



**Blue
Tourism
Initiative**

Towards Sustainable Blue
Tourism in the Caribbean:
Policy Pathways to Support
Community-Based Coastal and
Marine Tourism

Towards Sustainable Blue Tourism in the Caribbean: Policy Pathways to Support Community-Based Coastal and Marine Tourism

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Cover photo: English Man's Bay, Tobago © Niamh Vaughan

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The **Blue Tourism Initiative** is co-led by the **Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDRI)** and the Think and Do Tank **eco-union** and it is co-funded by the **French Facility for Global Environment (FFEM)**, and implemented with three partners responsible for the project's activities in each region: The **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)** in the Mediterranean; **Coastal Oceans Research and Development Indian Ocean (CORDIO)** and the **Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI)**.



IDDRI is an independent think tank based in Paris (France) at the interface of research and decision-making that investigates sustainable development issues requiring global coordination.



eco-union is an independent Think and Do Tank based in Barcelona (Spain), whose objective is to accelerate the ecological transition of the Euro-Mediterranean region.



CORDIO East Africa is a nonprofit research organization based in Kenya focus on the sustainable use and management of coastal and marine resources in the Western Indian Ocean.



IUCN Centre for Mediterranean Cooperation, established in Malaga (Spain), works to bridge gaps between science, policy, management and action in order to conserve nature and accelerate the transition towards sustainable development in the Mediterranean.



CANARI (Caribbean Natural Resources Institute) is a non-profit institute headquartered in Trinidad and Tobago, facilitating stakeholder participation in the stewardship of renewable natural resources in the Caribbean.



Beaches like this one in Trinidad and Tobago are a major attraction for visitors and locals alike. Credit Nicole Leotaud.

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Input was received from representatives across key sectors such as tourism and marine protected area management who were interviewed and a broader group of stakeholders who participated in a regional webinar to review key findings and validate policy recommendations.

The diagnostic study was developed as part of the Blue Tourism Initiative¹ (2022-2026) which is a global multi-stakeholder innovation program focused on the environmental management, governance and planning of coastal and maritime tourism in three marine regions: the Mediterranean, the Western Indian Ocean and the Caribbean. The project supports the participatory development of sustainable blue tourism initiatives through policy actions and a multi-stakeholder approach to inform the scalability of sustainable blue tourism in other regions.

The objectives of the Blue Tourism Initiative are to:

1. Assess the current global and regional situation of blue tourism with a particular focus on challenges and opportunities, and recommended directions for sustainable blue tourism development.
2. Support and monitor the implementation of sustainable blue tourism initiatives in the Mediterranean, West Indian Ocean and the Caribbean.
3. Integrate sustainable blue tourism management and governance at the regional policy level, share best practices and raise awareness among key local, national and regional stakeholders.

1 <https://bluetourisminitiative.org/>

Table of contents

Acknowledgements	3
Acronyms	5
Summary	6
1. Tourism in the Caribbean	7
1.1. Tourism's importance, COVID-19 impacts and recovery	7
1.2. Opportunities through coastal and marine tourism	8
2. Coastal and maritime tourism in the Caribbean's blue economy	9
2.1. Coastal and marine ecosystems underlying the Caribbean blue economy	9
2.2. The Caribbean blue economy	10
2.3. Tourism in the Caribbean blue economy	10
2.4. Blue tourism in the Caribbean	11
3. Community-based tourism as an opportunity for sustainable and inclusive blue tourism	14
3.1. The demand for a shift in the focus of tourism development	14
3.2. Community-based tourism as part of blue tourism	15
4. Institutional landscape for the blue tourism sector in the Caribbean	19
4.1. Stakeholders of blue tourism	19
4.2. Policies governing tourism management	20
4.3. Legislation governing tourism management	22
4.4. Governance arrangements	22
4.5. Management tools and approaches	23
5. Challenges, vulnerabilities and impacts of blue tourism	25
5.1. Economic leakages	25
5.2. Social and cultural impacts of tourism	25
5.3. Environmental impacts	26
5.4. Climate vulnerability	26
5.5. COVID-19 and external shocks	28
6. Policy recommendations to support community-based tourism approaches in blue tourism	29
6.1. Reimagining Caribbean tourism	29
6.2. Policy recommendations	29
Annex 1. Primary and secondary tourism stakeholders in the Caribbean	34
References	36

Acronyms

ACS	Association of the Caribbean States
ASP	Adaptive Social Protection
BE	Blue Economy
BT	Blue Tourism
CEP	Caribbean Environment Programme
CANARI	Caribbean Natural Resources Institute
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CBT	Community-Based Tourism
CCAD	Central American Commission for Environment and Development
CCCCC	Caribbean Community Centre on Climate Change
CCPF	Compete Caribbean Partnership Facility
CCTN	Caribbean Community Tourism Network
CDEMA	Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency
CHTA	Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association
CLIA	Cruise Lines International Association
CLME	Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystems
CMT	Coastal and Marine Tourism
CNFO	Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations
CORDIO	Coastal Oceans Research and Development Indian Ocean
CREAD	Climate Resilience Execution Agency for Dominica
CRFM	Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism
CROP	Caribbean Regional Oceanspace Project
CTO	Caribbean Tourism Organisation
DMO	Destination Management Organisation
EEZ	Economic Exclusive Zone
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

FFEM	French Facility for Global Environment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IDDRI	Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOCARIBE	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the UNESCO Sub-Commission for the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
MPA	Marine Protected Areas
MSME	Micro, small and medium enterprises
NICs	National Intersectoral Coordination Mechanisms
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
OECS	Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States
OSPESCA	Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organisation
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SLR	Sea level rise
SME	Small and medium enterprises
SST	Sea surface temperature
SusGren	Sustainable Grenadines
UNESCO-IOC	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organisation
WECAFC	Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission
WTTC	World Travel and Tourism Commission

Summary

The Caribbean is the **most tourism dependent region in the world**, with tourism responsible for a significant contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (13.9% in 2019; 9.1% in 2021) and jobs (13.4% of all jobs in 2021) (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic had significant impacts on the Caribbean’s tourism sector and economies, but rapid recovery has taken place. As growth starts to plateau, it will be important to drive continued development of the sector, including through diversification. Alongside the growing recognition of the need to diversify the Caribbean’s tourism sector are concerns regarding how the tourism sector addresses **environmental sustainability, socio-economic inclusion, equity and justice**.

Much of the tourism in the Caribbean depends on products and attractions in coastal and marine areas. Coastal and marine tourism (CMT) or Blue Tourism (BT) in the Caribbean encompasses a diverse range of activities, including beach tourism, scuba diving, snorkelling, other water sports, yachting, marine wildlife encounters, and cruises. However, the sector is hugely dominated by **large (often foreign owned) hotels, all-inclusive resorts and cruises** catering to the mass tourism industry, which have been criticised for negative environmental and social impacts and poor economic inclusion.

A blue economy (BE) and BT framing may be useful in exploring how to support continued growth of the sector to ensure that economic development is environmentally sustainable and provides economic opportunities for Caribbean people. Within this, community-based tourism (CBT) has been taking place in the Caribbean for decades and has been identified as a potential opportunity to direct BT towards environmental sustainability, socio-economic inclusion, equity and justice.

CBT has been defined by the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) as, “A collaborative approach to tourism in which community members exercise control through active participation in appraisal, development, management and/or ownership (whole or in part) of enterprises that delivers net socio-economic benefits to community members, conserves natural and cultural resources and adds value to the experiences of local and foreign visitors. This encompasses both tourism activities in a community and goods and services supplied to the tourism industry by one or more community members.”

The **institutional framework** supporting BT and CBT in the Caribbean includes numerous inter-linked public, private and civil society stakeholders operating at local, national, regional and international levels. The policy framework includes the **CTO’s 2020 Caribbean Sustainable Tourism Policy and Development Framework** as well as national policies and strategies which support BT and CBT approaches. Some countries have established or are establishing dedicated policies, agencies and initiatives to support CBT. However, the Caribbean is still working towards establishing national and regional coordinating mechanisms with sectoral integration across the public sector, the private sector and civil society. This will be essential for a coordinated approach to implementation of BE, and tourism within this, to manage potential conflicts among competing users of coastal and marine resources while ensuring that coastal and marine ecosystems and resources can continue to provide goods and services to the various users.

However, transforming the tourism sector in the Caribbean to more inclusive and sustainable models, including CBT, will need to address **complex and inter-linked challenges**. These include:

- **high economic leakages** in the tourism sector, with small and micro businesses being left out of the tourism value chain and limited benefits going to Caribbean communities;
- **negative social impacts** from restricted access to beaches and takeover of prime beachfront for tourism development and threats to Caribbean cultural heritage;
- **negative environmental impacts** due to pollution, destruction or degradation of ecosystems and diversion of surface water and groundwater;
- serious and escalating direct and indirect **impacts from climate change**, and exacerbation of other threats; and
- **vulnerability to external shocks** such as pandemics and the effects of global conflicts.

The following **policy recommendations** are proposed to facilitate CBT within environmentally sustainable and inclusive BT:

- 1** Assess and promote the socio-economic and environmental benefits of CBT through comprehensive data collection, market studies and the development of assessment frameworks.
- 2** Reform policies and laws to support CBT by incentivising community-based sustainable tourism developments and providing special support for inclusive and sustainable tourism models.
- 3** Incorporate environmental sustainability and economic inclusion into the planning of tourism development, focusing on reducing environmental footprint and ensuring equity and justice.
- 4** Support the adoption of inclusive governance models for decision-making, ensuring multi-stakeholder coordination, addressing community priorities and strengthening institutions.
- 5** Mainstream social justice principles to involve local stakeholders in building resilience, resolving conflicts, addressing gender disparities and ensuring the equitable distribution of tourism benefits.
- 6** Integrate and mainstream climate resilience in planning, development and management of the tourism sector.
- 7** Develop innovative and flexible financing to support blue-green business models and business continuity and ensure community access to financial mechanisms.
- 8** Establish business support organisations, ensuring their wider accessibility, which can provide tailored capacity building for CBT providers.
- 9** Support digitisation of micro and small enterprises in the CBT sector to enhance the sustainability of operations, coordination of activities at community level, access to needed markets and equitable benefit sharing from CBT activities.
- 10** Build multi-sectoral networks empowering and supporting CBT through partnerships.

This diagnostic study was conducted under the global Blue Tourism Initiative and aimed at exploring how concepts of BE and BT could be applied to support the transformation of the Caribbean’s tourism sector, particularly focusing on the potential of CBT as a specific niche sector which can help to drive this transformation.

1. Tourism in the Caribbean

KEY MESSAGES

- The Caribbean is the most tourism dependent region in the world, with tourism responsible for a significant contribution to GDP (9.1 percent in 2021) and jobs (13.4 percent in 2021).
- The COVID-19 pandemic had significant impacts on the Caribbean's tourism sector and economies, but rapid recovery has taken place. As growth starts to plateau, it will be important to drive continued development of the sector, including through diversification.
- Much of the tourism in the Caribbean depends on coastal and marine areas' attractiveness. A blue economy (BE) and blue tourism (BT) framing may therefore be useful in exploring how to support continued growth of the sector to ensure that economic development is environmentally sustainable and provides economic opportunities for Caribbean people.
- This diagnostic study is being conducted within the framework of the Blue Tourism Initiative and is aimed at informing how the sustainable blue tourism approaches can and should be applied to support the transformation of the Caribbean's tourism sector, particularly focusing on the potential of community-based tourism (CBT) as a specific approach which can help to drive this transformation.

1.1. Tourism's importance, COVID-19 impacts and recovery

The Caribbean is one of the most tourism-dependent regions in the world, with tourism contributing to 13.9 percent of the regional Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2019 (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted the tourism sector, with major effects on the Caribbean's economy. In 2020, there was a decline of 58 percent in the sector's contribution to GDP, alongside a decline in employment of 708,000 persons within the sector in the Caribbean (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2022) with the economies in some countries losing as much as 16-20 percent of GDP in 2020 (The World Bank, 2023). Consequently, average public sector debt increased from 66.4 percent of GDP in 2019 to 84.4 percent of GDP in 2020 (Caribbean Development Bank, 2021). The pandemic impacted 90 percent of Caribbean businesses, disproportionately affecting micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and women-led businesses. For instance, 36 percent of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), often women-led, experienced reduction in their workforce and 93 percent of women-led businesses reported reduced sales (Pereira and Yañez-Pagans, 2021). The decline in employment in the tourism sector meant that women were more likely to experience job losses and generally faced greater social, economic and physical insecurity than men due to the pandemic (Padmore, 2021). In 2021, tourism's contribution to GDP had declined to 9.1 percent of GDP and 13.4 percent of employment (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2022).

A study of public sector responses to the COVID-19 pandemic by the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) (Thanoo et al, 2023) identified 412 public sector COVID-19 recovery initiatives across six countries (Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago) as well as regional initiatives. Forty of these initiatives were focused on the tourism sector. Initiatives announced included immediate responses focused on meeting health and safety requirements, as well as recovery initiatives such as supporting businesses to increase use of financial technologies and online marketing, as well as to invest in greening measures. Travel incentives were also put in place such as remote working visa programmes and travel bubbles targeting digital nomads, with Barbados taking the lead.

National initiatives included, for example, Antigua and Barbuda's MSME Transition Grant Programme which aimed to support digitisation of tourism and other MSMEs, the Barbados Employment and Sustainable Transformation Programme which included support for digitisation as well as greening tourism sector through water conservation or water harvesting measures and installation of renewable energy systems, Jamaica's Second Rural Economic Development initiative which aimed to support tourism and other MSMEs including with building climate resilience, Jamaica's development of a resilient tourism framework strategy under the Blue Ocean Strategy, Saint Lucia's grant funding to support village tourism (CBT) complemented by a concessional loan financing component supported under the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Development Fund, and Trinidad and Tobago's grant programme to support upgrading of accommodation providers.

At the regional level examples of initiatives were FUT-Tourism: Rethinking Tourism and MSMEs in times of COVID-19 to support regional dialogue and policy solutions in the tourism MSME sector, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Accelerator Lab's BlueDigital project that aimed to use digital tools to improve BE value chains including for tourism businesses. However, several countries emphasised the importance of developing or expanding cruise ship ports, mega resorts and hotels, which have been shown to have uncertain or negative impacts on socio-economic inclusion and environmental sustainability. Contrastingly, stakeholders consulted to review CANARI's study recommended economic recovery through using nature-based solutions



Mega resorts and hotels have uncertain or negative impacts on socio-economic inclusion and environmental sustainability. Credit Natalie Boodram.

in community-based eco-tourism and using a sustainable cross-sectoral approach rather than development of the traditional mass tourism product. The study showed that although COVID-19 recovery initiatives provided an opportunity for investment in transforming economies, this was a mixed story for the tourism sector.

Nevertheless, perhaps as a result of this rapid pivoting of the sector, the World Travel and Tourism Council (2023) reported that the Caribbean has outperformed global recovery (see Table 1).

Table 1. Caribbean versus global recovery in travel and tourism (2022 versus 2019)

	Contribution to GDP	Contribution to jobs
Global	+22.0%	+7.9%
Caribbean	+33.2%	+12.0%

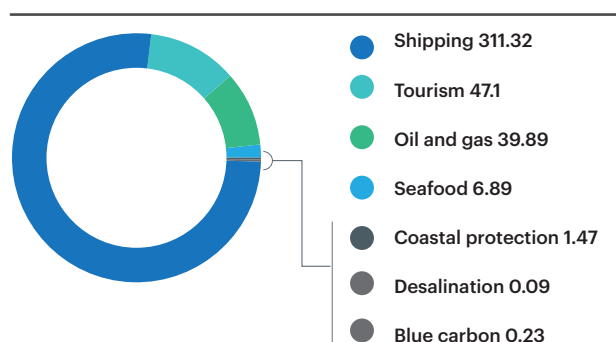
(Statista, 2023).

In 2023 the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO) estimated that there were approximately 32.2 million visitors, reflecting continued growth and recovery towards pre-pandemic levels. This included 31.1 million cruise visits, surpassing the previous record in 2019 by 2.4 percent. In 2022, cruise tourism contributed 20 percent to overall GDP with more than 780,000 stopover visitors. CTO has also projected that cruise tourism will continue to grow, with 35.8 million cruise visits expected in the Caribbean in 2024, equivalent to a 10-15 percent expansion compared to the previous year (Caribbean Tourism Organisation, 2024).

The Caribbean, therefore, remains a highly tourism-dependent region in terms of the share of GDP contributed by the sector. In 2022, four Caribbean countries ranked in the top ten in terms of the share of GDP contributed by the tourism sector: Barbados at 16.2 percent of GDP, Belize at 20.3 percent of GDP, Jamaica at 23.1 percent of GDP, and Antigua and Barbuda at 55 percent of GDP (Namchavadze, 2023).

However, projections are that this growth may be slowing down due to other factors, including recessions in key markets such as the United States and the impacts of current conflicts (Rosenblatt et al, 2023). This may create pressure to

Figure 1. Contribution of Caribbean blue economy sectors to gross revenue (US\$ billions)



(From Patil et al., 2016).



Cruise ships dominate the small harbour in Castries, Saint Lucia.

Credit CANARI.

diversify and stimulate increased attention to new models and offerings which promote sustainability and inclusion.

1.2 Opportunities through coastal and marine tourism

Much of the tourism in the Caribbean depends on products and attractions in coastal and marine areas and new opportunities may be found here. A World Bank study (Patil et al, 2016) identified coastal and marine tourism (CMT) as the largest economic sector for the Caribbean BE, with an estimated value of US\$47 million, representing 12 percent of the overall US\$407 million BE sector (see Figure 1). Although smaller than the shipping sector (which includes the Panama Canal traffic), it is even bigger than the oil and gas sector, confirming the vital importance of CMT for economic development in the Caribbean.

Recovery and continued growth of the regional tourism sector can leverage opportunities in CMT. Adopting CBT approaches can help to address key issues such as economic leakage, negative impacts on environmental sustainability, ensuring the sector contribution in fostering economic inclusion and local livelihoods, while mitigating conflicts with other development needs and protecting Caribbean culture.

This diagnostic study therefore aimed to explore how concepts of BE and BT could be applied to support economic growth alongside the transformation of the Caribbean's tourism sector to enhance environmental sustainability and equity. Specifically, the study focused on the potential of CBT as a specific niche sector which can help to drive this transformation. Policy considerations have been elaborated to support an enabling environment for CBT as a key pathway for a more sustainable and inclusive tourism sector in the Caribbean.

The next section describes CMT or BT as part of the Caribbean's BE.

2. Coastal and maritime tourism in the Caribbean's blue economy

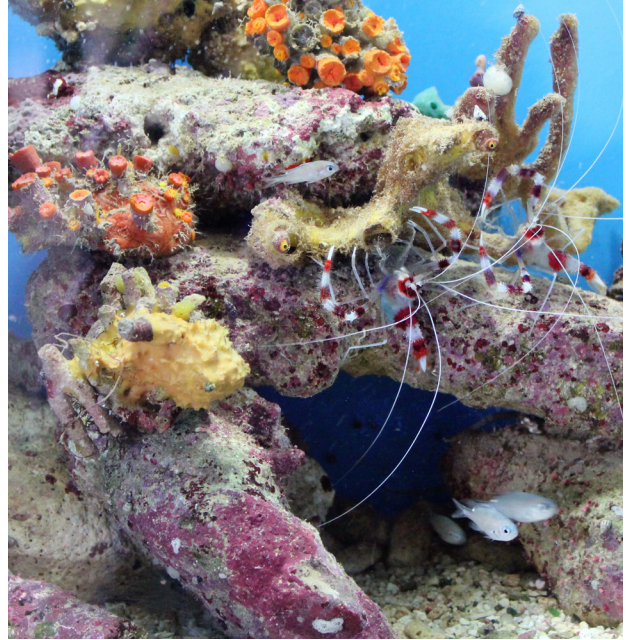
KEY MESSAGES

- The BE is an evolving concept, and its key themes are: 1) Sustainable and inclusive growth and development; 2) Reducing the risk of over exploitation and risky methods of extraction/usage of the ocean's resources; 3) Enhancing the welfare of coastline communities in terms of economic opportunities and social protection; and 4) Ensuring resilience of countries to natural disasters and the impact of climate change.
- CMT is an important component of the Caribbean BE and is reflected in policies, plans and initiatives throughout the region.
- CMT encompasses a diverse range of activities, including beach tourism, scuba diving, snorkelling, other water sports, yachting, marine wildlife encounters, and cruises. However, the sector is hugely dominated by large (often foreign owned) hotels, all-inclusive resorts and cruises catering to the mass tourism industry, which have been criticised for negative environmental and social impacts and poor economic inclusion.
- There is a growing recognition of the need to diversify the tourism sector, including via niche markets such as ecotourism and CBT (or 'village tourism').

2.1. Coastal and marine ecosystems underlying the Caribbean blue economy

The three main coastal and marine ecosystems in the Caribbean are coral reefs, mangrove forests and seagrass meadows, which are found across the 5.9 million km² area of the wider Caribbean. The interlinked coral reef-mangrove-seagrass complex is recognised as one of the most biologically diverse and productive systems in the world. This includes high species diversity, including endemic and threatened species, as well as commercially valuable species. The Western Caribbean ecoregion has been identified as one of 10 marine biodiversity hotspots globally. There are 15 Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas in the wider Caribbean. The Mesoamerican Reef along the coasts of Mexico, Belize, Guatemala and Honduras is the largest barrier reef in the Western Hemisphere and the second largest in the world (United Nations Environment Programme- Caribbean Environment Programme, 2020).

These ecosystems face serious pressures from human development, including from population growth and urbanisation, coastal development, and over-exploitation including over-fishing. Climate change adds additional pressures on ecosystems and exacerbates other human pressures. Damage from human activities has also compromised the abilities of these ecosystems to withstand stresses from other sources such as diseases, alien invasive species, intense weather events, and



Coral reefs in Curaçao are home to amazing biodiversity and a draw for blue tourism. Credit Natalie Boodram.



Mangroves like these in the Portland Bight Protected Area in Jamaica are key for protecting Caribbean coastlines. Credit JB Collier.



Seagrass meadows are highly threatened by coastal activities, including tourism. Credit Ileana Lopez.

climate change (United Nations Environment Programme- Caribbean Environment Programme, 2020).

Decades of these anthropogenic and natural stresses on coral reefs, mangrove forests and seagrass meadows have resulted in overall poor status and worsening trends in almost all areas. Average coral cover has declined from an estimated 34.8 percent in the 1970s to just 16.3 percent in a 2014 study. Caribbean coral reefs are also shifting from coral to macroalgal dominated. Reefs in the eastern and northern Caribbean are rated as "Poor" by the Reef Health Index. For mangroves and seagrass, data is lacking but generally coverage is low and declining, and the health status is uncertain (United Nations Environment Programme- Caribbean Environment Programme, 2020).

2.2. The Caribbean blue economy

Coral reefs, mangrove forests and seagrass meadows provide essential ecosystem goods and services which support Caribbean people and economies. Evolving ideas around the BE generally emphasise the sustainable use and stewardship of the environment to preserve the health of ecosystems as part of economic growth and development using coastal and marine resources, while also recognising the need for improved livelihoods, human well-being and social fairness as part of a BE (for example World Bank, 2021 and Commonwealth Secretariat, 2024 in Box 1). Conservation International adds that “blue economy also includes economic benefits that may not be marketed, such as carbon storage, coastal protection, cultural values and biodiversity” (Bertazzo, 2018).

Box 1. The Blue Economy definition

The World Bank defines the BE as the “sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and job creation while preserving the health of ocean ecosystems.”

The Commonwealth Nations defines ‘blue economy’ as an emerging concept that encourages sustainable exploitation, innovation and stewardship of our ocean and its life-giving ‘blue’ resources.

The Caribbean Development Bank (2018) outlines the main themes reflected in ideas around the emerging concept of BE as:

- Sustainable and inclusive growth and development
- Reducing the risk of over exploitation and risky methods of extraction/usage of the ocean’s resources
- Enhancing the welfare of coastline communities in terms of economic opportunities and social protection
- Ensuring resilience of countries to natural disasters and the impact of climate change.

The idea of BE, therefore, acknowledges that economic activities within the ocean rely on the health of coastal and marine ecosystems. However, it recognises that all these activities also possess the capacity to harm these ecosystems, thus endangering their integrity, employment opportunities and economic expansion within this sector of the worldwide economy (Patil et al, 2016).

Early interest in BE was expressed by the Caribbean and other Small Island Developing States (SIDS) wanted to be recognised as ‘Large Ocean States’ as they have an ocean area 28 times the size of their land mass and they consider the ocean as a new potential economic frontier (United Nations, 2024). Indeed, covering 2.75 million square kilometres (Caribbean Development Bank, 2018), the Caribbean Sea covers less than 1 percent of the world’s ocean area, yet it is a significant resource to its 40 million inhabitants, generating approximately US\$407 billion in 2012, equal to 14 to 27 percent of the global ocean economy (Patil, 2016). Economic growth in the

Caribbean has and continues to be inextricably linked to the ocean; incorporating BE into frameworks promoting sustainable growth may transform the 37 countries and territories that share the Caribbean Sea.

However, the scale and scope of the BE in the Caribbean is below its full potential (Caribbean Development Bank, 2018). This is due to the lag in formally recognising BE as a driver of economic growth and a lack of understanding the value of its resources and associated activities and ecosystem services.

Notwithstanding, there have been some noteworthy initiatives. International organisations such as the World Bank and the Inter American Bank (World Bank, 2021) and global agendas such as the Commonwealth Blue Charter (The Commonwealth, 2018) are influencing and supporting the Caribbean BE efforts. A plethora of projects, programmes and initiatives related to BE are being developed and implemented across the region, for example work in the Eastern Caribbean to conduct diagnostic studies and marine spatial planning to inform BE and the World Bank’s Unleashing the Blue Economy of the Caribbean (UBEC) project (World Bank, 2024).

Although the Caribbean does not yet have an overall regional strategy on BE, sub-regional and national strategies and plans are being developed, for example the OECS Blue-Green Economy Strategy and Action Plan (Organisation of the Eastern Caribbean States, 2021), Grenada’s Blue Growth Coastal Master Plan (World Bank, 2019) and the Virgin Islands Strategic Blue Economy Roadmap 2020-2025 (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). Government ministries and departments focused on the BE are also being established in several countries across the Caribbean – for example in Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada – reflecting the growing political interest in pursuing BE approaches to support development. CMT is a common area of focus across Caribbean BE policies, plans and initiatives (World Bank, 2016).

All coastal nations, and in particular SIDS, depend on the wealth of resources provided by the oceans and the associated linkages with essential aspects of the economy they support. BT is already a key contributor to GDP and comprises one of the largest and fastest-growing segments in the BE as well as the tourism sector (Corral Quijada, 2022). Focusing on the sustainable management and development of CMT within the BE framework is a critical imperative.

2.3. Tourism in the Caribbean blue economy

Understanding how tourism fits into a BE framework requires understanding the evolution of the sector in the Caribbean.

Tourism in the Caribbean developed largely over the last five decades, starting in the 1960s with newly independent countries seeking opportunities to reduce the reliance on agriculture and earn foreign exchange essential for major investment. Infrastructure was developed to support the tourism sector, particularly supporting the mass tourism sector through hotel development, many of which were foreign-owned, and the creation of the all-inclusive model in the late 1970s (Clegg et al, 2021). Here mass tourism can be defined as, “extreme concentrations of tourists in any one place, resulting in saturation



Overcrowded beaches are a major problem including at Trunk Bay, St John in the United States Virgin Islands. Credit Paige Rothenberger.



Morne Coubaril Historical Adventure Park showcases Saint Lucia's culture and heritage. Credit Nicole Leotaud.



Concord Falls is one of Grenada's ecotourism attractions. Credit Natalie Boodram.

of the place" (Stainton, 2023). In other words, an influx of tourists which exceeds the carrying capacity of the area or destination (Stainton, 2023).

The early focus on mass tourism continued with an expansion of **large-scale luxury all-inclusive global hotel and resort chains in the Caribbean** (Stainton, 2023). The most significant change in tourism in the Caribbean has been the large increase in cruise tourism (Clegg et al, 2021). Tourism in the Caribbean continues to be focused on the mass tourism market and dominated by foreign interests, despite wide recognition of negative socio-economic impacts, including connotations regarding exploitation and dependency related to the region's colonial past of extractive economic models and slavery (Clegg et al, 2021). Indeed, concerns regarding economic leakages and negative environmental and social impacts of the mass tourism sector continue (Leotaud et al, 2021).

Despite the **dominance of mass tourism and cruise ships**, faced with a stagnating tourism sector, there is a growing recognition in the region of the urgent imperative to diversify and transform the Caribbean's tourism sector. This is being driven by multiple pressures and threats including increased global competition, vulnerability to risks from multiple global factors including economic recessions, climate change, changing oil prices, and continued degradation of the natural ecosystems upon which the tourism sector depends. The potential transition is also being driven by greater demand by visitors for authentic inclusive, local and eco-friendly experiences, and new opportunities for small businesses to tap into emerging markets through, for example, online platforms.

Opportunities for **tourism diversification** include via niche markets such as ecotourism, cultural and heritage tourism

and CBT (called 'village tourism' in Saint Lucia), which are aligned with BE principles regarding environmental sustainability, ecosystem stewardship, and economic inclusion (Euro-monitor International, 2019).

2.4. Blue tourism in the Caribbean

BT or CMT in the Caribbean encompasses a diverse range of activities, including cruises, beach tourism, scuba diving, snorkelling, other water sports, yachting, and marine wildlife encounters (Box 2). However, despite the diversity in the BT or CMT sector, it is highly dominated by cruise tourism and mass-tourism characterised by large hotels and all-inclusive resorts.

Box 2. Coastal and Marine Tourism (CMT)

Coastal tourism refers to beach-based tourism and recreation activities, including swimming, sunbathing, surfing, and recreational fishing alongside other land-based activities taking place in the coastal area and for which the proximity of the sea is advantageous, such as coastal walks or marine and coastal wildlife watching.

Maritime tourism includes predominantly water-based activities, such as sailing, yachting, cruising, and other nautical sports. These activities also include the operation of landside facilities. (Balestracci and Sciacca, 2023).

Analysis from the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) (2023) indicates that the **cruise industry** in the Caribbean is the largest globally and before the COVID-19 pandemic it accounted for 50 percent of the global cruise market share. Between 2019 and 2023, the industry continued to grow in the Caribbean, despite a decline during the pandemic, expanding 33 percent from about 9 million to almost 12 million passengers. However, this was much slower expansion than the global average, which grew by 55 percent. This may be signalling market shifts, especially to Asia and China, to which the Caribbean needs to pay attention.

The growth of **cruise tourism** in Caribbean countries has increased its importance as part of BT or CMT and has reportedly led to economic gains (Business Research and Economic Advisors, 2020). The top Caribbean cruise ship destinations are the Bahamas, Cayman Islands, US Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico (Spencer, 2019). The cruise sector is a significant force shaping the focus of tourism development efforts in many Caribbean countries, representing around 80 percent of total arrivals in countries such as Dominica and St. Kitts and Nevis (Tonazzini et al, 2019). Paradoxically to the economic leverage catalysed by the cruise ship sector, it has been proven to cause pronounced and, in some cases, irreversible environmental degradation and breakdown in socio-cultural makeup of destinations (Cruise Lines International Association, 2023).

Scuba diving is also another highlight of the Caribbean BT or CMT sector as the attractive coral reefs in many destinations including Belize, Saint Lucia, Dominica, Saba, Cuba and the Bahamas are important components of the industry. Popular water sports, often associated with large hotels or resorts, include horse surfing, rowing, surf-skiing, kayak surfing, underwater scooter, freediving, windsurfing, kayaking, jet surfing, swimming, barefoot water-skiing, cliff diving, raft rodeo, canyoning, flyboard flying, parasailing, stand up paddle yoga, and fishing. Other destinations have evolved features like snorkelling with sea turtles (e.g., Belize, Barbados), or swimming with dolphins (e.g., Bahamas, Dominican Republic). Grenada developed the world's first underwater sculpture gallery at Molinere Bay, which serves as an artificial reef and attraction for snorkelling as well as being an artistic expression.



Recreational scuba diving in Barbados and elsewhere is a highlight of Caribbean blue tourism. Credit Nicole Leotaud.

Several Caribbean islands have used the marine environment to develop their yachting industry as a fundamental component of the tourism industry. There are numerous yachting and sailing events across the Eastern Caribbean such as Antigua's Sailing Week, a long-standing premier event in the region which attracts up to 500 yachts during April of each year. Other notable events include Sailing Weeks in Barbados and Grenada, the annual Bequia Easter Regatta in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and the Atlantic Rally for Cruisers, which culminates in Saint Lucia (Didier, 2021).

Conservation experiential tourism is also taking place, for example with visitors paying for the privilege of working to support research and conservation of nesting leatherbacks on Matura beach in Trinidad and Tobago. In this model, the local community is engaged in conservation activity as well as the tourism activity which brings livelihood opportunities and supports locally driven economic development. The work done by Sustainable Grenadines in Union Island in St. Vincent and the Grenadines (Box 3) is also a prime example of how the rehabilitation and conservation of flora and fauna has led to avenues for sustainable livelihoods, including ecotourism (Birds Caribbean, 2019). Voluntourism and research tourism are a small market, but with potential for growth.

Important linkages between BT and other sectors also exist, for example via links to **cultural heritage** tourism in coastal villages. For example, Indigenous Peoples such as the Kalinago in Dominica and Amerindians in Guyana host tours showcasing their culture. The island of Bequia in St. Vincent and the Grenadines is well known for its traditional and model boat building which spans back as far as the 1800s. Formerly known as the boat building capital in the West Indies, the industry was built on the island's rich fishing industry. Linkages with the fisheries and mariculture sectors have created successful products like Oistins Fish Festival in Barbados, the Gros Islet Friday Night Street Party in Saint Lucia and the Gouyave Fish Festival in Grenada. These are important tourism products that have emerged and sustained themselves economically over many years and characterise the tourism product and marketing drive of these respective countries.

The next section explores CBT as a niche sector (within BT or CMT) and how this could serve as a pathway to inclusive and sustainable BE in the Caribbean.



Nesting leatherback turtle tours are a major attraction at Matura beach, Trinidad and Tobago. Credit Nature Seekers.



The restored Ashton Lagoon in Union Island features the largest mangrove in the Grenadines. Credit: Jacob Bock, Faura & Flora International.

Box 3. Tourism guided by conservation – Ashton Lagoon, Union Island

Ashton Lagoon, located on Union Island in the Grenadines, is the largest contiguous mangrove habitat in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Despite being legally designated as a Conservation Area in 1987, the Lagoon faced significant environmental degradation following an abandoned marina development project in the mid-1990s. The incomplete project disrupted natural water circulation, leading to the destruction of coral reefs, seagrass beds, and mangroves, and negatively impacted local biodiversity. The Lagoon was declared as an Important Bird Area by BirdLife International in 2008.

The rehabilitation project was led by Sustainable Grenadines (SusGren) a transboundary local non-profit organisation operating across Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, in collaboration with local, regional and international stakeholders involved the following activities.

Hydrological restoration: Opening blocked areas to restore natural tidal flow and water circulation by removing backfill material and steel sheet piles used in the original marina project.

Mangrove replanting and coral restoration: Planting mangroves and restoring coral reefs to enhance the natural habitat and protect against erosion and storm surges.

Infrastructure development: Constructing boardwalks, watchtowers, floating jetties, and kayaking facilities to support ecotourism and provide access to Frigate Island, a national heritage site.

Community engagement and education: Training local residents and stakeholders on conservation practices and sustainable tourism to ensure long-term project success and community buy-in.

Economic benefits: Promoting ecotourism to create new economic opportunities for the local community.

Achievements and impacts included:

- *Community Involvement:* The success of the project is heavily attributed to community engagement and capacity-building. Local residents have been trained in conservation and sustainable tourism, ensuring the long-term stewardship of the lagoon. This inclusive approach has empowered the community to actively participate in and benefit from eco-tourism.
- *Tourism infrastructure:* The construction of boardwalks, suspension bridges, bird towers, information displays, and viewing decks has made the Lagoon accessible and appealing to visitors. These facilities attract locals, academics, and eco-travellers, enhancing the ecotourism experience and educational value of the site.
- *Livelihood benefits:* Activities such as seamoss farming and guided eco-tours have grown, increasing local incomes and fostering sustainable economic practices.

The Ashton Lagoon rehabilitation project demonstrates the strong link between environmental conservation and ecotourism. By restoring habitats and involving the community, the project has not only improved the ecological health of the lagoon but also created sustainable economic opportunities through ecotourism.

3. Community-based tourism as an opportunity for sustainable and inclusive blue tourism

KEY MESSAGES

- There is demand and opportunity to shift to more sustainable and inclusive tourism in the Caribbean, with CBT identified as one potential option.
- CBT has been practised across the Caribbean for decades and involves a collaborative approach to tourism in which community members exercise control through active participation in appraisal, development, management and/or ownership (whole or in part) of enterprises that delivers net socio-economic benefits to community members, conserves natural and cultural resources and adds value to the experiences of local and foreign visitors.
- Although there are significant challenges with scalability and economic viability of CBT, lessons from Caribbean experiences indicate the importance of the development of CBT strategies and programmes, mechanisms for participatory decision-making, collaboration, educational awareness and capacity strengthening.
- Despite the interest in pursuing CBT, powerful examples illustrating the potential for CBT, and experiences pointing to good practices, data is lacking on real triple bottom line economic, environmental and social impacts which would be needed for a serious policy commitment towards supporting CBT and transitioning away from other unsustainable models.
- CBT can help foster more inclusive and sustainable tourism development by involving communities in tourism planning processes and ensuring the sustainable implementation and development of tourism initiatives.

3.1. The demand for a shift in the focus of tourism development

Sustainable tourism academics and practitioners have been calling for a change in policy and action in how tourism is facilitated and managed. In the immediate post-COVID-19 period, this has become even more apparent and there is demand for “shifting the focus from management to stewardship, from product to experience and from quantity to quality” (Lewis-Cameron, and Brown-Williams, 2022, p. 151). This means creating a policy and legislative environment that focuses less on management and regulation but more on product enhancements and fostering good practice through incentivising rather than being punitive. It also requires enhancing and developing incentive mechanisms available to the sector, both financial and non-financial, to foster the sector’s motivation and commitment to shift towards more sustainable tourism models. Moreover, it also entails focusing less on visitor



Boat tours in Nariva Swamp in Trinidad and Tobago are conducted by local entrepreneurs to deliver socio-economic benefits to the community. Credit CANARI.



Many visitors are seeking low environmental footprint experiences like relishing the serenity of Englishman's Bay in Tobago. Credit Nicole Leotaud.

numbers, and rather on promoting destinations and experiences adapted for a longer-staying market, and attracting the type of visitor who will spend more within the local economy and appreciate the local products, services and experiences, as well as being sensitive to issues related to social equity, environmental justice and gender issues. This also could lead to decreasing the environmental footprint and less local resources spent on facilitating visitor access through the investments in larger ports and terminals.

Consequently, approaches focusing on CBT (also called ‘community tourism’ or ‘village tourism’) have found footholds in the lexicons of tourism planners, partly due to a recognition that successful tourism requires a shift in attention and focus.

A recent study for CTO (Euromonitor International, 2019) has also elaborated on the willingness of consumers from the region’s biggest source markets, to pay for CBT experiences. A total of 79 percent of respondents indicated that they were willing to engage in CBT experiences if they were more aware of what CBT entails. They also indicated that they are willing to pay US\$300 per CBT activity and 30 to 45 percent of respondents are willing to pay for local tourism products with organic and fairtrade certification, that are locally sourced, environmental sustainability, and fair community benefits. This study further solidifies the proof of shifting appetites and demand for sustainable, authentic experiences.

3.2. Community-based tourism as part of blue tourism

CBT is an extremely effective approach for achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, with positive impacts on empowering local communities while still paying attention to the potential of natural resources, local communities’ skills, the local communities’ socioeconomics and culture, and environmental conservation to remain sustainable (Hutnaleontina et al, 2022).

CBT has been practised across the Caribbean for decades, including in coastal and marine destinations. Appreciating that each country will have its own unique approach to CBT based on its national context, the CTO has provided a useful definition of CBT in the Caribbean context (Box 4) and identified categories of CBT (Table 2).

Box 4. Definition of CBT in the Caribbean

CBT is: “A collaborative approach to tourism in which community members exercise control through active participation in appraisal, development, management and/or ownership (whole or in part) of enterprises that delivers net socio-economic benefits to community members, conserves natural and cultural resources and adds value to the experiences of local and foreign visitors. This encompasses both tourism activities in a community and goods and services supplied to the tourism industry by one or more community members.” (Caribbean Tourism Organisation, 2006)

There are examples of good practices and CBT case studies across the Caribbean. Countries such as Saint Lucia, Barbados, Dominica, Jamaica and are widely recognised for their efforts to develop and promote CBT.

Saint Lucia’s Heritage and Tourism Programme had a focus on village-tourism which promotes a mix of natural and cultural heritage (Box 5). This has evolved into the work of the current Community Tourism Agency, which is proposing a new branding and certification to showcase the sector. Jamaica’s initiatives have included establishing the Community Tourism Network ‘Country Style’ and the programme ‘Unique Jamaica’ and providing for direct bookings with CBT providers via Jamaica’s official destination website. Furthermore, in 2020 it was announced that a Community Tourism Unit would be established to further expand locals’ participation in the industry and offer unique local experiences to visitors. Dominica has branded itself as ‘The Nature Isle’ and heavily promotes its rich biodiversity and natural beauty and tourism products, for example recently declaring the world’s first marine protected area for sperm whales, which supports whale watching activities for tourists (Coto, 2023). Belize and Jamaica also have national handbooks on CBT.

However, it is not sufficient to pronounce that CBT is being pursued. Achieving these lofty goals must involve specific applications of community participation in the planning and management of tourism. Moreover, community priorities must be addressed along with capacity building, socio-economic inclusion and equity in the distribution of benefits as well as socio-environmental issues must feature more prominently if tourism is expected to meet its all-encompassing developmental objectives. Whilst the importance of visitor experience cannot be minimised, community tourism must create a balance between the members of the host community and their experience (Kelly, 2022).

Involving the community in tourism planning processes is promoted as a means of fostering community participation in decision-making and ensuring the sustainable implementation of tourism initiatives. CBT has emerged as a method to address local concerns that directly impact the tourist experience, emphasising the need to develop tourism infrastructure in harmony with the social and ecological fabric.

Table 2. Categories of community-based tourism experienced in the Caribbean (CTO, 2019)

Adventure	Agro and food tourism	Scientific, academic, volunteer & educational travel (SAVE)	Spa, health, wellness tourism	Culture & heritage tourism	Nature-based tourism
Caving	Cooking classes	School exchanges and cultural immersion	Courses on ancient herbs & their uses	Cultural classes	Ecology
Hiking/trekking	Farm-to-table	School visits	Holistic medicine/alternative treatments and therapies	Festivals	Garden tours
Horse riding	Fish fry	Volunteer with local experience	Traditional health & wellness	Heritage sites	Wildlife tourism in natural habitat
Water-based activities and tours	Food & beverage tours			Homestays	Wildlife tourism in non-natural habitat
	Traditional cuisine			Indigenous tourism	
				Local tourism markets	
				Museums	
				Religious/spiritual experiences	



Credit: Natalie Boodram, Nicole Leotaud



From a broader standpoint, CBT facilitates the empowerment of local communities by fostering social capital and reinforcing local identities, aiming to create positive experiences for residents and tourists alike (Riyanto et al, 2023). An integral aspect of CBT is its promotion of a “sense of community,” which cultivates human connections that foster coexistence and collaboration.

The Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO) is encouraging the pursuit of CBT for market diversification and published a toolkit to inform and support stakeholders (Compete Caribbean, 2019). Some countries have and are taking action towards better integrating CBT in their tourism sector. Saint Lucia has prioritised CBT approaches for decades and has established a Community Tourism Agency to support CBT (Box 5) development and Trinidad and Tobago is developing a national CBT policy. At the same time, while there are examples illustrating the potential for CBT development in the region, data is lacking on real triple bottom line economic, environmental and social impacts, both positive and negative impacts, which would be needed for a policy commitment towards supporting CBT and transitioning away from other unsustainable tourism models.

Indications have shown that **local communities** have not had an equal footing in the decision-making process and prioritisation of efforts in the BE. The inability to deliver inclusivity at the community level in the BE and take advantage of opportunities presented in BT, is as a result of structural inequalities, the lack of recognition of the importance of local customs, knowledge, rights and practices and the inability to engage dispersed communities effectively. These inequalities are compounded by power dynamics with governments, institutions and financial corporations competing in large Economic Exclusive Zones (EEZs) with little consideration of impacts to the coastal and marine ecosystems and people (Evans et al, 2023).

Coastal communities and those involved in BT have a right to sustain their way of life, develop and charter social, economic and environmentally sustainable resilient futures. They also have critical roles to play as stewards of the marine and coastal environment, and the development and advancement of BT. Overall, CBT provides a sustainable pathway to BT by fostering partnerships between local communities, tourism private sector stakeholders and government agencies to ensure that tourism development in marine and coastal areas is socially inclusive, environmentally responsible and economically beneficial for all stakeholders involved.

Although there are significant challenges with scalability and economic viability of CBT, lessons from Caribbean experiences indicate the importance of the development of CBT strategies and programmes, mechanisms for participatory decision-making, collaboration, educational awareness and capacity strengthening (Box 4 above). Successful cluster initiatives have also included the ‘Pure Grenada’ brand, Community Tourism Enterprise Development in the Rupununi area in Guyana and Treasure Beach in Jamaica (Boxes 6-8).

However, despite the interest in pursuing CBT, powerful examples illustrating the potential for CBT, and experiences pointing to good practices, data is lacking on real triple bottom line economic, environmental and social impacts which would be needed for a serious policy commitment towards supporting CBT and transitioning away from other unsustainable models.

Globally, the far-reaching benefits of CMT are widely documented with direct and indirect gains to individuals and destinations. Spending on activities such as diving and snorkelling for example is said to yield US\$19 billion per year, while additionally US\$16 million was directed for the use of coral ecosystems in advertising and conservation efforts (Phelan et al, 2020). However, data on the existing and potential socio-economic contribution of CBT in the Caribbean is lacking.

In the next section, an analysis of the current institutional landscape for BT and CBT identifies key opportunities, challenges and policy requirements for CBT to serve as a pathway to support a more environmentally sustainable, inclusive and resilient tourism sector in the Caribbean.

Box 5. Community Tourism Agency – Saint Lucia

With the passing of the Community Tourism Act 2022, the Government of Saint Lucia established the Community Tourism Agency to carryout duties related to CBT in Saint Lucia. Funded by the CARICOM Development Fund, the Community Tourism Agency assists local MSMEs with the development, support and marketing of CBT initiatives. Although only one year in operation, the agency is keen on developing CBT ideas from ‘zero to hero’ ensuring that all initiatives are community approved, which mandates that initiatives must: 1) Bring about an authentic Saint Lucian experiences; and 2) Create community impact.

The Community Tourism Agency carries out the following functions, working closely with local MSMEs:

- Develop community-based ideas through the following support services.
- Business planning and development.
- Loan and grant schemes to increase access to finance
- Granting of concessions.
- Training and capacity building in key areas such as sustainable tourism supported by MOUs with institutions such as the Sir Author Lewis Community College.
- Operational support.
- Ensure MSMEs acquire regional and global standards such as public liability insurance.

The Community Tourism Agency helps businesses overcome bureaucratic processes and also supports marketing of CBT MSMEs through the Saint Lucia Tourism Authority.

Although most CBT initiatives fall under the accommodation sub-sector there are noteworthy coastal and marine initiatives developed under the Community Tourism Agency, for example relaunch of the Anse La Raye fish fry, establishment of the Dennery fish fry, development of the seamoss experience, kayaking, campsites and tours within the coastal areas, and ATV coastal tour experiences.

Box 6. Reshaping Tourism – The Saint Lucia Heritage Tourism Programme (1998-2005)

The Saint Lucia Heritage Tourism Programme, spanning from 1998 to 2005, stands as a significant case study in CBT initiatives. In response to the growing concerns about the impacts of mass tourism on Saint Lucia's cultural and natural heritage, this programme was designed to foster sustainable tourism development while preserving and promoting the island's unique heritage.

Saint Lucia, nestled in the Eastern Caribbean, has long been renowned for its stunning natural beauty and vibrant cultural heritage. However, rapid tourism development, primarily centered around all-inclusive resorts and beachfront properties, posed significant threats to the island's cultural authenticity and environmental integrity. Recognising the need for a more sustainable approach to tourism, the Saint Lucian government, in collaboration with local communities and international organisations, launched the Heritage Tourism Programme in 1998, which aimed to:

- Preserve and showcase Saint Lucia's rich cultural heritage, including its Creole traditions, historical sites, and indigenous practices.
- Diversify the tourism product beyond sun-and-sea offerings, encouraging visitors to engage with the island's authentic experiences and traditions.
- Empower local communities by involving them in tourism development and ensuring they benefit economically from tourism activities.
- Foster environmental stewardship and conservation efforts, particularly in ecologically sensitive areas.

The Heritage Tourism Programme was implemented through a multi-stakeholder approach involving government agencies, local communities, civil society, and international partners. Key components of the program included:

- CBT initiatives: Local communities were encouraged to develop and manage tourism products and services that highlight their cultural heritage, such as guided heritage tours, traditional craft workshops, and culinary experiences.
- Heritage site restoration: Significant historical sites and cultural landmarks were restored and preserved to enhance their appeal to visitors while maintaining their authenticity. This included forts, plantations, and indigenous settlements.
- Cultural festivals and events: Saint Lucia's calendar was enriched with cultural festivals and events celebrating its diverse heritage, such as the Saint Lucia Jazz Festival, La Marguerite Flower Festival, and Jounen Kwéyòl (Creole Day).
- Sustainable tourism practices: Emphasis was placed on promoting sustainable tourism practices, including responsible waste management, energy conservation, and the protection of marine and terrestrial ecosystems.

The Saint Lucia Heritage Tourism Programme yielded several positive outcomes:

- Economic empowerment: Local communities saw increased economic opportunities through tourism-related enterprises, leading to improved livelihoods and reduced dependence on external sources of income.
- Cultural revitalisation: Traditional crafts, music, dance, and culinary traditions experienced a resurgence, fostering a renewed sense of pride and identity among Saint Lucians.
- Environmental conservation: Efforts to protect and conserve the island's natural assets gained momentum, leading to the establishment of marine reserves, protected areas, and sustainable tourism practices.
- Tourism diversification: Saint Lucia's tourism product became more diverse, attracting travellers interested in cultural immersion and heritage experiences alongside the traditional sun-and-sea offerings.

Despite its successes, the Heritage Tourism Programme faced challenges such as limited funding, capacity constraints within local communities, and the need for ongoing stakeholder engagement. However, the initiative demonstrated the potential of CBT to reshape tourism development paradigms, emphasising sustainability, cultural authenticity, and community participation.

The Saint Lucia Heritage Tourism Programme serves as a compelling case study in how CBT initiatives can successfully reshape tourism by preserving cultural heritage, empowering local communities, and promoting sustainable development. Its legacy continues to inspire similar efforts worldwide, highlighting the importance of collaboration, cultural preservation and environmental stewardship in tourism planning and development.



Traditionally made bread is popular with locals and tourists in Laborie village, Saint Lucia. Credit CANARI.

Box 7. Treasure Beach, Jamaica (Lewis, 2024)

Treasure Beach, nestled along Jamaica’s desert south coast, is a picturesque string of fishing villages celebrated for its authentic charm and commitment to community-based tourism. Located about a three-hour drive from major cities like Montego Bay and Kingston, Treasure Beach boasts six miles of sandy beaches, private coves and rocky shorelines, creating a serene and welcoming atmosphere for visitors.

The community of Treasure Beach takes pride in its identity as the ‘Home of Community Tourism.’ Despite the allure of mass tourism development for some visitors, Treasure Beach has retained its tranquil ambience and family-like hospitality. Visitors are welcomed into a safe and laid-back environment where they can forge meaningful connections with local residents, creating a sense of belonging and home away from home.

Economically, tourism, fishing, and farming are the primary activities, aligned with Treasure Beach’s philosophy of sustainable local development. The community emphasises shared responsibility and benefits among its residents, fostering a sense of collective ownership and pride.

Central to Treasure Beach’s success in CBT is the Treasure Beach Destination Management Organisation (DMO). This community-based organisation represents tourism interests across the five bays that make up Treasure Beach. The DMO plays a vital role in coordinating tourism efforts, preserving local culture, protecting the environment, and enhancing economic benefits for the area.

The DMO’s objectives prioritise human capital development, aiming to educate, train and provide resources to empower the community. This focus on skills development not only supports the sustainability of Treasure Beach but also mitigates risks and ensures the preservation of heritage and culture.

One of Treasure Beach’s standout features is its reinvestment of tourism profits into community-based businesses. Unlike many tourism ventures where profits leave the area, Treasure Beach channels its earnings back into the community, supporting local enterprises and fostering a sustainable tourism model.

This approach has positioned Treasure Beach as a model of inclusive and sustainable tourism practices, particularly notable in the post-pandemic era. With a resurgence in tourism and a growing emphasis on community participation, Treasure Beach is poised for continued success as a vibrant and authentic destination in Jamaica’s tourism landscape.

Box 8. Pure Grenada

The Pure Grenada tourism cluster initiative is a prime example of how collaboration is essential for sustainable tourism. Facing a significant decline in tourism and limited government resources, the Grenada Hotel and Tourism Association initiated a collaborative action plan with the Government, Grenada Tourism Authority and local MSMEs. Supported by technical assistance from Compete Caribbean, the initiative aimed to develop a national brand for inclusive and sustainable tourism.

The ‘Pure Grenada’ brand was created, highlighting diverse local experiences. Despite initial challenges, including opposition to rebranding and coordination issues, the initiative successfully mobilised communities and trained 96 MSMEs in using the new brand. The results were remarkable. Although other factors contributed to the increased growth in the industry, from 2014 to 2019, visitor arrivals grew by 35.9 percent, reversing the previous decline, and Grenada experienced one of the highest tourism growth rates in the region. This success underscores the importance of public-private collaboration in achieving sustainable tourism development, showcasing how coordinated efforts can drive significant economic growth and resilience.



Leverra National Park in Grenada is an important turtle nesting site.

Credit Nicole Leotaud.

4. Institutional landscape for the blue tourism sector in the Caribbean

KEY MESSAGES

- Caribbean tourism stakeholders are diverse across the public, private and civil society sectors and operate in linked networks functioning at regional, sub-regional, national and local levels.
- A new type of tourist is visiting the Caribbean, who wants a richer, more authentic experience engaging with local people and having a positive effect on the environment, or at least minimising negative impacts.
- The CTO's 2020 Caribbean Sustainable Tourism Policy and Development Framework as well as some national policies and strategies support BT and CBT approaches.
- The tourism policy statements of most Caribbean states do not find resonance in the legislation. Rather, tourism legislation throughout the Caribbean is focused largely on incentivising hotel development, tourism promotions in market countries and setting up standards for compliance by industry practitioners. Tourism policy and actual practice are guided by power relationships, which are heavily slanted in favour of the private investor within the Caribbean context.
- Some countries, such as Saint Lucia, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago have established or are establishing dedicated policies, agencies and initiatives to support CBT.
- The Caribbean is still working towards establishing national and regional coordinating mechanisms with sectoral integration across the public sector, the private sector and civil society. These mechanisms will be essential for a coordinated implementation of BT within this to manage potential conflicts across competing users, while ensuring that coastal and marine ecosystems can continue to provide goods and services to the various users.
- Marine protected area (MPA) management and participatory management approaches support governance of BE, BT and CBT initiatives.

4.1. Stakeholders of blue tourism

The stakeholders found within the tourism sector in the Caribbean are many across the public, private and civil society sectors. The coastal and marine space is a diverse one and stakeholders assume roles and responsibilities based on their commitments, interests and priorities. In the Caribbean, stakeholders are also operating in linked networks functioning at regional, sub-regional, national and local levels. Table 3 illustrates the diversity of stakeholders in the Caribbean BT, but this varies widely across and within countries, especially multi-island states, due to different ecological, socio-economic

and cultural contexts and priorities. See Annex 1 for a more detailed mapping of tourism stakeholders.

In identifying stakeholders, it is also important to understand the tourists who are visiting the Caribbean. While many of the Caribbean visitors continue to be attracted to the traditional 'sun, sea and sand' destinations and all-inclusive resorts, others want a richer and more authentic experience. A trend that has been increasing is seen in a new type of tourist who wants to engage with local people in authentic experiences and who wants to have a positive effect on the environment, or at least to minimise negative impacts (Page et al, 2014). Many of these visitors are interested in individualised and immersive experiences, such as visiting the homes of local people, engaging in their activities, eating local foods, and participating in local community activities. Euromonitor International (2019) conducted a study to segment and profile potential tourists from the United States based on consumer research, and identified different profiles based on specific CBT experiences, their willingness to pay for experiences, and recommendations on how to attract tourists and position activities for optimal benefits.

The village of Laborie in Saint Lucia exemplifies these types of experiences, with visitors attracted by the charms of a simple fishing village which celebrates its cultural and natural heritage. Ecotourists visiting the nature isle of Dominica are captivated by the natural beauty of the island, traditions of the Kalinago Indigenous People, and simple rustic experiences. Similarly, the Brasso Seco Paria community in the northern mountains of Trinidad has developed an integrated visitor experience featuring hiking, agro-tourism tours, festivals, bird watching, and opportunities to buy locally made cocoa and coffee products and other local culinary specialties (Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, 2024).

Airbnb has been hugely important in enabling community tourism accommodation and experience providers to reach visitors. The COVID-19 pandemic also drove visitors to seek experiences in natural and remote areas, away from crowds (United Nations Tourism, 2021).



Laborie village in Saint Lucia provides a genuine immersive experience for visitors. Credit CANARI.

Table 3. Primary and secondary tourism stakeholders

Primary stakeholders	Secondary stakeholders
Tourists	Regional, national and local public sector (regulators, promoters, policy makers) responsible for sectors which are linked to the tourism sector
Tourism businesses	
Investors and developers	
Coastal communities and Indigenous Peoples	
Governmental and inter-governmental and technical organisations directly involved in the tourism sector	Regional/national airlines
Civil society organisations directly involved in the tourism sector	Civil society organisations including academia and research institutes working in related sectors
	Providers of financial and other services

4.2. Policies governing tourism management

4.2.1. Regional level

BT and CBT are supported by the 2020 Caribbean Sustainable Tourism Policy and Development Framework which lays out the policy framework for the sector for the next decade (Caribbean Tourism Organization, 2019). The Framework is a reference tool that offers benefits to member countries, the private sector and regional partners and the CTO, in supporting the sustainable development of tourism and fostering the competitiveness of the regional tourism sector. The Framework is intended to guide the vision for sustainable development of Caribbean tourism for the next decade. It brings together broad but integrated policy thematic areas that reflect current regional needs and priorities seen as critical to the sustainable development of Caribbean tourism.

The Framework is explicitly aligned with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and other global and regional policy agendas on climate change, comprehensive disaster management, trade and development generally. It posits that tourism is an ideal sector to drive sustainable development, including because it is, “one of the few sectors that provides a breadth of opportunities for the poor, the disadvantaged and the marginalised within society” (p. viii), noting that the sector thrives on entrepreneurship and offers opportunities for skilled and unskilled employees so has potential for job creation and poverty alleviation at the local level. It also is unequivocal in its position on sustainability whereby tourism must be managed to, “ensure that the environmental, cultural and other assets upon which the sector depends are preserved for future use” (p. viii). The Vision and twelve principles (Box 9) lay out the Framework.

Regarding BT and a focus on CBT, a few areas of the Framework are especially noteworthy.

Focus area #4 addresses inter-sectoral linkages and value chain management to safeguard community benefits, noting that, “The policy guidelines also ensure that marginalised

Box 9. Vision and 12 guiding principles of the Supporting a Climate Smart and Sustainable Caribbean Tourism Industry 2020 Framework

Vision: Caribbean Tourism that is sustainable, viable, of high quality, climate smart, resilient, and promotes empowerment and inclusiveness.

Guiding principles:

- Mainstream climate change actions
- Multi-hazard management and resilience
- Gender equity consideration
- Contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
- Apply sustainability to all tourism
- Optimal use of natural resources
- Socio-cultural and heritage conservation
- Entrepreneurship and stable employment
- Visitor satisfaction
- Public private partnerships
- Regional collaboration and integration
- Monitoring and evaluation

(Caribbean Tourism Organization, 2019)

communities, including indigenous people, rural and poor communities, benefit from tourism and from integration in the tourism value chain” (p. xvii). Further development of CBT, village-tourism and heritage-tourism are identified as priorities. Furthermore, focus area #4 aims to maximise the multiplier effect by creating linkages with other key economic sectors in order to reduce leakage.

Focus area #5 concentrates on ensuring that growth of the tourism sector is managed to ensure that the environmental, cultural and other assets upon which the sector depends are not damaged and this heritage is sustainably used for the benefit of all. It encompasses efficient resource use and biodiversity and environmental conservation and protection. The stated ambition is for tourism to play a key role in supporting the goals of the CARICOM Biodiversity Strategy and global biodiversity plans.



Day tripping cruise tourists overwhelm Villa Beach in St Vincent.

Credit CANARI.



Climate change causes stronger hurricanes which destroy tourism facilities as experienced on Barbuda with Hurricane Irma. Credit Barbuda Fisherfolk Association.



Sargassum clogs the coastline and access for tourists from the adjacent resort in Tobago. Credit CANARI.

Focus area #6 recognises the vulnerability of the tourism sector to the impacts of climate change (i.e., increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, sea level rise, salt-water intrusion into aquifers, temperature changes, changing rainfall patterns). It notes that tourism activities themselves can generally contribute to causing climate change. Actions proposed focus on both adaptation and mitigation; planning, awareness and partnerships; and addressing Sargassum beachings (recognising the likely link to climate change as one of the causal factors).

To help to deliver the Framework's priorities on CBT, the CTO collaborated with Compete Caribbean to develop the 2019 Community-Based Tourism Handbook (Branch, 2019). This was developed recognising the role of CBT in diversifying the regional tourism product, while also sustaining local livelihoods, and thus contributing to socio-economic development. Alongside practical guidelines intended to support governments and communities to create and deliver successful CBT experiences, the Toolkit includes the definition of CBT in the Caribbean context, which was adopted by CTO since 2006 (Box 2). The development of the Toolkit was sparked after successful cluster initiatives (Boxes 6-8) and recognition of the need to synthesise and promote good practices.

The CBT Toolkit has five components that can be used:

- 1. Tourism Assets Inventory Tool
- 2. Community CBT Diagnostic Tool
- 3. CBT Profile Tool
- 4. CBT Enterprise Handbook
- 5. Market Research of US-Based Consumers on willingness to pay for CBT products and services

To further solidify its commitment to the advancement of CBT, the CTO also launched the Caribbean Community Tourism Network (CCTN) which provides an avenue to support the development of the niche tourism practice with mechanisms for sharing best practices among member countries. The CCTN is designed to promote and support regional development strategies in CBT, to provide input into and recommend activities and actions with a view to enhancing the visibility and value of CBT as a regional tourism product, and to facilitate the exchange of experiences on national and regional initiatives (Caribbean Tourism Organization, 2021).

4.2.2. National level

National tourism policies also generally include elements which speak to environmental sustainability, the importance of protecting natural ecosystems and assets upon which the tourism sector depends, alongside the need to drive economic development and job creation. At the national level, countries such as Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Grenada have recognised CBT as a means of offering a unique national product that not only sets them apart but also provides meaningful impacts to its people.

For example, the National Community Tourism Policy and Strategy of Jamaica 2015 notes that, "...goals for community tourism call for an internationally competitive community tourism sector that contributes to national interests while generating benefits for communities." (Ministry of Tourism and Entertainment, 2015, p. vii). Recognised for its initiatives regionally, Jamaica's community tourism network 'Country Style' and the programme 'Unique Jamaica' have been established to promote CBT and to offer tourists a diverse community experience during their visit which can be easily accessed and booked through the Ministry's official website. Furthermore, in 2020 it was announced that a Community Tourism Unit would be established to further expand locals' participation in the industry and offer unique local experiences to visitors. Jamaica also revised their National Community Tourism Policy and Strategy taking into account lessons learnt and the integration of the cluster approach (Ministry of Tourism and Entertainment, 2015).



The Tobago Cays is a major sailing destination supporting economic development in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Credit CANARI.

Grenada's National Sustainable Development Plan 2020-2035 speaks directly about CBT and advocates for the mainstreaming of nature-based tourism, ecotourism and cultural tourism. The plan identifies nature-based tourism and ecotourism as opportunities to develop CBT activities such as home tours that provide home-cooked meals and cultural exchanges, walkthroughs of village gardens and fishing excursions with local fisher folks (National Plan Secretariat, Ministry of Finance, Planning, Economic, and Physical Development, 2019).

The national Community-Based Tourism Sub-Policy of Trinidad and Tobago being developed (Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, 2024) provides an example for other countries in the region in terms of a CBT focused policy. The rationale provided for the Sub-Policy was to support tourism diversification, leverage the ability of tourism to empower people and provide them with the skills to achieve change within their local community, and to further sustainability in the tourism sector appreciating that sustainability is one of the core principles of CBT. The Sub-Policy drew on the CTO's Community-Based Tourism Toolkit and defines CBT as, "A type of tourism that engages and empowers local residents in the development, management and ownership of tourism products and services in their communities. It emphasises the need to protect, preserve and promote the environment, historical and socio-cultural assets of the community" (p. 18).

4.3. Legislation governing tourism management

Whilst legislation should reflect policy, the tourism policy statements of most Caribbean states regarding sustainability and CBT do not find resonance in the legislation. Rather, tourism legislation throughout the Caribbean is focused largely on incentivising hotel development, tourist promotions in market countries and setting up standards for compliance by industry practitioners. Tourism policy direction is a direct reflection of the interests of tourism stakeholders and the power of these stakeholders (McLeod, 2023). In SIDS particularly, especially where tourism is a major driver of economic development, the influx of investors tends to disempower local communities (Hampton et al, 2015). It is therefore not surprising that tourism legislation is increasingly punitive and not developmental despite the political rhetoric. In fact, whilst many countries declare that they are pursuing, or wish to pursue, policies for 'sustainable tourism', there has long been a degree of uncertainty over the scope and priorities for making tourism more sustainable and only partial appreciation of how to put this into practice (United Nations Environment Programme and World Tourism Organisation, 2005) which continues today. Rhetoric on sustainable tourism is not yet reflected in the development of enabling legislation.

For example, the **Tourism Development Act Chapter 341 of Barbados** (2002 and amended in 2014), which claims to encourage sustainable development of the tourism industry, largely deals with duty-free and income tax concessions for approved tourism businesses. Antigua and Barbuda's Tourism Authority Act (No. 4 of 2015) and Tourism Licensing and Classification Act (No. 4 of 2019) speak to the institutional management of the tourism industry and enforcement of

standards, respectively. In 2020, Jamaica announced four new pieces of legislation intended to strengthen the country's tourism sector. However, these were bills directly related to product development infrastructure and the Tourist Board Act amendments which aimed to modernise and strengthen enforcement provisions, and the Travel Agency Act and Regulations to include procedures for the application and registration of travel agencies (Mondle, 2020).

Notably, Saint Lucia recently passed Community Tourism Development Act (2022) that saw the establishment of a Community Tourism Agency to discover unique offerings, creating opportunities, and grow tourism businesses and experiences that result in sustained livelihoods for all involved. The potential for continued legislative reform to support CBT across the Caribbean can build on this example.

4.4. Governance arrangements

The Caribbean is still working towards establishing national and regional coordinating mechanisms with sectoral integration across the public, private and civil society sectors. This will be essential for a coordinated approach to implementation of BE, and tourism within this, to manage potential conflicts across competing users, while ensuring that coastal and marine ecosystems can continue to provide goods and services to the various users (McConney and Compton, 2021).

At the sub-regional and regional levels, Ocean Governance Committees have been proposed for the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) as well as initiatives focused on regional governance frameworks for the Caribbean Sea and other linked Large Marine Ecosystems (McConney and Compton 2021). Three regional initiatives that focused on integrated regional ocean governance are: the ACS Caribbean Sea Initiative (1999-ongoing); the OECS Eastern Caribbean Regional Ocean Policy (2010-ongoing); and the UNDP Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem (CLME) Initiative funded by the Global Environment Facility (1999-ongoing). After extensive inter-governmental negotiations, the last initiative has successfully established a Coordinating Mechanism consisting of the following regional and global inter-governmental organisations which have a mandate related to ocean governance:

- UNEP represented by the Cartagena Convention Secretariat
- FAO on behalf of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC)
- Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO-IOC)
- Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM)
- Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organisation (OSPESCA)
- Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD)
- CARICOM Secretariat
- OECS Commission

At the national level, inter-sectoral coordination mechanisms will be key and can be used to help deliver effective BT through facilitating coordination across sectors and stakeholders. For example, an Integrated Coastal Zone Management Committee was appointed in Trinidad and Tobago in

Table 4. Examples of policies and strategies on community-based tourism in the Caribbean

Country	Policy or strategy	Main scope
Jamaica	National Community Tourism Policy and Strategy of Jamaica (2015)	Promote community tourism and offer tourists a diverse community experience which can be booked through the Ministry's official website. A Community Tourism Unit has been established to expand locals' participation in the industry and offer unique local experiences to visitors.
Trinidad and Tobago	Community-Based Tourism Sub-Policy (2021)	Support tourism diversification, leverage the ability of tourism to empower people and provide them with the skills to achieve change within their local community
Grenada	National Sustainable Development Plan (2020-2035)	Identifies nature and ecotourism as opportunities to develop CBT activities.
Saint Lucia	Community Tourism Development Act (2022)	A Community Tourism Agency has been established to discover unique offerings, creating opportunities, and grow tourism businesses and experiences that result in sustained livelihoods for all involved.
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	Ecotourism and community-based tourism policy	Currently in development*.

* Ministry of Tourism, personal communication, June 10, 2024

January 2024 and includes a representative of the Ministry of Tourism. However, non-governmental stakeholders are not appointed as members of the Committee (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Ministry of Planning and Development, 2024).

For CBT, coordination will also be important at the local level and the model of the Laborie Development Foundation in Saint Lucia (Laborie Development Foundation, 2024), which brings together many community organisations across tourism and other sectors and interests, may be useful to explore.

Some countries have gone the way of establishing dedicated coastal zone management organisations which can lead on stakeholder coordination, for example Barbados (The Coastal Zone Management Unit, 2023) and Belize (Coastal Zone Management and Authority and Institute, 2019). But generally, the picture across the Caribbean is still one where mechanisms for coordinating among multiple stakeholders across sectors and at different levels are lacking. Effective BE, BT and CBT fundamentally require effective coordination and management of potential conflicts across users, and this is a significant gap which needs to be addressed (Coastal Zone Management and Authority, 2019).

4.5. Management tools and approaches

Marine protected areas (MPAs) have traditionally been used as a tool to protect these important ecosystems and manage resource exploitation and stakeholder conflicts in coastal and marine areas through zoning and other legislative instruments. In the wider Caribbean there are 15 Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas declared under the Convention on Biological Diversity, two Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas designated under the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, 1973 as modified by the Protocol of 1978 (MARPOL 73/78), nearly 100 sites under the Convention

on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (the Ramsar Convention), 35 protected areas under the SPAW Protocol of the Cartagena Convention, six World Heritage Natural Sites under the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, approximately 330 Key Biodiversity Areas and many Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas in coastal areas. The area of marine and coastal ecosystems protected increased nearly 29-fold from pre-1983 to 2014 (United Nations Environment Programme-Caribbean Environment Programme, 2020).

The designation of MPAs continues to increase, catalysed for example by the **Caribbean Challenge Initiative**² which aimed to conserve and effectively manage at least 20 percent of the marine and coastal environment by 2020. However, concerns persist about the effectiveness of management of these areas and there are numerous capacity building initiatives that aim to address this (United Nations Environment Programme-Caribbean Environment Programme, 2020).

Caribbean experiences with the use of MPAs has not always been ideal. Firstly, most MPAs were established as fishing management instruments, and in the main most fishers tend to respect the boundaries and rules of engagement. However, the approach has generally not been developmental but punitive and enforcement rather than active participation to encourage compliance has been the dominant approach. Indicators to reflect success of MPAs have generally been measured in terms of prosecution of offenders and fines paid. Most MPA managers agree that non-compliant fishers are generally in the minority, even though their single actions may impact the entire workings of the protected area. Conflicts between the fisheries and tourism sectors are significant and require careful management. The tourism sector and recreational and cultural uses of MPAs have been integrated into MPA management, including through regulations and zoning.

2 <https://caribbeanchallengeinitiative.com/>



The Portland Bight Protected Area in Jamaica is managed by the Caribbean Coastal Area Management Foundation which conducts boats tours in the Salt River mangroves. Credit CANARI.

More broadly, participatory approaches to managing coastal and marine areas – both within and outside of MPAs – have become the norm in the Caribbean³ and are a critical feature in CBT approaches. Among the optimal benefits of natural resource management by host communities is that they have everything to gain or lose by improper management of the resource base. The value of participatory natural resource management has been identified as a process that facilitates dialogue among all actors, mobilises and validates popular knowledge and skills, encourages communities and their institutions to manage and control resources, seeks to achieve sustainability, economic equity and social justice, and maintains cultural integrity (Clauzel, 2022). Participation in natural resource management could range from one end whereby community opinions are invited but may or may not influence management decisions, to cases of devolution where management responsibility is wholly transferred from an agency (usually the State) to a local community group. This form of management is oftentimes referred to as community-based natural resource management and has been used successfully across the region, for example in the well-known Soufriere Marine Management Area in Saint Lucia.

Perhaps the more important lesson to be learned from the process of devolving management responsibilities to local communities is that it must be supported by institutional strengthening, capacity building and sustained conflict management. Clauzel (2022) writing in support of CBT as a strategy for sustainable tourism at the community level, offers the concept of a ‘caring entrepreneur’. He contends that whilst establishing and operating a tourism business in a community where the prerequisite business and organisational acumen may be lacking, the intervention of external stakeholder support must be guided by a strong commitment to the development priorities of the host community. He goes on to propose that opposing objectives of the two groups, whilst inevitable, must be negotiated fairly, and that host communities, for their part, must recognise their business management limitations.

The next section draws on this institutional framework, and the needs and opportunities for CBT in the Caribbean, to highlight challenges which will need to be addressed in BT and CBT.

3 For example, co-management of coastal and marine areas is practised in Bahamas, Belize, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

5. Challenges, vulnerabilities and impacts of blue tourism

KEY MESSAGES

- The Caribbean tourism sector is plagued by high economic leakages, with small and micro businesses being left out of the tourism value chain and limited benefits going to Caribbean communities.
- Restricted access to beaches and takeover of prime beachfront for tourism development has negative social impacts. Tourism can also threaten Caribbean cultural heritage.
- The tourism sector is also having negative impacts on the environment through pollution, destruction or degradation of ecosystems and diversion of surface water and groundwater. Tourism demands coupled with the impacts of climate change have also resulted in stresses to the water, food and energy sectors.
- Stronger storms, extreme rainfall, increased sea surface temperatures, ocean acidification, sea level rise and higher waves due to climate change has resulted in the devastation of fragile ecosystems which are keystones for the region's tourism product. Climate change will also exacerbate pollution from increased runoff and Sargassum influxes. Stronger storms will have devastating impacts on tourism infrastructure. Climate change will also impact the tourism sector indirectly via higher energy costs, higher insurance rates, challenges accessing freshwater, health challenges of workers, and reduced visitor demand.
- With low economic diversification, constrained fiscal spaces, scarce economic mitigation capacities, and high dependence on remittances, the Caribbean and other SIDS are extremely vulnerable to external shocks such as pandemics and the effects of global conflicts.

5.1. Economic leakages

Delivery of overall benefits from the tourism industry is dependent on how much money stays within host destinations. The World Bank has conservatively estimated leakage rates of 55 percent to over 80 percent for some SIDS such as the Bahamas (Jayawardena and Ramajeessingh, 2003). In the Eastern Caribbean, 68 percent of tourism expenditure is allocated to imported luxury items such as watches and perfumes (Dukharan, 2023). All-inclusive product experiences represent a significant portion of tourism flows and also account for high leakage rates due to repatriation of a percentage of investments as most companies and assets are foreign owned. A value chain study conducted by Duke University highlighted that cruise companies captured up to 70 percent of prices paid by tourists for excursions, which are sold before port arrival (Daly and Fernandez-Stark, 2018). High leakage rates also result in reduced linkages with important sectors and communities of host destinations, with small and micro businesses being left out of the tourism value chain (Leotaud et al, 2021; Crisman & Winters, 2023).

5.2. Social and cultural impacts of tourism

Restricted access to beaches by locals is also an issue. Jamaica is one of the countries where public access to the beach is not provided for in legislation, and some beaches such as Bob Marley Beach are closed off to the public. The privatisation of beaches and the controversial sale of prime beachfront property to tourism developers is seen as a direct threat to the heritage and rights of Caribbean people. Public outcry has resulted for example in Saint Lucia regarding the sale of land around the Pitons, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, in Tobago where a proposed Sandals resort would have restricted beach access for locals, and currently in Barbuda where a tourism development is threatening an important wetland and local livelihoods (Mohammed, 2023). Advocacy and increasingly litigation are being used by the public to seek to protect their rights to a healthy environment and access to information, participation and justice in environmental matters. The tourism sector is a target where developments are perceived to threaten these rights.

There are also fears that mass tourism models detract from the Caribbean's cultural heritage. Cheap foreign produced items dominate craft markets and genuine locally produced crafts are too often not seen as attractive or affordable preferred alternatives. All-inclusive resorts are designed to capture the attention of tourists, who are less inclined to visit authentic cultural heritage offerings in villages, so support is diverted away from protection and further development of the Caribbean's cultural heritage offerings. Tourism here is seen as neo-colonialism which threatens heritage justice; a more inclusive and equitable tourism model is needed (Fortenberry, 2020).



Local craft promotes Laborie village in Saint Lucia. Credit CANARI.

5.3. Environmental impacts

The tourism sector has also faced criticisms of negative impacts on the environment (Jayawardena and Ramajeesingh, 2003).

CMT takes place in a context of limited space for development due to rugged interior terrain and overall small sizes of most Caribbean SIDS. For the islands, most economic activity, infrastructure and key services are located along or near a narrow coastline creating intense competition for space and clearing and degradation of coastal and marine ecosystems as a result (Walker, 2022). Coral reefs, seagrass beds and mangroves have already been severely degraded across the Caribbean driven by coastal development and over exploitation, and threats from pollution, invasive species, climate change, extreme weather events and Sargassum influxes (see section 2.1). Globally, these ecosystems are facing continued and escalating threats due to climate change as well as human behaviour associated with poor coastal planning and extractive industries, tourism being one of the key ones (Table 5) and this also applies in the Caribbean.

The impact of the tourism sector on coastal and marine ecosystems which support the sector and other BE activities stems from pollution activities associated with the cruise industry (Amine et al, 2022), the yachting sector (Didier, 2021), coastal recreational activities including marine-based sporting activities (Amine et al, 2022), as well as the siting of coastal resorts. Barbados experienced extensive coral damage after 28 cruise ships were allowed to anchor on the south and west coasts in 2020 seeking refuge during the COVID-19 pandemic (Small and Oxenford, 2022).

Tourism demands coupled with the impacts of climate change have also resulted in stresses to the water, food and energy sectors for Caribbean SIDS (Crisman and Winters, 2023). The paradox is that BT depends on the pristine condition of fragile ecosystems and resources which are being degraded by unsustainable tourism practices.

Aruba serves as a striking example of the consequences of uncontrolled tourism expansion. Despite having a population of 105,000 and a land area of approximately 178 square kilometres, Aruba welcomed over a million tourists in 2017 (Jurgens et al, 2024). The wide-ranging effects of excessive tourism are typically felt in various direct and indirect areas. Direct impacts of over-tourism include diminished or adverse effects on tourism's contribution to GDP, reduced average spending by visitors, increased import dependency, heightened use of resources, focused exportation within the tourism sector, inflation in tourism-related prices, competing land space for alternative activities such as agriculture and escalated government expenditures. Indirect transmission of over-tourism affects the socio-ecological fabric of communities, leading to stagnant labour participation rates, restricted or declining income equality, uneven distribution of income, rising social costs, dominance of foreign ownership in the tourism industry, concentration of tourism activities in specific geographical areas, inflation of real estate prices, environmental degradation, loss of natural habitats, and a declining contribution of tourism to ecological preservation efforts.

5.4. Climate vulnerability

Tourism in the Caribbean is facing an existential crisis due to climate change, with protected changes in tropical storms (cyclones), extreme rainfall, sea surface temperatures (SST), ocean acidification, sea level rise and sea wave heights (Table 6).

The 2018 special report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (IPCC, 2018) predicted that a 1.5 degrees Celsius increase in global warming would cause between 70 and 90 percent of the world's coral reefs to disappear. Increased SST has already resulted in devastating impacts on sensitive ecosystems, with NOAA confirming the fourth global coral bleaching event being experienced in 2024 (NOAA, 2024). These events negatively impact the health of the ecosystem as corals are important for the provisioning of homes for juvenile fish species and other aquatic life which are essential for fisheries and CMT activities such as snorkelling.

Damage to coral reefs also reduces coastal protection services as they act as natural breakers to waves and storms. This means an increased likelihood of sea level rise and waves from storms threatening coastal tourism infrastructure. Tourism losses and infrastructural damage from sea level rise can amount up to US\$22 billion per year by 2050 and US\$46 billion per year by 2100, representing 10 percent and 22 percent respectively of current regional GDP (Thomas et al, 2018).

The Caribbean region has also been labelled as one of the most vulnerable to natural disasters in the world. According to research by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), of the 511 disasters worldwide to hit small states since 1950, around two-thirds (324) have been in the Caribbean. Their analysis indicates that this region is up to seven times more likely to experience a natural disaster than larger states, and when one occurs, countries incur as much as six times more damage. Climate change will only intensify these events. Climatic hazards such as tropical cyclones pose multi-faceted threats to coastal tourism, inflicting physical damage to infrastructure, causing business interruption, and requiring the evacuation of tourists, not to mention the ensuing damage to the destination's image. Rapid-onset events such as tropical cyclones which are classified as tropical depressions, tropical storms and hurricanes cause an estimated US\$835 million worth of damage annually in the Caribbean (Lewis, 2022).



Coral bleaching is a severe threat to Caribbean coral reefs.

Credit British Virgin Islands National Trust.

Table 5. Environmental impacts of community-based tourism globally

Category	Specific impacts
Environmental degradation and pollution	Degradation and pollution from golf courses Pollution by littering Greenhouse gas emissions
Destruction of habitats and damage to ecosystems	Destruction of high-quality natural environments Unmanaged human interference of species of fauna and flora Dynamite blasting and over-fishing
Loss of coastal and marine resources	Interference with inland and coastal natural processes (excessive groundwater extraction by large resorts) Coastal ecosystem damage and destruction through tourism development Terrestrial runoff and dredging on coastal areas (damage to coral reefs and marine resources caused by the construction of tourist infrastructure) Destruction by tourist activities (destruction of coral reefs, lagoons, mangroves, saltwater marshes, and wetlands due to excessive visitation and/or unmanaged exploitation of those resources disturbance) Introduced exotic species which can be destructive to indigenous flora and fauna
Coastal pollution	Wastewater discharge and sewage pollution Coastal water pollution and siltation due to nearshore resort construction and runoff from resort areas Marine and harbour pollution Coastal oil pollution due to motorized vehicles and ships
Surface water and groundwater diversion	Diversion of streams and water sources from local use to resort use, resulting in a decline in water availability for domestic and other productive uses and farming

(Extracted from Duan et al, 2022).

Increased runoff due to climatic heavy rain events will also increase runoff of solid and liquid pollution from land-based sources, which is already a serious issue in the Caribbean (Taylor et al, 2021). This includes pollution from untreated wastewater, domestic grey water, agricultural runoff, and urban solid waste, including plastic and microplastics. Ocean-based pollution sources, for example from maritime transportation and offshore mining, are also a challenge. Pollution impacts on ecosystems which are key for the tourism sector, and also creates poor aesthetics at key tourism sites. Pollution also has direct impacts on human health (Corbin, 2021). Initiatives such as the Blue Flag programme indicate water quality at beaches but are not widely taken up in the Caribbean where low ratings would deter visitors.

Warming of ocean temperatures has also resulted in large brown mats of Atlantic Sargassum in the Caribbean Basin. The influx of the Sargassum along Caribbean coasts chokes and smothers corals and wildlife, impacting fisheries and other service industries dependent on coastal and marine areas. The sight and unpleasant smells produced from decomposition has led to the early closure of hotels and resorts due to room cancellations located near the coast and halted all CMT activities in affected areas (United Nations Environment Programme, 2021).

Climate change will also impact on the tourism sector indirectly. Higher energy demand for cooling and higher insurance rates will increase operational costs. Access to fresh-water may become more difficult. Workers may experience health challenges, for example from heat stress and increase in vector-borne diseases (e.g., dengue). Reduced demand may be a consequence of widely reported threats and actual

or perceived impacts of hurricanes and Sargassum. Increased desire to reduce carbon footprints may also drive visitors to alternate destinations (Corbin, 2021).

Furthermore, vicious feedback loops exacerbate the impacts of climate change and natural disasters, increasing public debt and rigid financing schemes. The development of innovative shock response financing mechanisms is becoming increasingly important to ensure business continuity within the short, medium and long-term. Given the high exposure of BT to the impacts of climate change and natural disasters, building resilience of operations within CBT can adapt innovative models such as adaptive social protection (Cornelius, 2018).

Finance mechanisms such as microinsurance can achieve adaptive social protection. Microinsurance is a key component of shock-responsive social protection as it presents the most vulnerable and those with low income the ability to protect themselves against risks. It can also be seen as a risk transfer mechanism and a strategy in disaster risk management. Ground-breaking tools such as the Flexible Hurricane Protection parametric insurance product piloted in Dominica in 2021 provided an alternative to traditional indemnity insurance. Supported by Compete Caribbean, the Climate Resilience Execution Agency for Dominica (CREAD) partnered with the Dominica Co-operative Societies League (a credit union association), to offer individuals access to parametric insurance coverage for storms and hurricanes. The parametric product allows for quick payout within 15 days as once an event meets the parameters set then payment is triggered. Businesses can access and customise their coverage according to their financial capacity and risk preferences, with coverage ranging

Table 6. Historical and future change in marine climate variables for the Caribbean

Marine climate variables	Historical changes	Projected changes
Tropical cyclones	Increase in potential destructiveness since 1980s Increase in intensity and storm duration since 1970s Increase in average number of Category 4 and 5 hurricanes per year over the last 30 years	Increase in most intense storms Increase in rainfall amounts and maximum hurricane wind speed (by up to 11%, depending on warming scenario) by end of century
Extreme rainfall	Small increase in heavy rainfall associated with rain events in some parts of the Caribbean Increase in drought risk since 1950s	Increase in heavy rainfall by 2100 with regional variations Significant drying after 2050 with up to 10% of Caribbean land masses under drought
Sea surface temperatures	Increase over the Wider Caribbean (-1°C per century) and the Antilles (-1.3°C per century)	For business-as-usual, further increase in sea surface temperatures in the Antilles (-1.39-2.21°C per century) and for the Wider Caribbean (-1.37-2.15°C per century), with intensification towards the end of the century
Ocean acidification	Increase in surface ocean acidity (by -12%) over past three decades Decrease in surface aragonite saturation state (by -8%) over past three decades	Increase in acidity by 58% by 2100s Decrease in sea surface saturation state by 32% by 2100s
Sea level rise	Increase in Caribbean Sea levels around global mean values (-0.19 ± 0.02 m) for 1901 to 2010	For business-as-usual, increase in Caribbean Sea levels by -1 m by end of century Southernmost Caribbean show marginally higher rates of increase
Sea wave heights	Positive trends in significant wave heights since 1948	Negative trends in significant wave heights -1-2% by the end of century

(Taylor et al, 2021).

between US\$475 to US\$100,000. As of June 2023, 66 policies had been purchased with a combined purchase value of US\$55,000, and a coverage value of US\$422,000. This represents an 80 percent increase from the pilot project which ended in 2022 (Bertrand and Hamilton, 2024).

The public sector can consider enhancing mitigation, adaptation and resilience in destinations through targeted and tailored capacity building, financial actions at the destination level and communication for awareness building at regional and national levels. For example, the consolidation of observatories, organisation of forums, and committees composed of local stakeholders can address the needs of destinations facing climate change (European Small Islands Federation, 2023).

5.5. COVID-19 and external shocks

With low economic diversification, constrained fiscal spaces, scarce economic mitigation capacities, and high dependence on remittances, the Caribbean and other SIDS are extremely vulnerable to external shocks and were projected to suffer even more significantly than other countries from the economic effects of the COVID-19 crisis. In 2020, their total GDP dropped by 7.1 percent, compared to a decrease of 4.1 percent in other developing countries (Piemonte, 2021).

Caribbean tourism services were dramatically impacted by the COVID-19 lock-down and the restrictions on travel, especially from major source markets like the United States. The pandemic led to closure of airports, cruise ship docks, restaurants and dive shops and deprived the Caribbean of tens of billions of dollars. The IMF estimated that up to 2019, visitors from the US market alone contributed almost US\$60 billion to the GDP of Caribbean economies (Mu et al, 2023). Escalating commodity prices and fall in remittances also pose a great threat to the fiscal stability of Caribbean SIDS (Ratzlaff and Trenchi, 2023).

Beyond COVID-19, recovery and transformation efforts for the tourism industry must also consider the impacts of the current global geopolitical context. The war in Ukraine is significantly affecting the Caribbean's principal markets. Coupled with high levels of imported inflation, hike in oil prices and airfares, significant price increases across the industry, and a consequent reorientation in visitor demand, 2024 is forecasted to see a decline in visitors (Jessop, 2022).

Caribbean SIDS and their tourism sectors will remain vulnerable to these external shocks.

The next section considers these challenges and lays out policy recommendations to support CBT as part of BT in the Caribbean.

6. Policy recommendations to support community-based tourism approaches in blue tourism

KEY MESSAGES

The following policy recommendations are proposed to facilitate CBT within environmentally sustainable and inclusive BT:

1. Assess and promote the socio-economic and environmental benefits of CBT through comprehensive data collection, market studies and the development of assessment frameworks.
2. Reform policies and laws to support CBT by incentivising community-based tourism developments and providing special support for inclusive and sustainable tourism models.
3. Incorporate environmental sustainability and economic inclusion into the planning of tourism development, focusing on reducing environmental footprint and ensuring equity and justice.
4. Support the adoption of inclusive governance models for decision-making, ensuring multi-stakeholder coordination, addressing community priorities and strengthening institutions.
5. Mainstream social justice principles to involve local stakeholders in building resilience, resolving conflicts, addressing gender disparities and ensuring the equitable distribution of tourism benefits.
6. Integrate and mainstream climate resilience in planning, development and management of the tourism sector.
7. Develop innovative and flexible financing to support blue-green business models and business continuity and ensure community access to financial mechanisms.
8. Establish business support organisations which are accessible and can provide tailored capacity building for CBT micro and small businesses.
9. Support digitisation of micro and small enterprises in the CBT sector to enhance the sustainability of CBT operations, coordination of CBT activities at community level, access to needed markets and equitable benefit sharing from CBT activities.
10. Build multi-sectoral networks empowering and supporting CBT through partnerships.

6.1. Reimagining Caribbean tourism

CMT is a crucial component to the overall tourism product of Caribbean SIDS and the overall sustainable development agenda. However, despite its importance, the current model of CMT is unsustainable. With the existential crisis of climate change, disasters and external economic shocks, negative impacts on host destinations are exacerbated. Economic, social

and environmental assets needed to support sustainable forms of BT are being degraded.

The Caribbean's reimagining of the tourism sector points to CBT as a potential model to drive a type of BT which is environmentally sustainable while delivering economic benefits to local communities.

While the Caribbean has positive experiences with CBT to draw upon, much remains to be done to achieve scale, sustainability and impact.

6.2. Policy recommendations

The following policy recommendations, summarised in Table 7, provide strengthened support for the CBT sector in the Caribbean.

1. Assess and promote the socio-economic and environmental benefits of CBT through comprehensive data collection, market studies and the development of assessment frameworks.

Many CBT micro-enterprises are part of the informal sector, meaning that capturing their true economic impact is challenging. Data on the triple bottom line economic, environmental and social impacts is needed to drive and inform policy commitment towards supporting CBT and transitioning away from other unsustainable tourism models in the Caribbean. Market studies to confirm the shift in trends towards authentic and interactive tourism experience and common assessment indicators and frameworks are needed to guide rigorous studies on CBT throughout the region to determine the existing and potential contribution of this sub-sector to socio-economic development and environmental stewardship. Data collection should draw on both scientific and local and traditional knowledge for informed decision-making.



Sampling locally grown watermelon is part of the authentic experience in Nariva Swamp tours in Trinidad. Credit CANARI.

2. Reform policies and laws to support CBT by incentivising community-based tourism developments and providing special support for inclusive and sustainable tourism models.

Reform policies, laws and plans related to tourism. These should be more critical before incentivising new development of tourism infrastructure such as hotels, and in promoting higher tourist numbers and instead place more attention in fostering good practice through incentivising rather than being punitive, including special support to inclusive and sustainable tourism models, such as in CBTs. Moreover, the development of sub-sector policies and plans to strengthen the enabling environment for CBT remains essential.

3. Incorporate environmental sustainability and economic inclusion into the planning of tourism development, focusing on reducing environmental footprint and ensuring equity and justice.

Support transformation in approaches to tourism in the sector as part of green and blue economy approaches. Focus on decreasing the environmental footprint of the sector by, for instance, supporting more sustainable practices, community engagement and monitoring mechanisms, and emphasising environmental stewardship alongside ensuring economic inclusion and social equity and justice. The public sector should support the minimisation of social and environmental pressures on destinations through incentives, and the use of sustainability-recognised standards, such as certifications, ensuring that these are accessible to tourism SMEs and that they are monitored and adapted over time.

4. Support the adoption of inclusive governance models for decision-making, ensuring multi-stakeholder coordination, addressing community priorities and strengthening institutions.

Multi-stakeholder and multi-sector coordination is required at local, national, regional and international levels to ensure that stakeholders have ample opportunities to actively participate in decision making processes. Good governance can be delivered through intersectoral coordination mechanisms that are multi-sectoral and multi-layered to engage the complexity of actors and issues encompassing marine governance. Ensuring that community stakeholders have a voice in decisions which directly or indirectly impacts their quality of life is critical. Community priorities must be addressed to ensure socio-economic inclusion and equity in the distribution of benefits if tourism is expected to meet its all-encompassing developmental objectives.

Governance mechanisms must allow for:

- managing relationships between the host community and other supporting institutions including investors;
- navigating the differences between investor priorities and community priorities;
- clearly defining obligations and deliverables with specific consequences between all parties;
- connecting actors and integrating systems in BT;
- forming linkages to national and regional processes;
- facilitating an enabling an environment for participation and flexibility;
- including the comprehensive set of actors, both state (government and inter-governmental agencies) and non-state



Sailing has a low environmental footprint and fosters environmental stewardship. Credit Nicole Leotaud.



Community stakeholders in coastal villages like Parlatuvier in Tobago need to have a say in how the bay is used. Credit Niamh Vaughn.

- (civil society including academia) and private sector (including MSMEs); and
- strengthening institutions to manage tourism and its supporting BE resources.

5. Mainstream social justice principles to involve local stakeholders in building resilience, resolving conflicts, addressing gender disparities and ensuring the equitable distribution of tourism benefits.

With competition for limited resources, there are many reported instances of conflict between tourism development and local communities. With conflicting agendas and the need to compete with similar destinations, decision-making processes often exclude the concerns and priorities of local stakeholders which in some cases results in negative socio-economic and environmental impacts. With CBT rooted in local participation, having the input of local stakeholders in the allocation and use of resources not just aids in developing a more inclusive tourism product but also helps communities build resilience to climate change and natural hazards. Furthermore, as the impacts of tourism and climate change are gendered, it presents an opportunity to build youth and gender-sensitive policies and programmes in addition to presenting more opportunities to women. This supports a more equitable distribution of the tourism benefits.

6. Integrate and mainstream climate resilience in planning, development and management of the tourism sector.

Given the extreme vulnerability of the Caribbean's tourism sector to climate change, and the likelihood of increasing and severe impacts, incorporating strategies and actions to address risks and build resilience in tourism policies and plans is essential. Conduct mapping of climate vulnerabilities along tourism and CBT value chains and assess feasible and impactful adaptation measures which can be taken by governments and tourism businesses will help mainstream climate resilience in the sector. At the business level, technical and financial support to help CBT providers to 'climate proof' their businesses should be provided where absent. Facilitate knowledge sharing through platforms and communities of practice.

7. Develop innovative and flexible financing to support blue-green business models and business continuity and ensure community access to financial mechanisms.

It is critical for existing and aspiring micro and small enterprises in CBT to access microfinance to propel initiatives. Financing can be shifted away from facilitating visitor access through investments in larger ports and terminals towards innovative and flexible financing to support micro and small businesses in coastal communities. Microfinancing architecture for CBT may include diverse financing tools. Supporting mechanisms are instrumental for equipping established and new community entrepreneurs with the required skills and knowledge to successfully access finance. Moreover, microinsurance is a key component of shock-responsive social protection as it presents the most vulnerable and those with low-income the ability to protect themselves against risks. Existing parametric insurance products being piloted in the Caribbean can be expanded to support CBT.

8. Establish business support organisations which are accessible and can provide tailored capacity building for CBT micro and small businesses.

Develop one-stop-shop business support organisations which can provide tailored capacity building for CBT service providers, including in sustainable business models, collaborative CBT approaches, access to market at national and international levels, and delivery of triple bottom-line economic, environmental and social co-benefits. These one-stop-shops should also provide ongoing support to access finance. Encourage the establishment of business support organisations within communities, in turn supported by provincial or national entities, leveraging successful models and established community organisations and networks. Promote continued assessment of needs and opportunities through these supporting organisations.

9. Support digitisation of micro and small enterprises in the CBT sector to enhance the sustainability of CBT operations, coordination of CBT activities at community level, access to needed markets and equitable benefit sharing from CBT activities.

After COVID-19, there was evident yearning for adventure, nature-based activities and local tourist experiences. This shift in market preferences was championed by Generation Y and Z which are therefore key demographics to be targeted.

With the allure of Caribbean getaways transcending beyond magazine pages, brochures and posters, tourism micro and small enterprises need an online presence to market unique experiences and packaged products that are sustainable and means to facilitate digital payments. Moreover, and specifically for the management of CBT destinations, digital tools can be fostered to facilitate coordination within and among CBTs, and promote access to untapped tangible and intangible heritage, often representing the Unique Selling Point of smaller communities and villages. However, to support the digital transformation, capacities need to be built along with the implementation of appropriate policies, legislation and infrastructural development and partnerships.

10. Build multi-sectoral networks empowering and supporting CBT through partnerships.

Fostering collaboration and partnerships among stakeholders at different levels, including regional, is required to foster linkages along the tourism value chain and with associated sectors in Caribbean SIDS. These partnerships should increasingly recognise that enterprises and communities in host destinations are not just receivers of funding but rather important actors in the tourism value chain. Value chain linkages, that can also be supported by digital tools, will encourage locally driven economic development and business clusters in communities across the region in favour of more collaborative and less competitive approaches. Destination Management Organisations and tour operators would be key in pushing forward an attractive CBT in the region through the creation of CBT packages in collaboration with interested communities, based on knowledge sharing and good practices.

With concerted focus on these policy recommendations, CBT has the potential to support transformation of the CMT or BT sector and deliver economic, social and environmental co-benefits and more inclusive, environmentally sustainable and climate resilient economic development for the Caribbean.



The famous Pitons are part of the Soufriere Marine Management Area in Saint Lucia, managed using a multi-stakeholder co-management model. Credit CANARI.

Table 7. Summary of proposed policy pathways for strengthened CBT in Caribbean SIDS

Policy pathways	Suggested actions
1. Evaluate and promote the socio-economic and environmental benefits of CBT through comprehensive data collection, market studies, and the development of assessment frameworks.	<p>1.1 Develop assessment frameworks and indicators to guide CBT studies.</p> <p>1.2. Analyse CBT benefits and impacts through comprehensive data collection and market studies.</p> <p>1.3. Monitor, over time, the benefits and impacts of CBTs to inform development and management of CBT models.</p>
2. Reform policies and laws to support CBT by incentivising community-based tourism development and providing special support for inclusive and sustainable tourism models.	<p>2.1 Shift policy and strategic focus from mass and large-scale tourism development to smaller CBT initiatives.</p> <p>2.2 Establish and embrace tourism success targets that are based on quality rather than quantity, with particular attention to community and ecosystem well-being.</p> <p>2.3 Develop CBT-specific policy, plans and strategies with the sub-sector's relevant targets, strategic directions, and actions for enabling its mainstreaming.</p>
3. Incorporate environmental sustainability and economic inclusion into the planning of tourism development focusing on reducing environmental footprints and ensuring equity and justice.	<p>3.1 Adapt and integrate blue and green economy approaches to CBT.</p> <p>3.2 Incentive sustainable practices, such as reducing environmental footprints, and ensure equity and justice through CBT.</p> <p>3.3 Adapt or develop CBT accessible standards and incentives, along with monitoring and adaptation mechanisms.</p>
4. Support the adoption of inclusive governance models for decision-making, ensuring multi-stakeholder coordination, addressing priorities and strengthening institutions.	<p>4.1 Ensure multi-stakeholder, multi-sectoral and multi-layered coordination at all levels.</p> <p>4.2 Address community priorities and distribute benefits equitably through inclusive governance models.</p>
5. Mainstream social justice principles to involve local stakeholders in building resilience, resolving conflicts, addressing gender disparities, and ensuring the equitable distribution of tourism benefits.	<p>5.1 Involve local stakeholders in decision-making processes to deliver equity and resilience.</p> <p>5.2 Support youth and gender-sensitive policies and programmes for a more equitable distribution of the tourism benefits.</p>
6. Integrate and mainstream climate resilience in planning, development and management of the tourism sector.	<p>6.1 Map climate vulnerabilities along tourism and CBT value chains and assess feasible and impactful adaptation measures.</p> <p>6.2 At the business level, provide technical and financial support to help CBT providers to 'climate proof' their businesses.</p> <p>6.3 Facilitate knowledge sharing through platforms and communities of practice.</p>
7. Develop innovative and flexible financing to support blue-green business models ensuring community access to financial mechanisms.	<p>7.1 Enhance the access to microfinance tools and the supporting mechanisms for equipping established and new community entrepreneurs.</p> <p>7.2 Promote microinsurance for CBT entrepreneurs to build resilience to shocks.</p> <p>7.3 Redirect some investments from larger tourism developments (i.e., ports and terminals) towards innovative and flexible financing to support MSMEs in coastal communities.</p>
8. Establish business support organisations which are accessible and can provide tailored capacity building for CBT micro and small businesses.	<p>8.1 Develop one-stop-shop business support organisations which can provide tailored capacity building for CBT.</p> <p>8.2 Promote continued assessment of needs and opportunities through these supporting organisations.</p>

<p>9. Support digitisation of micro and small enterprises in the CBT sector to enhance the sustainability of CBT operations, coordination of CBT activities at community level, access to needed markets and equitable benefit sharing from CBT activities.</p>	<p>9.1 Support the integration of digital tools among community tourism entrepreneurs to enhance access to markets.</p> <p>9.2 Integrate digital tools to coordinate CBT activities inclusively.</p> <p>9.3 Value and promote tangible and intangible community heritage through digital tools to enhance competitiveness.</p> <p>9.4 Build capacities in use of digital tools and implement enabling policies, laws, infrastructural development and partnerships.</p>
<p>10. Build multi-sectoral networks empowering and supporting CBTs through partnerships.</p>	<p>10.1 Foster collaboration and partnerships among stakeholders at different levels, to create partnerships along the tourism value chain, involving community actors.</p> <p>10.2 Support, through targeted partnerships, locally driven economic development and business clusters in communities across the region in favour of more collaborative and less competitive approaches.</p> <p>10.3 Support Destination Management Organisations and tour operators in advancing an attractive CBT sector in the region by developing CBT packages in collaboration with the various interested communities.</p>

Annex 1. Primary and secondary tourism stakeholders in the Caribbean

Primary (directly involved in the tourism sector)

Category

Tourists	Governmental and inter-governmental and technical organisations directly involved in the tourism sector	Civil society organisations directly involved in the tourism sector
Tourism businesses		
Investors and developers		
Coastal communities and Indigenous Peoples		

Key organisations

GLOBAL

Inter-governmental

United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO)

Civil society

Global standards and certifications providers (e.g., Global Sustainable Tourism Council, Blue Flag, Green Key, Green Globe, Green Destinations, Eco Certified Tourism, Travel Life, Earth Check, Reef Check)

World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC)

Travel Foundation

Private sector:

Global hotel and resort chains operating in the Caribbean, including using all-inclusive models (e.g., Sandals and Beaches Resorts, Club Med, Divi Resorts, Radisson, Hilton)

Cruise Lines International Association and their members (e.g., Royal Caribbean, Norwegian Cruise Line, Carnival, Princess, Holland America, Disney, Celebrity)

Online booking sites (e.g., Airbnb, [Booking.com](https://www.booking.com))

International tour operators (e.g., Island Routes, Trafalgar Travel, GO! Jamaica Travel)

REGIONAL

Inter-governmental

Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO)

Private sector

Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA)

Caribbean Community Tourism Network

NATIONAL

Public sector

National tourism boards

Ministries of tourism

Tourism development agencies

Private sector

National tourism private sector associations

Tour operators

LOCAL

Local tourism associations

Individual businesses, operators and providers (accommodation, water sports, tours, etc.)

Local governments and municipalities (e.g., Tobago House of Assembly, Barbuda Council)

Coastal communities and Indigenous Peoples

Secondary (involved in sectors related to tourism)

Category

Regional, national and local public sector (regulators, promoters, policy makers) responsible for sectors which are linked to the tourism sector

Regional/national airlines
Civil society organisations including academia and research institutes working in related sectors

Providers of financial and other services

Key organisations

GLOBAL

Inter-governmental

Global funds (e.g., Green Climate Fund, Global Environment Fund)

UNEP, UNDP, UNESCO, other UN agencies

Civil society

International non-profit organisations engaged in environmental management, fisheries, protected areas, coastal management, waste management and pollution control, planning physical development, etc. (e.g., International Union for the Conservation of Nature [IUCN], Conservation International, Fauna and Flora International, BirdLife)

International non-profit funds (e.g., Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, Caribbean Biodiversity Fund)

Private sector

International airlines (e.g., British Airways, Virgin Airways, American Airlines, Delta, JetBlue, United Airlines, KLM)

REGIONAL

Inter-governmental

Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Commission

CARICOM Secretariat

Association of Caribbean States (ACS)

United Nations Environment Programme – Caribbean Environment Programme (UNEP-CEP)

Cartagena Convention Secretariat

Food and Agriculture Organisation – Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (FAO-WECAFC)

Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the UNESCO Sub-Commission for the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions (IOCARIBE)

Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM)

Central American Fisheries and Aquaculture Organisation (OSPESCA)

Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD)

Caribbean Climate Change Centre (CCCCC)

Caribbean Disaster Management Agency (CDEMA)

Civil society

Universities and research institutes (e.g., University of the West Indies, Institute of Marine Affairs, Caribbean Research and Management of Biodiversity)

Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations (CNFO)

Regional non-profit organisations engaged in environmental management, fisheries, protected areas, coastal management, waste management and pollution control, planning physical development, etc. (e.g., CANARI, Caribbean Youth Environment Network, Caribbean Water and Wastewater Association, Birds Caribbean, Climate Analytics Caribbean)

Private sector

Regional commercial and development banks and insurance providers

Regional funds and business support (e.g., Caribbean Biodiversity Fund, Compete Caribbean)

Regional airlines (e.g., Caribbean Airlines, InterCaribbean Airways, Cayman Airways, Fly BVI, WinAir, Fly Montserrat, Surinam Airways)

NATIONAL

Public sector

Government agencies with responsibility for environmental management, fisheries, protected areas, coastal management, waste management and pollution control, climate change and disaster management, planning and regulating physical development, airports/ports, business support, community development, economic development, etc.

Civil society

Research institutes and marine centres
National associations of fishers

National non-profit organisations engaged in environmental management, fisheries, protected areas, coastal management, waste management and pollution control, planning physical development, etc. (e.g., Oceana Belize, Saint Lucia National Trust, Bahamas National Trust, Environmental Awareness Group)

Private sector

National chambers of commerce and business associations

National commercial and development banks and insurance providers

National tourism enhancement funds (e.g., Jamaica, Saint Lucia) and other funds (e.g., Trinidad and Tobago's Green Fund)

National airlines (e.g., Vieques Air Link, Maya Island Air)

LOCAL

Public sector

Local government offices responsible for marine protected areas and managed areas

Civil society

Local associations of fishers

Local non-profit organisations (including community-based groups) engaged in environmental management, fisheries, protected areas, coastal management, waste management and pollution control, climate change and disaster management, planning and regulating physical development, business support, community development, economic development, etc. (e.g., Nature Seekers, Environmental Research Institute Charlotteville, Sustainable Grenadines, Caribbean Coastal Area Management Foundation, Fragments of Hope)

Private sector

Individual businesses (formal and informal sectors) in sectors linked with the tourism sector for example in agriculture, fisheries, construction, financial services, etc.

Local business associations

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