



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

TOURISM IN THE PEARL LAGOON BASIN

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
COMMUNITY-BASED SUSTAINABLE TOURISM



TECHNICAL REPORT

TOURISM IN THE PEARL LAGOON BASIN

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY-BASED SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Conservation and Sustainable Tourism in Critical Watersheds
Jerry Bauer, Team Leader

By

Jerry Wylie
Ecotourism Specialist
USDA Forest Service
International Institute of Tropical Forestry
Río Piedras, Puerto Rico

and

Jerry Bauer
Team Leader
USDA Forest Service
International Institute of Tropical Forestry
Río Piedras, Puerto Rico

Nicaragua, January 2008



This work was completed with support from the people of the United States through USAID/Nicaragua by the USDA Forest Service International Institute of Tropical Forestry under PASA No. 524-P-00-07-00007-00 (Conservation and Sustainable Tourism in Critical Watersheds), with assistance from local and international partners and collaborators. The contents are the opinions of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the United States Government. For further information contact Jerry Bauer at gbauer@fs.fed.us.



Pearl Lagoon local fisherman.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction
Existing Tourism Linkages
Potential Tour Packages
Recommendations
Map of the Pearl Lagoon Basin
References Cited



Fly fishing is a great activity at the Pearl Cays.



INTRODUCTION

This report is a continuation of a series of activities sponsored by USAID/Nicaragua to promote sustainable community-based tourism in the communities of the Pearl Lagoon Basin on the Caribbean side of Nicaragua. Previous activities include an assessment of the potential for sea kayak tours (Wylie 2005), a workshop on sustainable tourism in 2006 (Bauer & Coria 2006), design of a information kiosk for Pearl Lagoon Town, and creation of a advertising bookmark in 2007.

The objective of this trip, conducted January 22-24, 2008, was to identify potential tour packages and do a quick assessment of the existing tourism infrastructure for producing quality tourism products. This assesment was conducted in cooperation with a local tourism entrepreneur Nuria Dixon, who is currently building the “Caribbean Roots Ecolodge”.



- ▲ Fresh water stream lined by mangrove forest is a tourist attraction near Pearl Lagoon Town.
- ▶ The Pearl Cays are just kilometers away from Pearl Lagoon Town.

EXISTING TOURISM LINKAGES

The core business cluster supporting tourism in Pearl Lagoon Town and basin is in place. This includes regularly scheduled transportation by road and by boat, restaurants, small hotels and guest houses, shops, and fishermen serving as informal guides and boatmen. New hotels and restaurants are being planned in Pearl Lagoon and Awas.

Although internet access is limited, there is good cell phone coverage. Electricity is provided by generator in Pearl Lagoon Town and Orinoco (and perhaps other communities), but is not available 24-hours.

With the completion of the road from Rama in 2007, Pearl Lagoon can now be reached from Managua in 5 - 6 hours. This new transportation link is expected to dramatically increase visitation and supplies that previously came by boat from Bluefields, 40 km to the south. It may also make Pearl Lagoon Town the gateway to Corn Island for those going by boat, replacing Bluefields.

In addition to this established core set of businesses, there are other linkages in a larger chain that contributes to the production of successful travel experiences. All of these will require reinforcement and further development. This value-chain includes:

- A developed image as a tourism destination
- Advertising (print and internet)
- Packaged tours
- National and international tour agencies and operators
- Receptive (local) tour operators
- Visitor information (maps, signage, kiosks, brochures)
- Interpretive programs for cultural and natural attractions
- Trained tour guides
- Museums and visitor centers
- Specialized camping and sports equipment
- Local medical expertise
- Souvenirs

The most efficient way to enhance this value-chain is to utilize linkages and clients already established in the core business cluster, especially hotels and restaurants. Hotels currently coordinate local trips and activities for their customers, arranging boats, guides, and providing sports equipment, and lunches. In addition, they can display and sell souvenirs made by local artisans and serve as informal visitor centers by providing maps, brochures, and photographs of local attractions. A good example of this is the new hotel in Orinoco, which displays Garifuna artifacts.

Although they do not do so presently, restaurants could offer similar services to an even larger audience, as well as develop cooking classes and tours based on local products and recipes. Both hotels and restaurants could enhance the visitor experience and provide sustainable benefits by incorporating more information, services, and heritage interpretation to their customers.



Foreign tourist enjoying the Pearl Cays.



Colorful Atlantic Coast church is a tourist attraction in the Pearl Lagoon Town.

Coconut palms at one of the Pearl Cays.



POTENTIAL TOUR PACKAGES

A wide range of day and multi-day tours from Pearl Lagoon Town are possible based on the natural and cultural attractions of the Pearl Lagoon Basin. These are listed below and shown on the attached map (page 6). Details of potential kayak tours in the lagoon and at the Pearl Cays are available in a previous report (Wylie 2005).

CULTURAL TOURS

Kakahbila (Miskito)
Orinoco (Garifuna), overnight lodging available
Awes (Miskito)
Pearl Lagoon Town

NATURE TOURS BY FOOT OR HORSEBACK

Awes wetlands (foot)
Kakahbila (foot or horseback)

NATURE TOURS BY POWERBOAT

Awes Creek
Isik Creek (west of Awes)
Wawashang River near Orinoco
Birding at mangrove channels and lakes on south side of the peninsula

TOURS BY KAYAK OR SMALL DUGOUT CANOE ("DORY")

Awes Creek
Isik Creek west of Awes
Tuba Creek
Bay islands near Pearl Lagoon Town

"FRUITS OF THE SEA" EXPERIENCE

Observe shrimp netting in traditional sailing dories
Ocean fish with hand line
Oyster harvesting (optional)
Cook with traditional recipes and enjoy

PEARL CAYS

Day trips for snorkeling and fishing
Overnight stay at small lodge
Overnight camping
Multi-day kayaking trips

RECOMMENDATIONS (not in any specific order)

1. **Utilize free internet sites for advertising.** Provide photographs to Google Earth maps and short descriptions on tourism opportunities in Pearl Lagoon in such social networking websites as Trip Advisor.
2. **Test sea kayaking in the Pearl Cays.** Organize a multi-day exploratory/FAM kayak trip of the cays utilizing folding kayaks, either camping or staying at one of the new hotels. Use pangas to ferry all boats, equipment and supplies. Invite a travel writer and photographer to document the trip and an international tour company to evaluate the area's potential for kayak expeditions.
3. **Stimulate the development of souvenirs.** There are no souvenirs currently available based on traditional crafts such as weaving or carving. Be sure to provide information on each item to explain where it is from, its cultural/historical roots, and what makes it significant.
4. **Develop tour policies.** Standardized tour pricing, standards, and policies for village tours are needed and must be developed by each community. This can include such things as appropriate clothing standards and behavior for visitors, use of cameras, and days when tourists are not welcome. It should also consider whether a portion of visitor fees should go to the community to support cultural and environmental projects.
5. **Ensure sustainable benefits.** Make sure all tourism activities produce benefits for the cultural and natural environment, local communities and businesses, and the visitor.
6. **Explore opportunities for volunteer vacations.** Visitors are willing to donate their time, expertise, and money for local projects if they are offered a unique experience and a chance to develop a personal connection with locals. Potential projects are expanding the tiny school at Kakah-bila or controlling the serious shoreline erosion threatening the village of Awas. International organizations are available to advertise projects and organize trips.
7. **Develop marketing materials for cultural and nature tours.** Photographs and graphic design are needed for advertising tours on the internet and in print media.
8. **Develop and promote specific tour packages.** Tour packages should provide all information needed for tour agencies and customers to understand the trip. This includes a detailed description of activities, time required, level of difficulty, price, minimum and maximum number of clients, what is provided, what the visitors must bring (especially appropriate clothing), starting time, and contact information.
9. **Utilize hotels and restaurants as focal points for local tourism.** Utilize hotels and restaurants as visitor centers, museums, gift shops, tour agencies for organizing local trips, and sports equipment rental.
10. **Training tour guides.** A one day training emphasizing practical techniques for leading tours, providing heritage interpretation, and dealing with groups should be provided to each community.

Typical view of the Pearl Cays.





REFERENCES CITED

Wylie, J. 2005. Sea Kayak Assessment of Pearl Lagoon and Pearl Cays, Nicaragua: Summary of Findings and Recommendations. Report prepared by the US Forest Service International Institute for Tropical Forestry for the US Agency for International Development.

Bauer, J.; Coria, S. 2006. Sustainable Tourism, II Short Course for Local Communities. Report prepared by the US Forest Service International Institute for Tropical Forestry for the US Agency for International Development.

Wylie, J.; Bauer, J. 2008. The Changing Face of Heritage Tourism. P 30-36. Legacy, Volume 19, Number 1. The National Association for Interpretation.

Typical wooden house and local resident in Raitipura.

