

An underwater photograph of a coral reef. The water is clear and blue, with sunlight filtering through. The coral is diverse, including tall, thin, branching corals and lower, more complex reef structures. The overall scene is vibrant and healthy.

Ecotourism

Policy

DRAFT

Ecotourism in T&T – Background

Trinidad and Tobago is endowed with a very rich natural and cultural heritage that delivers a South American wilderness adventure with a Caribbean experience

T&T has the potential to deliver Ecotourism (or Ecologically and Culturally Sustainable Tourism) has been defined as responsible tourism to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well being of local communities.

While this excellent ecotourism potential has been touted by many foreign and local experts, professionals and non-professionals alike.

However due to lack of serious effort and understanding on successive Governments' and the local business community's part, and lack of funding of the local professionals in the ecotourism industry this amazing potential has never been actualized.

What is Ecotourism

- *Is responsible travel, where responsibility rests on both the traveller and travel provider*
- *Contributes actively to the conservation of natural environment and sensitive areas*
- *Contributes actively to the conservation of cultural heritage;*
- *Includes local and indigenous communities in its planning, development and operation,*
- *Benefits local communities and contributes to their socioeconomic well-being;*
- *Interprets the natural and cultural heritage of the destination to visitors;*
- *Lends itself better to socially and environmentally conscious independent travellers, organized ecotours and small groups;*
- *Accommodations are generally environmentally conscious, small and locally owned*

SCUBA Diving

Kayaking

Parang, Chutney, and lots of other Music

CONSERVATION!



Food & Religion

Why an Ecotourism Policy?

- The major factor that has kept ecotourism from achieving its full potential is a complete lack of political will and support! The history of successive governments' support for ecotourism is woeful; describing it as lip service is being generous at best.
- The simple fact is that all efforts towards developing ecotourism have been inadequate, misdirected, incomplete and poorly thought-out.
- This Government states that it recognises that the development of its eco-tourism industry requires a more strategic approach to enhance its sustainability and long-term competitiveness and in order for tourism to realise its fullest potential, to engage local communities, create economic opportunities and alleviate poverty.
- At present the Draft National Tourism Policy has been developed and is engaging feedback from relevant stakeholders.
- Hence an ecotourism policy will give the ecotourism industry that extra impetus required

Ecotourism Policy Statement of Purpose:

- **To build a balanced, collaborative ecotourism policy framework consistent with internationally accepted principles of sustainable tourism.**

Guiding Principles for Ecotourism

- **There are 21 guiding principles that are aimed at the development, management and promotion of ecotourism in Trinidad and Tobago**

A photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright orange and yellow glow that reflects on the water. The sky is filled with soft, golden clouds. The water in the foreground is dark blue with some ripples.

VISION

- **To become the premiere ecotourism destination globally**

MISSION

- **To develop a value driven eco tourism industry encompassing every aspect of Trinidad and Tobago's wild, natural and cultural heritage offering professional services that is community driven and conserves the environment.**

Aims & Objectives

- Identification and promotion of ecotourism potential sites
- Development of permissible and ecologically sound ecotourism infrastructure;
- Diversification of the range of tourism activities available at destinations;
- Development and enforcement of standards and norms for ecotourism activities;
- Securing involvement of the local communities living in and dependent on peripheral and other areas for their livelihood;
- Developing natural areas into national parks with emphasis on conservation with government / community / NGO co-managed visitation
- Awareness building amongst general public; local communities, foreign visitors and government staff;
- enunciate mechanism for securing partnership of private sector enterprise committed to the goals of ecotourism for development of infrastructure and services
- Sensitization of community and augmentation of local community livelihood;
- Rebuild communities where people live, study, play and work within the community, thus cutting down stress, congestion on streets and lengthy commutes
- **With the ultimate objectives of:**
 - a. Conserving the natural resource base of Trinidad and Tobago;
 - b. Promoting Trinidad and Tobago as the premiere ecotourism destination;
 - c. Securing economic benefits for the local communities without adversely affecting their cultural ethos.

Ecotourism Policy Framework

- *Ecotourism Policy Framework Foundations*
- **Consultative communication, education, and awareness strategies:** This would be established very early to ensure that communities, tour operators, companies and eco operators are welcome and active partners in ecotourism planning and in co-management of ecotourism operations.
- **Environmental operational principles and minimum impact guidelines** This would be established collectively by Trinidad and Tobago's ecotourism stakeholders covering environmental concerns such as treatment of wastes, transportation methods, and implementation of internationally accepted "environmentally friendly" standards.
- **A well developed and executed marketing plan** that targets identified ecotourism markets locally, regionally and internationally.
- **Competitive clustering** This would be used to establish community, regional and each islands developmental priorities for ecotourism, where the advertised standard of quality can be guaranteed. Demonstration effect used to develop additional diversified ecotourism destinations, using a phased-in, community, regional and each islands approach.
- **Capacity building strategy** This would encompass investment incentives, tourism occupational training, community-based training, and entrepreneurial support to small, medium and micro-enterprises and community ventures.
- **National ecotourism brand management** approach developed that encompasses natural and cultural attractions, integrated with national tourism marketing strategy.
- **National ecosystem and cultural resource research and inventory mapping strategy** linked to analysis of ecotourism and cultural tourism product development potential.
- **Legal framework developed**, expanding the legal structure to protect ecosystems, and to benefit communities, forms basis for certification and licensing structures.

SWOT Analysis:

– **Successes:**

- The private sector is the strongest force in ecotourism development despite of a lack of government support.
- Trinidad and Tobago boasts by far the best natural and cultural products in the Caribbean which is competitive on the world market
- Trinidad and Tobago is very well established on the international ecotourism market as an excellent destination for birding (bird watching). Each year Pax Guest House, Blue Waters Inn, Le Grande Almandier, the Asa Wright Nature Centre and others are filled with birders mostly from the USA, UK, Europe, Canada and elsewhere.
- The Asa Wright Nature Centre is ranked among the world's top ten ecolodges and it keeps improving
- The conservation of the Scarlet Ibis in the Caroni Bird Sanctuary is a brilliant success and the sight of the Scarlet Ibis flying in to roost is ranked among the world's top ten birding wonders.
- The model for community based conservation of nesting Leatherback Turtles as developed by Nature Seekers in Matura is now THE world model for community based conservation of nesting Leatherback Turtles.
- Conservation of the Trinidad Piping Guan throughout the eastern Northern Range as piloted by the Forestry Division in their "We Pawi" programme has had excellent success

– **Successes:**

- North East Trinidad is leading the way in the development of ecotourism in the form of the Turtle Village Trust, with Nature Seekers and Grande Riverre providing excellent guides for birding, hiking and turtle tours and turtle conservation. This is the example we should be following throughout Trinidad and Tobago.
- Paria Springs Eco-Community, as successful eco adventure tour operation handling tours both in Trinidad and Tobago, is recognized as one of National Geographic's best tour operators on earth and has been specially recommended in Rough Guides new book Clean Breaks: 500 New Ways to See the World.
- The Trinidad and Tobago Incoming Tour Operators Association has successfully grown to include several ecotourism tour operators both in culture and nature tours.
- A variety of groups have been clearing trails in Trinidad and Tobago both for conservation and for ecotourism. The Forestry Division has been clearing bench trails throughout the Northern Range, Trinidad and Main Ridge Tobago for fire prevention and rapid response to fires. A group of mountain bikers and hikers have also been clearing several trails.
- Even though our Carnival is plagued with problems it remains an excellent for the cultural aspects of ecotourism.
- Several communities in Trinidad and Tobago such as Brasso Seco, Plum Mittan, and others have started small ecotourism products.
- Tourism Park has had limited success in that in its first year it was well done but lost momentum and quality in the second year.

– **Weaknesses / Failures:**

- The main failure has been that of successive Governments' complete lack of initiative, knowledge, planning, marketing, product development, training and funding of ecotourism or adventure tourism.
- Governments' failure to deal with the current crisis that is the crime situation has made it much more difficult to attract visitors to Trinidad and Tobago
- The sensationalizing of crime and criminals in news media adds to the difficulty of attracting ecotourists.
- While several governments have promised funding for tourism and ecotourism the reality is that both the Ministry and TDC are severely under funded
- The local banking institutions and finance houses have also failed to understand the needs of ecotourism, so no attractive funding has ever been developed.
- While Trinidad and Tobago is well known in the world of birding outside that there is no knowledge that we even exist, even with the success of Soca Warriors
- Government workers in both The Ministry of Tourism and TDC have very little knowledge of ecotourism, its needs, how to market or develop it.

– Weaknesses / Failures:

- Several mega tourism projects such as the Tobago Hilton have been green washed to sound like ecotourism, while in fact they are not and actually down grade the actual product and mar Trinidad and Tobago's reputation for true ecotourism.
- There is a complete lack of substantial and relevant training for tour guides in the field of ecotourism
- A complete lack of infrastructure and development in rural communities in the form of good roads, reliable electricity, phones (which admittedly has improved recently), information centers and staffing those centers
- To say that Government has failed to market Trinidad and Tobago as an eco adventure destination is a gross understatement.
- Initially TIDCO and now TDC have failed to follow and adhere to tourism development plan
- The chaos that is the organization of Carnival makes selling it as an ecotourism product very difficult; we should be able to purchase tickets for shows at least 6 months in advance etc.
- The lack of a push towards the development of locally owned, funded and operated, small hotels and ecolodges (less than 25 rooms), host homes, guest houses and other accommodations has hurt our ability to develop ecotourism.

– **Opportunities:**

- We can develop Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean's premiere eco adventure destination; a destination that can rival any other eco adventure destination worldwide.
- The development of ecotourism in Trinidad and Tobago will radically change distribution of wealth in rural communities, placing sustainable incomes in rural areas, thus decentralizing the economy
- Development of a truly sustainable business sector that will build other sectors such as arts, crafts, fishing and farming
- Working with the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) a world body located in Seattle we can position Trinidad and Tobago as the Caribbean premiere eco adventure destination
- We need to develop into our marketing programmes the fact that we are a warm, friendly and welcoming people
- Develop relationships with reputable international media
- The best natural and human resources for ecotourism in the Caribbean
- Our culture stands as a beacon of light to other cultures world wide
- Further development of trails in all areas of Trinidad and Tobago
- Establish is the main spoken language
- Trinidad and Tobago is the perfect combination of South American wilderness and adventure with Caribbean charm, rhythm and relaxation

– Threats:

- By far the number 1 threat is the continued escalation in Crime**
- Continued marginalization of ecotourism by successive governments means that ecotourism will never achieve its true potential.**
- Continued industrialization of Trinidad and Tobago erodes our ability to boast being a green destination.**
- The price of the destination is high, with expensive air tickets and an economy whose rate of inflation is excessive means that sooner or later we will price Trinidad and Tobago out of the market.**
- Local militant groups, especially with their tie to crime and international terrorism**
- The Tourism Development Authority's lack of initiative, a marketing plan and implementation of that plan coupled with a Board of Directors who seems to find obstacles instead of solutions combines to form a completely non supportive government.**

Moving Ecotourism Forward in T&T

- **Ecotourism activities and facilities**
 - Accommodations, camps, community centers
 - Birding, hiking, canopy adventures, biking, kayaking, fishing, etc
- **Ecotourism development as a protected area management strategy**
- **Capacity building, training, education and awareness raising**
- **Certification and labeling**
- **Institutional frameworks**
- **Roles of Stakeholders**
 - Ministry
 - *TDC*
 - *NGOs*
 - *Ecotourism Professionals*
 - *Business Sector*
- **Policy Implementation**
 - Ensuring it moves forward
 - Monitoring and Evaluation

Lets Forge The Way Forward

