendors & service providers and contribute hundreds of thousands of dollars in Value Added and Departure Taxes to the national treasury. Indeed, Jungle Bay is just one of a wave of similar ventures that are being developed and proposed that completely rely on Dominica's pristine image for its survival. Actually, Dominica's entire tourism industry, cruise and stay over, is based exclusively on this image of pristine natural splendor. Today our tourism sector is Dominica's the largest source of export trade and direct foreign investment, and its potential is enormous as long as we effectively

maintain a handle on social challenges and preserve our image as the Nature Island of the Caribbean.

Therefore, "all shades of politicians, comrades and de masses", please remember that in our quest to rapidly move our island forward, our pristine image and natural attractions are our greatest economic asset. Also remember that in this electronic age our image can be severely damaged with a few simple inconsistent actions and decisions, so let us all reflect on the reality of our situation and begin to present Dominica to the world as the Nature Island with the promotion and protection of its natural environment as its national identity.

[Back to Economic Development](#)