

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

(The Business of Sustainable Tourism)

by

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"The difference between papers that do investigative reporting and those that don't are editors who then demand it and make it possible, even necessary, for the reporters to do that kind of work" - by Joe Grimm, 'Every reporter can do projects', Detroit Free Press (1998).

The second Caribbean Media Exchange (CMEx) took place at Sandals Royal Bahamian last weekend. The theme was "The Business of Sustainable Tourism".

Counterpart International joined with several hospitality industry and sustainable development partners to mount this event. Participants included representatives of the media, the tourist and travel industries, and sustainable development communities in the Caribbean, US and UK.

At the first CMEx last year, participants came to the following general conclusions:

1. sustainable tourism has a vital role as a contributor to the engine of growth;
2. the media should expand coverage of the sustainable tourism industry;
3. the media and the industry should monitor the impact of government regulations and fiscal policies on the competitiveness of the industry;
4. the local and regional media should facilitate the building of a relationship between residents and the industry; and
5. the media and the industry should develop and articulate the objectives of sustainable tourism.

We were treated on Friday to a brilliant motivational presentation by Vincent Vanterpool-Wallace, Director General, Bahamas Ministry of Tourism. He painted a comprehensive picture describing the key elements of sustainable tourism. Some points raised were:

1. focus on the experience, not the destination;
2. recognise the 'island collection' philosophy of some tourists, who may not necessarily return to the destination that they visited but are sufficiently impressed to want to return to the Caribbean region;
3. sustainable tourism implies that not only the tourist must be happy but also the other industry stakeholders;
4. advertising supports the total experience;
5. in a service industry, employee personality may be weighted more than formal education;

6. when an employee is doing well in a job do not promote him/her to a position where less effectiveness may be achieved, rather revalue the current job and continue to receive the effective service;
7. the Internet allows you 'to test drive' the vacation before purchasing it;
8. education is a must;
9. tourism is a global business, employ the best;
10. the shorter the stay, the greater the daily spend;
11. tourism linkage opportunities;
12. the reputation of a destination has great economic value.

There were a number of panel discussions on 'Sustainable Tourism Economics', 'The economics of going green', 'Reporting for better health' and 'Embracing Black Tourism'. There were keynote addresses on 'Communications and Tourism' by award winning film maker Barbara Pyle formerly of CNN, 'Personal views on sustainable tourism' by Allen Chastenet, Senior Vice President, Air Jamaica, 'Sustainable development and the Economic impact of HIV/AIDS on the tourism sector' by Dr. James Hospedales of Caribbean Epidemiology Centre and 'Change is the only constant' by Peter Greenberg, Travel Editor, NBC.

Doug Hoyte, compered a Talk Back Live post-lunch session on Sunday when the topic 'Is the Caribbean ready for Cuba?' was fully aired. The consensus was that:

1. Cuba (there was a representative from Cuba present) is cultivating multi destination travel with countries in the Caribbean,
2. 'when Cuba opens up' is a myth. This myth was exploded by Patrick Cozier, Secretary General of the Caribbean Broadcasting Union, who pointed out that Cuba had already opened up and
3. the more tourists that come to Cuba the greater the opportunity for the Caribbean - this is a very cheap form of marketing.

My presentation was on the "Importance of Holistic Health on Sustainable Tourism". I pointed out that:

1. with a median per capita income of less than US3000 in the English speaking Caribbean, we need all the help we can get in terms of innovative initiatives if we are to increase the economic growth rate substantially and have a chance at significant poverty reduction,
2. we must build on the success of the tourism industry by creating innovative experiences,
3. the Mission statement for the Business of Tourism is "To deliver innovative tourism experiences satisfying the needs of specific tourist markets and tourism industry partners,
4. these partners include Media, Tourists, Investors, Management, Employees, Residents and Governments.

The objectives of sustainable tourism were deemed to be:

- Good Communication among Industry Partners,
- Repeat Business/Referrals to the Caribbean,
- Good Return on Investment,
- Inspirational Management,
- High Level of Service,
- Industry/Community Integration,
- Net Foreign Exchange Earnings,
- Increased Employment,
- Better Distribution of Income and
- Rapid Economic Growth Rate

and the holistic health strategies to achieve these objectives were:

- Spiritual-Push towards the Peak of Human Achievement,
- Emotional - Think Positively and avoid Negative Thoughts,
- Intellectual - Garner Education, Training and Experience,
- Physical - Indulge in Balanced Nutrition and Exercise.

There was a lively exchange on 'Investigative journalism' towards the end of this panel discussion.

Bevan Springer, Samira Cherrouk and Lorraine Ortiz, co-ordinators of CMEx, should be congratulated on a job well done.

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[Back to Planning Options](#)