JOURNAL OF HERITAGE TOURISM

Beyond Sun, Sand and Sea: The Emergent Tourism Programme in the Turks and Caicos Islands

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Mass tourism began in the Caribbean in the 1960s with the advent of low cost air travel. Jamaica, Barbados, and the Bahamas were among the first places to develop a resort-based tourism programme. Within 20 years, these locations began to experience the problems that are now typically associated with unplanned growth. For emergent tourist destinations, these older islands can serve as a model of what *not* to do. One location that has taken some lessons to heart is the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) in the lower Bahamian archipelago. While TCI offers itself as a sun, sand and sea destination, tourism officials seek to attract upscale visitors with a long term investment in the islands. The problem they are wrestling with is how to develop an island image based not only on the sea-based amenities but also the local history, natural attractions and expressive culture. In response, a diverse heritage group has begun a dialogue about how to do this. This paper describes the current state of tourism in the TCI within the context of new directions in Caribbean tourism.

doi: 10.2167/jht036.0

Keywords: Caribbean, heritage tourism, Turks and Caicos Islands

This paper reports on tourism development of a new sort in a Caribbean island location. The Turks and Caicos Islands, like its neighbours, currently offers itself as a sun, sand and sea destination. In an effort to cultivate an upscale group of return visitors, tourism officials are exploring how to craft a heritage tourism industry based on local history, natural attractions and expressive culture. These efforts are hampered, however, by an uneven heritage stock, problems of support and management, as well as the absence of models in the region. Situated within the wider context of the Caribbean, the case illustrates some of the difficulties in rethinking an alternative tourism programme in a region that is thoroughly branded as a tropical paradise.

Sun, Sand and Sea Tourism in the Caribbean

Most Caribbean islands have not cultivated a tourism industry based on much beyond sun, sand and sea (Patullo, 2005; Potter *et al.*, 2004; Strachan, 2002). As compared to North America and Europe, as well as parts of the

1743-873X/08/01 055-019 $20.00/0
JOURNAL OF HERITAGE TOURISM

Vol. 3, No. 1, 2008

developing world, the region has done little to attract heritage or ecotourists. There are obviously some exceptions to the rule. Dominica is currently developing ecotourism programmes to capture a new market (Boxill & Severin, 2004). Some of the older island destinations have restored their old towns, forts and castles to attract visitors (Found, 2004). There are also a number of carnival celebrations in the Caribbean, the regional Carifesta, and a calendar of local festivals, as Culturama in St. Kitts-Nevis (Olweg, 1993). However, these tend to draw domestic and regional tourists or those in the Caribbean diaspora.

Given that there is much potential – 500 years of colonial history, architecturally and historically significant buildings and sites, and vibrant expressive forms beyond the stereotypical hotel reviews to present to tourists – it is curious that much of the Caribbean has opted mostly for the narrow niche of tropical hedonism. One thinks of Jamaica and Cuba, beautiful islands with a fascinating history of pirates, colonial conflicts, as well as fine arts and vernacular traditions of dance and music.[1] Yet, most visitors remain in tourist enclaves and rarely venture outside the walls of their resorts.

What are some reasons for the preponderance of the paradise trope in the Caribbean tourism industry? The first, and perhaps most obvious reason, has to do with the climate and coastal assets. The insular and mainland regions are largely in the tropics and offer a balmy respite to winter-weary visitors from the temperate zones. In addition, islands with their physical separation from the mainland seem to have a special place in people's imaginations (Lockhart, 1997).

The Caribbean has received leisure-seeking upper class visitors for the past two centuries. Initially, the region was a draw to those stricken with diseases or conditions that required convalescences in a warm environment with salty breezes. But, after the turn of the 20th century, beaches, sunbathing and outdoor activities came to be seen as healthy and a tan a status symbol (Lencek & Bosker, 1998). Upper-class travellers bound on private yachts and steamships from North America and Europe began to view the islands as places to recreate and rejuvenate, an insular alternative to the well-travelled Mediterranean coast. The Bahamas, an early favourite destination, promised 'bacchic release and then some: happiness, eternal youth sexual adventurism, nonstop sunshine, and partying' (Strachan, 2002: 1). In a careful analysis of imperial travel writing up to and including the 20th century, Sheller (2004) reveals just how deeply the tropics became embedded in the collective Euro-American imagination.

The fantasy of paradise, once only available to the elite, was marketed to the middle and working classes after 1960. The twin factors of easy access and cheap air fares cultivated a mass tourism market for the Caribbean, drawn largely from North America. According to the Caribbean Tourism Organization, about 37 million people[2] visited the Caribbean islands in 2005. Just like the busman's holidays run by Cook's Travel in earlier times, contemporary tourists of modest means are lured by the prospect of tropical getaways at budget prices where they can pretend privilege. As compared to their travel-seasoned upper class compatriots, such tourists have much less international experience and more anxiety about parts unknown. Thus, the inclusive resort packages where the costs are clear, the risks are few, and the experience predictable, are very attractive. The floating hotels, cruise ships, have the same allure as the inclusive

resorts, not only providing a safe, risk-free, *prix-fixe* product, but the added bonus of travel to several ports of call with duty free shopping.

Island governments have been willing partners in the marketing of the sun, sand, and sea experience to tourists. Most islands are small and resource-poor, and many have struggled in recent times to build their economies. Plantation agriculture based on sugar, coffee and fruit has declined in importance, and many places have no resources other than a topographically pretty face. This fact has made the Caribbean the most tourism-dependent region in the world: 25% of all its earnings are from this sector (Apostolopoulos & Gayle, 2002; Gössling, 2003). Weak, and in some cases corrupt governments have capitulated to foreign interests – the airlines, tour operators, cruise ships and resorts – that opt for the tested and financially rewarding forms of beach tourism. Many islands have paid a dear price for development (Pattullo, 2005; Stonich, 2000; Wilkinson, 1997). When the beaches are littered, reefs dead and the locals have lost their ethos of hospitality, the tourists go elsewhere, a fate that has befallen some of the 'mature' tourism destinations (Barker & McGregor, 1995; Beller *et al.*, 1990; de Albuquerque & McElroy, 1992, 2001; Honey, 1999; Jennings, 2004; Price, 1996).

On this question of the absence of heritage tourism, one must also consider the legacy of colonialism for Afro-Caribbean peoples. On the French and British islands that practiced plantation agriculture using slave labour, the policy for maintaining social control involved the suppression of people's cultural forms. Normal bonds of marriage and family ties were often outlawed, as were forms of expression and conviviality. As observers have pointed out, the centuries of suppression has had a profound impact on the collective psyche of island peoples (e.g. Hall, 2001; Oostindie, 2001). Many Afro-Caribbean people internalised white racist standards and beliefs that, in turn, were reinforced by the absence of native historiography and literature in the school curricula in favour of that of the colonisers. Thus, it is not surprising that today, islanders devalue their own heritage and even dialects in favour of the elite's, a psychopathology explored in essays and fiction by celebrated Caribbean writers such as Franz Fanon (1963), Derek Walcott (1974), and V.S. Naipaul (1967).

Although white privilege and power of the older variety has largely disappeared from most islands, colonial history still remains problematic for Afro-Caribbean peoples. In fact, if heritage interest is driven by the impulse to reconstruct a past that is attractive and appealing, as Kammen (1991) asserts, then Caribbean history fails the test. It is hard to wax nostalgically about a period that began with the genocide of the indigenes, and then saw the rise of the total institution of the plantation in which human beings were brutalised. Understandably, there has been some reluctance to build or rebuild sites that feature the colonial past. As an illustration, Waters (2006) states that local antipathy accounts for the inaction in realising seven different plans for a tourism programme at one of Jamaica's oldest port towns, Port Royal. Apparently, Afro-Jamaicans do not feel much nostalgia for Port Royal's past and, in fact, disavow the era of piracy which they associate with enslavement. In the end, its history has been rejected as legitimate patrimony for Afro-Jamaicans.

Would sites that portray slavery and the plantation system draw the many tourists on the islands for a healthy dose of escapist fun? On the face of it, it

would not seem likely. But one might consider that there are very successful tourist sites in West Africa that feature staging areas for the Middle Crossing. Bruner (2005) describes the popularity of Elmina Castle in Ghana, now a World Heritage site that draws large numbers of African-Americans to experience the dungeons where slaves awaited the ships that would tear them from their homeland. For many of these visitors, the trip becomes a pilgrimage.

While the plantation era is a large and problematic piece of Caribbean history, there are other periods, landscapes, and celebrations that could be woven into a heritage industry. Since 1995, the UNESCO World Heritage Centre has held several expert workshops to review the natural, historic and cultural assets of the region leading to the conclusion that there is much potential for further development of such sites (van Hooff, 2000). On the lighter side, there are the widely celebrated festivals – Carnival and other festivals – throughout Caribbean that could be aimed at a larger tourist market.

Assuming much more heritage tourism could be developed, are there enough visitors who want this kind of experience? By way of an answer, the World Tourism Organization estimates that over a third of all international tourism has a cultural component (McKercher & du Cros, 2002; Timothy & Boyd, 2003). While heritage tourism has not been well developed on tropical islands in either the Caribbean or the Pacific, recent studies suggest that there is a segment of the tourist market that seeks scaled-down destinations specialising in particular activities or amenities (King, 2001). According to Ayres (2002), small island states are increasingly interested in marketing 'alternative tourism', and Found (2004) makes the case that, in spite of incomplete record-keeping, heritage sites in the Caribbean are seeing an increase in visitation. The alternative trend includes not just the well known ecotourism, but also cultural, historic and ethnic tourism (V. Smith, 1996; Smith & Eadington, 1992; van den Berghe, 1994).

Who are these alternative tourists? A recent report identifies a new segment of international tourists called 'experience seekers' (EDSA *et al.*, 2005: Ch. 3, 18–19). This type is looking for natural, unfabricated locations, indigenous culture, eco-experiences, and more interesting accommodations – cabanas, ecolodges or bungalows, as opposed to conventional hotels. Such tourists seek places where they can experience nature, spiritual growth and active body sports. The younger ones want to do things with their children; the older ones seek personal growth and have been dubbed 'metro-spirituals' (Mitchell, 2006).

The Emergent Tourism Industry of the Turks and Caicos Islands

The Turks and Caicos Islands, often abbreviated as TCI, is fairly new to the tourism business and exemplifies the changing trends in tropical island tourism, especially the beginnings of a shift from a resort-based industry to an alternative one which features the indigenous locale. The country's evolving tourism programme offers the opportunity to closely observe the processes by which cultural and natural sites become commodified and transformed into a national culture, as well as exemplifying some of the emergent issues in trying to develop heritage tourism.

Geographically, Turks and Caicos is the southernmost group in the Bahamian chain, consisting of an archipelago of 40 small islands and cays, eight of which are currently inhabited. Technically, these islands are part of the Caribbean fringe area because they lie in the less salty Atlantic Ocean, not the Caribbean Sea (Boswell, 2003). They sit on two submerged limestone banks: the Caicos group (the main islands being Providenciales, and West, North, Middle, East, and South Caicos) and the Turks group (Grand Turk and Salt Cay) (see Figure 1).

TCI has been a crown colony (now called a dependent overseas territory) of the United Kingdom since 1976. Prior to that, it was politically linked in different time periods to Bermuda, and to the Bahamas and Jamaica, when those countries were still British colonies themselves. Today, a governor represents the British crown, but does not exert a great deal of control over local politics and economic policy. The constitutional reforms of 2006 gave the premier increased power over national issues and created the position of deputy-governor to represent the native population of 12,000, known as Belongers. The country is inching towards independence, but is not yet ready to sever its formal ties with Great Britain, in large part because being a British overseas territory adds the perception of stability, a factor important to investors (Connell, 2001). Since 1974, however, the currency system has been based on the US dollar.

Tourism has proceeded differently across the main inhabited islands of TCI. The island of Providenciales, commonly called Provo, is considered the 'tourism capital' as distinct from the political capital of Grand Turk. Provo is by far the most developed island with a strip of condo-hotels along the 12 miles of the

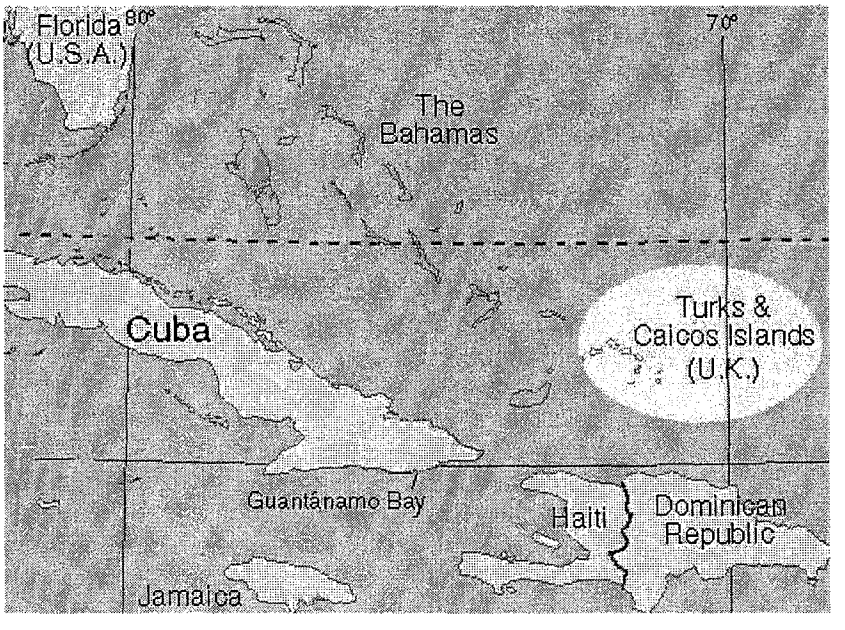

Figure 1 Location of the Turks and Caicos Islands

Grace Bay beach. With the prospect of a deep-water port and international airport, the coastal areas of North Caicos are beginning to see condo and villa projects. And because of the opening of a cruise ship terminal in 2006, Grand Turk is also growing after languishing for many years. To date, South Caicos has had limited development, and Middle Caicos and Salt Cay have had even less. The tiniest islands of the group house private and/or exclusive destinations for wealthy visitors and American celebrities.

Tourism is an emergent industry, having only begun to appear on the landscape in the last 25 years. There has been spectacular growth in this time period in both the number of visitors and the built environment. In his assessment of tourism impact across 36 small island tourist economies, McElroy (2006) notes that Turks and Caicos has moved from the *intermediate* to the *developed* category, putting the country in the same league as the most mature areas of the Caribbean and elsewhere.[3] Growth has been so strong that the government has permitted developers to import thousands of immigrants from the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Mexico, the Philippines and China to work in construction. These groups, along with foreign workers who staff the hotels and operate businesses, now outnumber Belongers by more than two to one.

Resort tourism is an obvious choice for the country since its main assets are its white sandy beaches, sparkling turquoise waters and vibrant coral reefs found throughout the islands. In addition, TCI is only about 575 miles southeast of Florida, making it an easily reached destination. Currently, tourism revenues constitute about a third of the country's GDP (EDSA *et al.*, 2005: Ch. 3). The other two industries are the small offshore finance sector and fisheries industry based on spiny lobster, conch and selected fin fish.

The problem discussed next concerns the efforts of TCI to design a programme that extends beyond the standard attractions of sun, sand, and sea. Following recommendations by the Caribbean Tourism Organization that the region cultivate sustainable tourism, the country is in the midst of assessing how its natural, cultural and historical assets can be incorporated into resort tourism. Officials talk publicly about the environmental and social pitfalls of mass tourism, so they have targeted an affluent market segment that they hope will make a long term commitment to the islands.

Brief description of the tourism programme

The origins of tourism in the Turks and Caicos Islands date back to the mid-1960s in the wake of the collapse of the solar salt industry (Lightbourne, 1975). A few local and expatriate entrepreneurs built small hotels and guest houses on Grand Turk and South Caicos around 1970 that were aimed at the scuba market. Around the same time, a group of American investors discovered Providenciales and its glorious 12-mile beach along Grace Bay. The developers struck a deal with the government to build an airport and roads in return for 4000 acres of prime land (Soderqvist & Fogarty, 2005). With infrastructure built, Provo attracted interest from the French hotel chain, Club Méditerranée, known popularly as Club Med. Club Med Turkoise, an all-inclusive hotel, debuted in late 1984.

Club Med's opening signalled a new phase in tourism development in TCI with the transition from small hotels and guest houses catering to the very rich

or adventure tourists, to large scale (though not mass) tourism. Several other all-inclusive resorts followed – a Ramada resort and Beaches of the Sandals chain, but after them, the government did not permit any more all-inclusive hotels on the grounds that they contribute little to the economy. Since the 1990s, the preferred form of development has been condo-style hotels. Today there are at least 20 condo-hotels in Provo. The preference for these over inclusive resorts is part of the strategy to keep the number of visitors down. There are frequent mentions of the ecological fragility of the islands, which have a porous limestone geology and a reef system easily degraded by waste pollutants, boat moorings, and clambering snorkellers.

The Tourist Board, a member of the Caribbean Tourism Organization, monitors hotels and manages tourism planning and education. For strategic planning, the board contracts with outside consultants. The first five-year report, *A Strategic Plan for 1998–2001 TCI Tourism into the 21st Century*, was produced in 1998 (cited in Ishida, 2005). The plan stressed ideas such as public–private partnerships, protection of the natural environment, retention of the country's unique cultural characteristics and the extension of economic benefits from tourism to the local population (Ishida, 2005). In February 2006 the plan was updated with a new one (the O'Reilly report) which recommended balancing out tourism across the islands and against the over-development of natural areas (O'Reilly, 2006). Unlike the first, it advocated giving greater attention to heritage, incorporating nature, history and culture into the tourism programme.

The government also engages in planning for development. The Department of Economic Planning and Statistics commissioned a consultant group from Trinidad to do a comprehensive development plan in 2005, which has recently been completed. With the help of sub-committees, the report presents a ten-year plan for the country in 20 sectors from investment to agriculture, from health to tourism. The tourism report, drawing on the Tourism Strategic Plan, recommends smaller-scale, site-appropriate planning for the other islands which do not draw on the Provo model of large scale condo-hotels, and recommends the incorporation of local people into development plans.

As a final example of planning, the Department of Environment and Coastal Resources assembled an insider-outsider team headed by consultants from Fort Lauderdale in 2004/2005. The team's objective was to identify each of the main islands' natural and cultural assets and make recommendations for attractions that could be based on those assets. As is indicated by the title, *Belonger Business Opportunities in Protected Areas*, the report's goal was to suggest business opportunities in eco- and cultural tourism for local residents (EDSA *et al.*, 2005). Illustrating the concern for the protection of the natural resources, legislation in the form of the National Parks Ordinance was adopted in 1975 and amended in 1989 and 1992. The Ordinance created four categories of protected areas: National Parks, including under-water parks, Natural Reserves, Sanctuaries, and Areas of Historical Interest (EDSA *et al.*, 2005). The most protected are the Sanctuaries, where no entry and no development are permitted.

Tourism and government officials speak of TCI as an 'upmarket destination'. Compared to other Caribbean islands, TCI receives affluent visitors who spend more money and stay longer as compared to other major destinations. A government survey done in 2002 reports that visitors, on average, spend $247

per person per day, and stay seven days (EDSA *et al.*, 2005: Ch. 3). Officials say that the upmarket promotion is by design, through the careful placement of advertising targeting the affluent, discriminating traveller. Figure 2 shows the steady growth in visitors over the years, although the numbers are small compared to other destinations (see Figure 3).

Arrivals by air increased by 41% or 248,343 in 2006 (see Figure 2). The number of Grand Turk cruise ship passengers in 2006, the year the terminal opened, was 295,000, a figure that is expected to increase. Two-thirds of the visitation is from November to April; the other third arrive from May to November. The bulk of visitors come from the US (70%) and Canada (12%), and 18% are from Europe and other locations (Tourist Board, 2007).

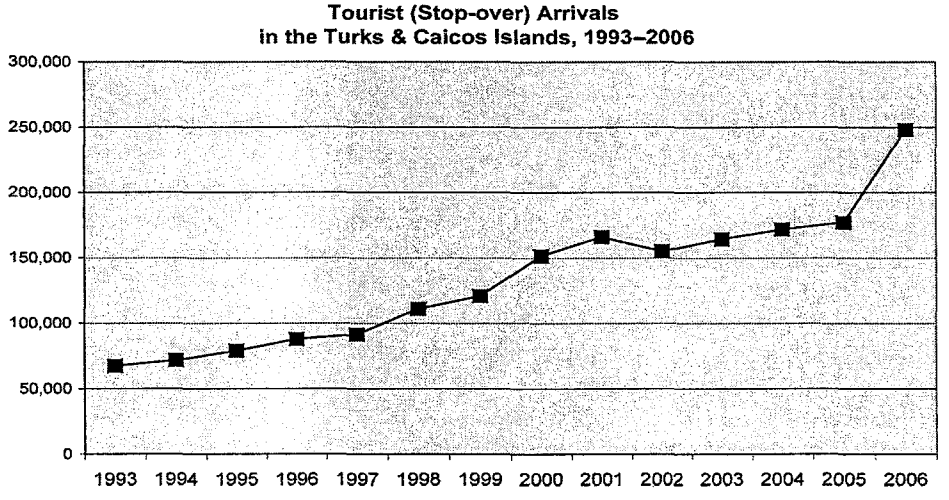

Figure 2 Visitation to Turks and Caicos
Source: Turks and Caicos Tourist Board

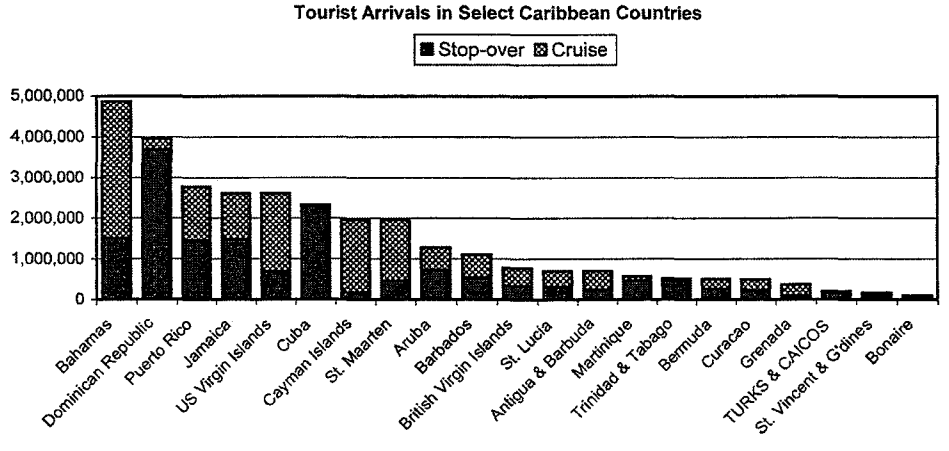

Figure 3 Visitation to selected Caribbean Islands in 2005

To date, most visitors appear to come for the 3 S's: sun, sand and sea. Statistics gathered by the Tourist Board note that 61% of visitors are classified as leisure tourists, 34% as business tourists, and a small percentage as honeymoon and scuba tourists (EDSA *et al.*, 2005: Ch. 3). While there are some conferences and international gatherings held in TCI, the high number of business tourists appears to be related to the building boom presently underway.

Is there any evidence that visitors who come to TCI desire any alternative forms of tourism? In truth, there is scant internal research on this question. Like most islands, the Tourist Board collects statistics on arrivals and reasons for visitor trips (business, recreation, etc.) and the Department of Economics and Planning keeps figures on spending. But there have been no interest surveys beyond one done a few years ago by an American student intern who conducted an exit survey at the airport (Ishida, 2005). Her survey results suggested that most people seek the scenery, beach and water experiences, with few respondents mentioning the desire for cultural attractions or eco-activities other than snorkelling or fishing.

Creating heritage in the Turks and Caicos Islands

One could easily argue that, to date, the tourism 'product' of Turks and Caicos is indistinguishable from many other places. TCI's shore line, reefs and topography resemble many of the islands in the Bahamas. Culturally and historically, the country also has many similarities with its better known neighbour. Its political and legal traditions, its language and its expressive cultural forms are not unlike other Commonwealth islands. In fact, Jamaica and Trinidad, with their colourful traditions of reggae, Rastafari and Carnival, have a much more distinctive image than Turks and Caicos. The questions that island promoters wrestle with are: (1) What is unique and distinctive about TCI? and (2) How can it compete with better-known places with slogans like 'Hearts Beat Faster in Jamaica' and 'It's Better in the Bahamas'?

According to MacCannell (2001), the issue of distinctiveness is a common one among global tourism cultures in their effort to position themselves in a sea of competitors. As evidenced by the internal tourism plans and studies, TCI officials talk about the importance of offering something authentic and original for tourists to enhance the perception that these islands are unique among the many Caribbean destinations. One of the basic problems for TCI, however, is that with a few exceptions (H. Sadler, 1997; N. Sadler, 2004; H. Smith, 1968), exceedingly little information has been archived or published on the country's history. Craton (1999) sees the absence of historiography in Turks and Caicos within the wider context of the marginality of the less economically productive of the British colonies. TCI, like its sister nations of Belize, the Caymans, and Bahamas were 'regarded as unimportant in the British imperial scheme', and thus 'were slow to generate either sound modern scholarship or a popular historical awareness' (Craton, 1999: 666). The result was that, until recently, records were haphazardly kept and local history was not considered important enough to document.

There has been a corresponding neglect in the documentation of cultural practices and traditions. Although only possessing a small population of about 12,000 Belongers (out of 33,000 residents), Turks and Caicos has expressive traditions of storytelling, dance and music-making, as well as a number of

interesting customs and practices in folk medicine, family life and religious practice. However, the documentation of cultural forms is, at best, only in the early stages (*cf.*, Cohen, 1988; Greenwood, 1989; Handler, 2003; Medina, 2003). For example, the director of The Department of Culture and Arts is presently compiling a book on the history, customs, symbols and practices of the islands, and the new Minister of Education has commissioned contributors to write chapters for a book on Turks and Caicos history and culture.

The earliest efforts to document TCI's past and culture began several decades ago, although they were not initially in the service of tourism. American archaeologists, Shaun Sullivan and William Keegan, began working on sites of the Taino Lucayan and produced a number of reports (Keegan, 1992, 1997, 2007; Keegan & Maclachlan, 1989; Sullivan, 1976, 1980, 1981). With support from an expatriate benefactor, the National Museum of Turks and Caicos was created in 1991 and housed in an attractive colonial building in Grand Turk. A branch museum has recently been proposed for Provo. The museum, due to the efforts of the first two expatriate directors, has documented colonial history and prehistory in displays and in booklets. The small, well-designed museum has displays of a notable shipwreck and artifacts of Taino Lucayan culture. In 2006 the staff, along with a marine archeology team from Texas, tried to authenticate another shipwreck as the Trouvador, a slave ship that sank off the coast of East Caicos leaving its hundred or so survivors to people the islands.

The Turks and Caicos National Trust, created in 1992, is modelled after the UK prototype. It is a non-governmental organisation (NGO), but it receives funding diverted from the tax on hotel rooms (one-tenth of the 10% tax). In 2000, the Trust prepared a list of historic sites for restoration and, since then, has been working on two of them, the colonial sites of Cheshire Hall on Provo and Wade's Green Plantation on North Caicos. These properties are associated with the 50-year plantation era based on cotton cultivation that began in the late 18th century. The planters were Loyalists from the American south who relocated with their slaves to estates granted by the British crown.

The Department of Culture and Arts is another key player. The department's responsibilities began with culture shows for the hotels, but expanded to include folklore collecting and heritage education in the schools. The director, hired in 2001, has done field collections of islanders' folktales, music, dance, folk medicine and cuisine over the years and has written articles on the same for the *Times of the Islands* magazine. Shortly after his arrival, he created TUCA (Turks and Caicos Cultural Group) staffed by talented volunteers. While much of the director's work can legitimately be seen as cultural retrieval, some of it is clearly cultural invention, from the musical reviews performed by the volunteer troupe he assembled, to the attractive costumes the performers wear. He has also designed costumed dolls, which he uses in schools as part of his education programme and are sold at the museum. Singlehandedly, he is inventing a performance tradition for TCI. Similar kinds of cultural invention work has been documented in other developing countries (see Sarkissian, 1998).

The locally produced magazine, *Times of the Islands*, is worth a special note. It is an interesting blend of promotional articles and advertisements about resorts, along with well-written cultural and historical pieces. Those are part of the American editor's personal campaign to educate both residents and tourists

about TCI's history and culture. She has a stable of talented contributors who write about local food, indigenous music, wildlife flora and fauna, unusual architecture, and colourful elders with wizened faces and interesting biographies. Every issue of the magazine features regular departments called *The Green Pages*, for natural history pieces, *Talking Taino*, for archaeological reports, and the entire newsletter of the National Museum (*The Astrolabe*). *The Astrolabe* includes articles on colonial history and prehistory, as well as more unusual pieces, for example on maps, the old prison, and destructive hurricanes of the recent past. The magazine is widely distributed throughout the islands to stores and hotels and is sent abroad to museum members.

The Department of Environment and Coastal Resources (DECR) should also be mentioned. While the main functions are monitoring protected underwater and coastal areas, monitoring openings, keeping catch records, and conducting marine research, the DECR has a National Educational Centre (NEC) in Provo built in 2002 with an educational mission. The staff has recently completed a display area in the NEC building which contains large scale maps, display panels, and photographs of natural areas to inform the public about wildlife and conservation efforts in TCI. With these attractions, the DECR hopes to highlight the distinctiveness of TCI ecology to tourists and local residents alike.

The marketing slogan of Turks and Caicos is *Beautiful by Nature*, so it is not surprising that ecotourism is currently getting much attention. The TCI web site (http://tcimall.tc/) emphasises its nature preserves and underwater parks, listing a number of businesses that offer ecotourism attractions such as diving and snorkelling, kayaking, whale watching, butterfly and bird watching, hiking and bicycling, and cave exploration. North and Middle Caicos offer birding, hiking and cave exploration. Whale watching occurs in the Columbus Passage to the west of Grand Turk. The National Trust offers nature experiences with lectures and demonstrations on Little Water Cay, the sanctuary for endangered iguanas.

The most unusual of the eco-offerings is the world's only commercial conch farm found in Provo. While conch fishing is done in the wild for local consumption and export, the farm is an enormous indoor-outdoor facility that raises conch for export from the egg mass stage to maturity. The farm was started two decades ago by an American biologist after doing a series of experiments on conch cultivation. Regular tours of the facility are given by guides who walk visitors through greenhouse structures where the baby conch reside until they are moved to the large sea corrals. The tour is topped off with a close-up view of the two conch mascots, Sally and Jerry, a breeding pair. A second farm called Conch World is under construction in Grand Turk that will be coupled with a Lucayan Village for the cruise ship visitors.

The ecotourism label is often appropriated for commercial purposes, a practice labelled by critics as 'greenwashing' (Arieff, 2006). Paradoxically, some ecotourists are opting for places that pamper their guests in 'five-star luxury, environmentally and socially friendly lodges' rather than the spartan eco-lodges of a decade ago (Meyers, 2006: 129). Such ecotourists are targeted in the marketing of West Caicos, an island that has been uninhabited since the late 19th century. The West Caicos Reserve will consist of 75 luxury villas, a marina for mega-yachts and a five-star boutique hotel with 125 rooms run by the Ritz

Carlton (Kaye, 2006). Its vaguely green message – some might say its greenwashing – tout its proximity to the 500-acre preserve at Lake Catherine, a spa that uses 'indigenous herbal plants', tarless roads and a ban on motor vehicles in favour of walking, biking and golf carts.

Discussion: Heritage Challenges in TCI

There are challenges for any country trying to conserve its heritage, whether it is for domestic consumption or tourism purposes. But the problems are most pronounced in developing countries where there is an array of concerns that compete with conservation efforts for attention. These can range from pragmatic issues such as lack of funding and urban pressures to demolish old structures in favour of modernisation projects, to perception problems such as the public's sense of the value of the environment and the past (Timothy & Boyd, 2003: 119–124). Such issues clearly exist in TCI and the Caribbean more generally, as described next.

State of the heritage stock and support

Heritage stock refers to the intangible culture of the islanders, as well as the tangible aspects of the built and natural environment. Both kinds have received uneven attention. While the country has moved very quickly in the creation of agencies whose purpose is to produce a national heritage, many of the offices and organisations are fairly young – a few years to a decade or two old. One sees vision and energy among the staff of agencies, but the efforts to recover and document culture and history are in the incipient stages, hampered by insufficient support and a paucity of records. Certainly, one cannot fault the dedicated staff but, to date, the heritage stock is inadequate for a serious heritage tourism programme.

The National Trust serves as an example of this problem. In general, the Trust's purview is broad in two senses: thematic and geographical. Its thematic domain potentially includes Lucayan prehistory, the plantation period, the salt era and natural history sites. The Trust's geographic purview extends across all the islands, but with its limited resources and staff, the agency must make decisions about how to allocate its energies. Because of the ongoing archaeological research on the Lucayans, prehistory should take a prominent place in the heritage programme, but no site reconstruction is underway. The presentation of plantation and salt history is better, but still patchy. The two plantation sites have been cleared of overgrowth, given interpretive signage, and opened for tours, but both need much more work. The Trust only operates one portion of the salt industry, the Boiling Hole in South Caicos. The other sites in South, Grand Turk and Salt Cay are crown properties, with some basic signage, but no tours or interpretation. To date the best revenue producer for the Trust's properties is Little Water Cay, the iguana preserve just east of Provo.

Obviously, the state of the heritage stock is related to the problem of funding. The Department of Culture and Arts, the National Trust, and National Museum are supported either directly or indirectly through public funds, along with admission revenues. But each organisation has a small staff which does more with less and is hobbled by inadequate facilities and insufficient funding for

projects. The problem is obviously lack of money to upgrade and develop sites, due, in some people's view, to the lack of political will. Politicians like to talk about alternative tourism, but have not been active on any follow through. Perhaps there is good news ahead in the appointment of a new minister of education and culture in 2007, who comes to the position with a background in higher education and community affairs.

Heritage planning and management

There is no lack of national plans in Turks and Caicos, whether these concern the newest national development plan (see http://www.depstc.org/ndp/ndp_overview.html), tourism plans or business plans for residents in the tourism sector. All such plans have been done with the help of outside consultants who have worked in tandem with TCI officials. While it appears that the research is initially undertaken with energy and zeal, the final reports languish on shelves without follow-up and implementation. These reports do nice inventories and make good recommendations, but there is little indication that they move beyond that stage.

In general, what is apparent in TCI is only first phases of what Timothy and Boyd (2003: 107–108) call the *heritage conservation process*, which they describe as the initial work of research and identification, policy setting and, eventually, management and interpretation. There is clearly a problem with follow-up, but that is by no means unique to TCI. It appears more the rule than the exception that Caribbean countries are remiss in either formulating or, more often, carrying out policy in either the tourism or heritage realms. Wilkinson's (2004) study of tourism planning on five islands makes the case that, in theory, governments can often exert considerable control over tourism development. But, by his assessment, only the Caymans have demonstrated planned growth, community participation, and environmental controls in their tourism sector. With respect to the domain of heritage, Caribbean governments have also been slow to do inventories of possible sites, develop conservation plans, or nominate them for consideration by the World Heritage Committee (Pressouye, 2000). As of 2006, there are only about 20 Caribbean sites of the 830 World Heritage sites (see http://whc.unesco.org/en/list).

As far as management, the heritage industry in TCI has a flat structure. The control of heritage does not fall to any one group or agency. There are many actors in the game, from the government-supported Tourist Board and Office of Culture and Arts, to NGOs such as the National Museum and National Trust, small non-profit organisations such as the National Maritime Heritage Foundation, private sector players from small (Big Blue Tours) to large (Carnival Corporation). Groups meet and confer with one another on an as-needed basis, for example, as for the restoration of heritage sites in Grand Turk for cruise ship visitors. However, there is no coordinating body which oversees or provides leadership, and there is no heritage management plan that guides the efforts of the players. The absence of control has led to occasional conflict, as in objections to Carnival's plans for the restoration of some historic sites. This state of affairs is not unusual in the Caribbean, but it stands in sharp contrast to other parts of the developing world, for example, as in Singapore or Indonesia

where there are strict governmental regulations about how ethnicity and heritage are expressed in the tourism programme (Dahles, 2001; Leong, 1997).

A new development may change the flat structure. In the summer of 2007, an official of the Department of Environment and Coastal Resources (DECR) convened the first meeting of an ad hoc heritage commission. The group will have a listserv and is attempting to conceive specific projects to attract government funding. While all those in attendance shared a common interest in documenting, preserving and developing TCI cultural heritage, there are likely to be some disagreements to overcome as the group moves forward. For instance, some will want the commission to be under the purview of a government ministry, but this might work at cross-purposes with the NGOs, which are more independent.

Problematic heritage?

If much of heritage involves looking back, the irony is that states need pastness to demonstrate they are modern (Mitchell, 2001). The possession of a history confers legitimacy to the state, but for post-colonial nations the past is often viewed with ambivalence because it is fraught with painful memories. Nonetheless, as AlSayyad (2001) argues, when new states no longer have a colonial power to articulate against, the social glue defined as the common enemy evaporates and political schisms can emerge. For such nations, discovering or inventing a national culture is a political necessity in order to define themselves internally and on the international stage. Colonial history may be recast by state architects in a somewhat arbitrary way to highlight the experiences of the colonised in a positive way, and it is often tricky to find a coherent narrative that captures an appropriate collective identity.

Is colonial heritage a problem for Turks and Caicos islanders? Given that TCI is still a dependent overseas territory, it would seem premature to suggest that a post-colonial consciousness has emerged among local people, one that induces ambivalence about the period of slavery in which islanders either worked for white masters on the plantations or toiled in the salinas. Since the slavery period has only recently been taken up in the school curriculum and since it has barely been interpreted in heritage sites, it is difficult to predict now how Belongers might respond to the weaving of a slavery narrative into the heritage programme.

More to the point, though, there are hints of uncertainty from Belongers that they even have a heritage. Such indications have emerged in discussions with thoughtful citizens who make the point that most islanders believe they have no history. In a similar vein, they themselves wonder whether there is anything truly distinctive about TCI.[4] These sorts of reflections raise the fascinating question of whether the emergence of a heritage consciousness among a people is the inevitable product of social reflexivity or, rather, the result of particular societal conditions.

Among people in developed countries, the possession of a heritage consciousness goes without comment. That so many people want to visit historic sites and museums when travelling seems expected, and visitation to such places has, in fact, increased over recent decades (Kammen, 1991: Ch. 18). The same goes for marking historic buildings with plaques, erecting monuments to the past, and the growing interest in various forms of collecting. Yet, as the

documentarians of cultural history in the West have so eloquently argued, the public's interest in national and military history, historic sites, and various forms of heritage is of fairly recent vintage and has arisen for specific reasons (Anderson, 1991; Kammen, 1991; Lowenthal, 1985; Samuel, 1994). In general, the consensus among these writers is that a commodified past has important national functions, such as nation-building and imperialism, providing a palliative for anxieties about the future, or offering new forms of commerce.

Most Westerners are likely to endorse the importance of patrimony, and when they travel abroad they may expect that others do the same. This assumption may be another reason why many Caribbean locations are interested in documenting their heritage, perhaps a new twist on the often-cited effect of the tourist gaze (Urry, 2002). But, while the impetus for the discovery of heritage in TCI may derive from tourist expectations, there is an additional factor to consider. The search for a national culture also comes from an internal source that is only indirectly related to tourism. Because of rapid development, TCI is experiencing demographic and cultural swamping. The native population has been eclipsed by the influx of foreigners who staff the hotels, run service and retail businesses, and work in construction. Indigenous culture is being challenged by the images and behaviour modelled by visiting tourists, foreign workers and American television. As evidenced by public discourse,[5] Belongers clearly fear that they will be displaced by outsiders with different traditions, languages and religions. In response, and possibly for the first time, native people want to understand what makes them distinctive as an indigenous group. Thus, while heritage construction is an attempt to meet the demand of a growing tourist segment, an exclusive focus on this misses the other, internal motivation.

Conclusion

The review of TCI's tourism programme illustrates the many problems present in trying to design one that extends beyond sun, sand and sea. As discussed, useful plans are available, and appropriate agencies are in place to realise these plans. But clearly, what is missing is a greater measure of financial support, effective management, and a clear vision of why heritage matters. That there is a new internal motivation to discover what is distinctive about the country may just be the impetus needed to create a national culture for both insiders and outsiders.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge summer grants in 2005 from Cedar Crest College and Lehigh University for research in Turks and Caicos. This material is also based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation (under Grant No. BCS-0621241) for research entitled *Residents' Understandings of Tourism in the Turks and Caicos Islands, British West Indies.* Lastly, they thank Mr Brian Riggs for his thoughtful comments on early drafts.

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Notes

1. Cuba is notable for the state support of the arts. Reminiscent of the Cold War era of US support for the arts (Cameron, 1996), the leaders of Cuba have long regarded the arts as symbolic of the strength of the regime, an essential aspect of the 'living revolution'. Government provides a high level of subsidy for national troupes and arts conservatories (see Daniel, 1995; Manuel, 1991; Rosendahl, 1997).
2. The Caribbean Tourism Association breaks down the total as: 18.6 million stop-over visitors and 18.1 million cruise passengers (http://www.onecaribbean.org/home/).
3. McElroy's Tourist Penetration Index (TPI) is a very useful one to measure the overall impact of tourism on small island economies. In his sample of 36 economies, Turks and Caicos has ascended from the *intermediate* level of development in 1991 to *most developed* in 2001, putting it among the most mature tourist destinations on the list. The authors think that McElroy's TPI for Turks and Caicos is somewhat skewed because of the small population and very high visitor expenditures as compared to older, more developed tourist economies on his list.
4. Such opinions were recorded in many of the in-depth ethnographic interviews conducted during periods of fieldwork in 2005 and 2006.
5. Sentiments about the cultural swamping appear with great regularity in the three weekly newspapers and political speeches. The authors also heard such concerns in interviews and normal conversations.

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