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What impact has tourism had on the people and the environment of Jamaica?



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# Introduction

**The guiding question: What impact has tourism had on the people and the environment of Jamaica?’**

Jamaica is an island nation of the Greater Antilles in the Northern Caribbean Sea. It is renowned as a popular holiday destination and visited by thousands of tourists annually. The main attraction of this island is its magnificent natural beauty: warm climate, sandy beaches, crystal clear ocean, distinguished wildlife and plants. The tourism industry in Jamaica has developed profusely as global internationalization has accelerated and more people have visited the island. However, concurrently both positive and negative effects of tourism on the environment and the locals have intensified dramatically. Therefore, in this essay I would like to discuss the impact that tourism has had on the environment and the local people of Jamaica.

The Area of Interaction which best suits the theme of this project is ‘Environment’. This is because I will be encouraged to see and consider all sides of complex environmental issues – tourism impacts on society, ecology and local people in this project. In order to do this project successfully, I will try to understand the general concept of tourism and its impact on our economy reading the text book ‘Tomorrow’s Geography’. I will then go on the internet and try to collect as much information related to the issue of this project as possible. After that I intend to carefully choose relevant pieces of information and try to apply them effectively in geographical context within the text and draw a conclusion.

# What are the impacts of tourism on the environment?

Tourism and the environment have a complex and interdependent relationship. In reality the environmental impact of tourism can be both negative and positive.

On the positive side, many physical attractions of the island, such as Jamaica Bay are designated as Special Sites of Conservation so as to prevent tourists from destroying the areas. This is because the environmental aspect of Jamaica is the main attraction for tourists and also a factor which will determine the continued success of the tourism industry ("Encyclopedia of the nations").

However, there are some negative impacts. The constant use of airplanes to transport people to and from the island, the increasing number of vehicles have produced environmentally unfriendly substances and contributed to air pollution. Also, the island's many tourist hotels and their inadequate sewage disposal systems have been cited as one of the biggest causes of environmental destruction. Although a huge amount of water is needed to dispose of solid waste sufficiently, studies indicate that on average a tourist uses ten times as much water and produces three times as much solid waste as a resident and the island itself has faced water shortages due to unrestrained tourism ("Caribbean Studies"). Therefore the effectiveness of the sewage disposal system is questionable and discharges, which are usually dumped into the ocean, have resulted in the current decline in biodiversity. As the sewage often contains a large amount of nitrates and phosphates it causes eutrophication (see appendix A), which result in smothering coral reefs and destroying the marine ecosystem. In effect according to CMS (Community Tourism Secretariat), in the last twenty years approximately twelve

percent of all aqueous species in the sea around the island have faced extinction (“Tourism - Environmental Impacts”).

On the other hand constant construction of hotels and the heavy use of public beaches by tourists have led to the disappearance of sand dunes formed on the beaches and the removal of extensive root systems, both of which protect the land when destructive storms strike the coast. Therefore, many beaches of the island have been eroded terribly. At the present time plant and animal life is jeopardized due to excessive tourism. Many trees have been cut down to build more resort areas and wildlife habitats have been ruthlessly destroyed and many have to migrate to other places and adapt to the different living condition. Surprisingly according to research, “the interdependent relationship in the ecosystem of the island has nearly collapsed and the existence of 20 to 40 percent of plants, 11 percent of all birds and 25 percent of all known mammals species in Jamaica have been threatened and furthermore Jamaica is a sad-record holder in the highest local deforestation speed.” (“Caribbean Studies”)

# What are the impacts of tourism on the local people?

Tourism has had some impacts on the local residents of Jamaica too. The impacts can be both negative and positive.

On the positive side, the tourism industry has provided local residents with jobs and revitalized the economy of Jamaica as the principal source of incomes. According to the JTB (Jamaican Tourist Board), the number of people in employment has dramatically increased from 9527 to 13619 between 1980 and 1985, and even now it has grown substantially as more tourists visit this place. Moreover, tourism provides 11.8 percent of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) today and it is suggested to increase to 20 percent in twenty years ("All-jamaica.com"). Following this, the standards of living of many local residents and their revenues have risen by a large extent due to tourism.

However, tourism can also be detrimental for the local residents of Jamaica. Most areas of Jamaica have been overbuilt with tourist accommodations and other tourism-related buildings beyond the capacity of the local reservoirs to provide enough water. Generally resort areas such as Negril receive water first and often hotels in these areas tend to keep holding tanks full as insurance even at night so as to provide tourists with sufficient water even when pressure is poor or nonexistent. This has taken water supply from local people of the island and so residents in the West End in reality have no access to water supply during evening and night hours ("Caribbean Studies").

Also, due to the inadequate sewage disposal systems of tourist accommodations the ocean around the island has been contaminated and it not only destroys the marine

ecosystem but also makes it harder for the locals to get clean water and even seafood because of bioaccumulation effect (see Appendix B). In effect there have been a number of cases of people suffering from diseases due to drinking contaminated water or eating contaminated seafood. Jamaican fishermen have also suffered a lot because of this negative consequence of tourism. Since the risk of getting disease by eating seafood has increased the number of consumers of seafood has decreased and the profitability of the island's fishing industry has diminished in a critical rate ("Tourism – Environmental Impacts").

It might seem that the local farmers have made a huge profit thanks to the greatly developing tourism industry because of application of multiple effects. However, in reality they have not. As most tourists demand familiar menu and tastes they are used to rather than the local food it is rare for hotel businesses to purchase anything from the local farmers and have generally resorted to importing food from foreign countries. Consequently, most of local farmers have been concerned with decreasing incomes.

Also, according to WTO (World Tourism Organization), 34 percent of workforces in Jamaica depends directly or indirectly on tourism ("Encyclopedia of the nations"). This fact indicates that other **66 percent of workforce is not dependant on tourism industry**. Increasing demands for basic services such as airports, roads and other infrastructures and goods for tourists costs the local government and increase taxes as the tourism has developed. Furthermore, this has also often caused price hikes too. These problems have negatively influenced more than half of the local residents whose income does not increase proportionally. Statistics in 2007 show that a quarter of these people is impoverished.

## Limitation on the development of tourism

As you can see from what I have noted so far, tourism has had much more negative impact on the locals and the environment than positive. Although the tourism industry of Jamaica is still developing progressively, its sustainability has been questionable due to the negative impacts of tourism. Many economists have actually suggested that it would start to decline in twenty years time at the earliest. In order to overcome this problem, they have to come up with an innovative idea to resolve the negative impacts of tourism. However there is a limitation here.

Since the owners or operators of approved hotel enterprises or resort cottages, especially all-inclusive hotels that have generated the largest revenue in Jamaica, are entitled to relief from income tax for a period of ten years. Additionally they also benefit from a duty exemption on imports for constructing or expanding their hotels ("Tourism – Economic Impacts"). Furthermore on average half of all profits is kept in private offshore accounts or invested in other projects overseas and 40 percent is used to pay for imports of food and other products for tourists ("Encyclopedia of the nations"). Therefore, in contrast with the fact that the government encourages tourism and helps it financially only 10 percent of all profits is put back into the national economy. This has greatly reduced governmental investment in critical areas such as the environment and quality of people's lives. In essence, the government of Jamaica that has embraced tourism as just a way to boost the economy makes it impossible to improve the negative impacts of tourism on the environment and the local residents and this has been the limitation on the development of tourism industry in the island.



## Conclusion

Through this project I have discovered that tourism has much more negative impacts on the environment and the local residents of Jamaica than positive ones and that they are often closely related to the economical aspect of tourism. I have also learnt that the Jamaican government which have embraced and encouraged tourism just as a way to be economically one step up from where they were in this competitive world has badly affected the sustainability of the tourism of Jamaica in form of a threat to the locals and the ecology and been the limitation of its development. For the Sustainable Tourism Development (STD) of Jamaica, I believe they need to consider how they can achieve **'tourism, which can satisfy the demands of tourists and the tourism industry , maintaining the ecological processes and biological diversity and continue to attract them in order to meet the needs and wants of all local residents in terms of improved living standard and quality of life .** In order to actualize this, I conclude that first they need to reduce the tendency of the governmental investment towards tourism and amend the policy so as to prevent leakage of profits as much as possible . Then, after the government ensures that they have enough money to invest in critical areas they should put more efforts into improving the negative impacts of the tourism for STD. More specifically they can invest more money in: developing agro -tourism, campaigns of encouragement for tourist to eat more local food and improvement of both sewage disposal system and water access.

## Evaluation

Before I actually started to do research I made a rough plan so that I will be properly organized and this helped me to use my limited time effectively. In the research stage, I firstly read the geography textbook that I usually use in the school and understood fundamental concept of tourism and its impacts on the environment and local people, which helped me to comprehend other complex issues on which I would research afterward. Therefore, I believe my planning stage and research stage of this project was successful. I also think that both coherency and reliability of this project are relatively high. This is because I actually followed the structure below, so that I would be able to put relevant and detailed information in an organized order, and used many reliable facts supported by official organization such as WTO (World Tourism Organization) in order to formulate a valid conclusion: 1. Positive and negative environmental impacts of Jamaican tourism, 2. Positive and negative impacts of tourism on the locals of Jamaica, 3. How both 1 and 2 are related to the sustainability of Jamaican tourism. Although I also intended to discuss cultural impacts of tourism on the locals of Jamaica and its interdependent relationship with the sustainability of tourism of the island, I could not really achieve this due to a lack of time. Therefore, if I had another opportunity to do this project again, I would also try to include this issue in addition to what I have done in this project so far.

**Word Count : 1864**

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## **Image**

1. Fizzo Brown. Jamaica Beach. 05 Mar 2008 <<http://fizziobrown.blogspot.com/>>

# Appendices

## **Appendix A**

This appendix explains what eutrophication is and how it can result in smothering coral reefs. Eutrophication happens when an excess amount of nutrients accumulates on a seabed. It leads to algae to bloom dramatically which fluctuates the concentration of oxygen in the ocean. This can smother and kill coral reefs.

## **Appendix B**

This appendix explains what a bioaccumulation effect is and how it makes it really difficult for the locals of Jamaica to eat seafood. Since some poisonous chemicals from sewage are not biodegradable, they accumulate in bodies of aqueous livings and become more concentrated as you go up the food chain. If the locals eat seafood whose concentration of chemicals reaches a certain level it can cause disease and even lead to their deaths.