

Sustainable Tourism

Overview

The goal of sustainable tourism is to maximize visitors' enjoyment while minimizing environmental and societal impact. The idea is that by giving visitors an authentic, environmentally focused experience, it is possible to create a system where residents can benefit from tourism without sacrificing their local culture or depleting their natural resources. This is often a difficult balancing act, as traditional methods of tourism are often at great cost to the residents, however, new ideas and tourist demands are creating new avenues for sustainable tourism.

Sustainable tourism options could itself be a selling point for these island destinations. A 2010 Green Economy report found that over a third of all tourists prefer environmentally-friendly tourism options [15,32].

Implementation

Designing an environment which encourages these measures may require a shift in traditional ways of thinking. Developing clear indicators to

measure the success of economic, environmental and societal impact on tourism is a great way to guide these measures. Annual reviews of these indicators could help highlight both the success and failures across the islands to meet these objectives. Perhaps financial incentives could be offered to businesses which score highly within these indicators, further encouraging investment and renovation which will help meet these goals.

Example of Solutions

Sustainable tourism, when done well, can work to enhance the overall visitor's experience. A perfect example of this is the country of Bhutan. Bhutan works under the concept of "high value, low impact" by carefully regulating the number of visitors entering the country. Here, a daily visitor's tariff is charged, of which a large portion goes to reinvesting in the country's infrastructure [31].

Another striking example, which may be a bit easier to apply to the Caribbean, comes from Fiji. The resort, Six Senses Fiji, is a luxurious five-star resort which runs completely off solar power. Additionally, they collect rainwater and

have an on-site filtration system, eliminating the need for single use bottled water. They minimize waste through strict recycling practices and have implemented a composting system for food waste. They also grow as many herbs and vegetables as possible, minimizing import requirements. There is also a focus on increasing biodiversity through their Rise Beyond the Reef program, the 12 giant clams which inhabit the reef and the 17 critically endangered crested iguanas which use the resort's forested area [26].

Voluntourism is also becoming increasingly popular. This is a vacation designed around volunteer options offered. Countless locations have been able to take advantage of the passion of visitors to help build and run conservation efforts, protecting unique natural resources of an area. Typically, these programs are geared towards projects requiring physical labor, such as planting trees, cleaning coral reefs or building infrastructure projects such as fences to keep free roaming cattle from over grazing. These projects often provide unique hands on experience with the natural habitat, normally inaccessible to visitors.

