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DOMINICA SUSTAINABLE TOURISM POLICY & MARKETING STRATEGY

PREPARED FOR THE DISCOVER DOMINICA AUTHORITY

15 October 2007

This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by Chemonics International.

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Indefinite Quantity Contract No. AFP-I-00-04-00002-01
Task Order No. AFP-I-02-04-00002-00
Prepared for USAID/J-CAR
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents an overview of global, national, and regional tourism trends relevant to Dominica's tourism economy. It presents the case for a sustainable destination approach to tourism development in Dominica and a strategy for how to achieve it.

The report is based on primary and secondary research conducted in September 2007. The consultant interviewed Dominican residents, business owners, and representatives of the government's dedicated tourism promotion agency, the Discover Dominica Authority; carried out a comprehensive evaluation of the 2010 Sustainable Tourism Policy and the proposed 2008 marketing strategy; and visited various sustainable tourism attractions in southeastern Dominica.

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) defines a sustainable tourism destination as a country, region, or town that has shown dedication to, and success in, tourism development that maximizes benefits to the natural environment and local communities and minimizes negative impact. Furthermore, WTTC states that a sustainable tourism destination supports the preservation of natural and cultural heritage, local character, and authenticity. The National Geographic Society Center for Sustainable Destinations defines sustainable tourism as a key way to develop the most beneficial, least disruptive form of tourism highlighting the natural, historical, and cultural assets unique to a destination. Sustainable tourism requires local governments, businesses, and other tourism stakeholders to "anticipate development pressures and apply limits and management techniques that sustain habitats, heritage sites, scenic appeal, and local culture. ... It aims for quality tourism, not quantity."

Major recommendations of this report for Discover Dominica include the following:

- Participate in and support global sustainable tourism initiatives that will help protect Dominica's tourism assets while positioning the country as a world-class sustainable tourism destination. These initiatives include the World Heritage Alliance; the geotourism strategy of the National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations; the Small Tourism Enterprise Project (STEP) of the Organization of American States; and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Center for Excellence in Destinations.
- Develop a public/private Destination Stewardship Council made up of various stakeholders involved in sustainable tourism to oversee the development and execution of a sustainable tourism plan for the country. While government will play an instrumental role, the best way to ensure successful destination stewardship is to engage other organizations and businesses using geotourism stewardship council model developed by the National Geographic Society.
- Generate public awareness and participation in sustainable tourism through education, communication, public events, and competitions that help

Dominicans understand the importance of sustainable tourism and the visitor's experience.

- Develop a Destination Management System (DMS) and call center to help tourism enterprises in Dominica access the market and make it easier for a potential traveler to plan and book a complex itinerary that involves various suppliers. By initiating a DMS, Discover Dominica will become the facilitator for national tourism promotion, hosting and managing tourism information while leaving the booking and transaction part of the process to the private sector. Strategic partnerships with the private sector will ensure that tourists visiting the Discover Dominica Web site can find information and plan their trips.
- Focus product development activities on helping the private sector understand how to incorporate elements that make up Dominica's "sense of place" rather than trying to recreate mainstream Caribbean tourism products. "Sense of place" begins with the design and construction of hotels and extends to the ingredients used in preparing visitors' meals. The private sector must understand how to develop unique and authentic experiences that can be delivered only by Dominicans.
- Promote and publicize sustainable tourism initiatives (e.g., exemplary practices) through yearly awards, coordinated marketing campaigns, conferences, training, technologies and resources for improving social and environmental practices, and technical assistance to businesses willing to practice sustainability. Promote the adoption of newly created baseline criteria for sustainable tourism developed by the United Nations Foundation, the Rainforest Alliance, the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the Sustainable Tourism Certification Network of the Americas, and the European Network for Sustainable Tourism Development (ECOTRANS).

A sustainable tourism model for Dominica will ensure that a growing number of tourists continue to come and spend their money in the country in a manner consistent with tourism industry trends while the character of the island and its authentic experiences and attractions are preserved for future generations residents and visitors alike.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM VISION FOR DOMINICA

Overview of the Sustainable Tourism Industry

Today, tourism is widely recognized as the largest industry on earth based on its contribution to global gross domestic product, the number of jobs it generates, and the number of clients it serves. Tourism is one of the top five exports for 83 percent of all countries and the number one source of foreign exchange for 40 percent of countries (United Nations World Tourism Organization, UNWTO). In 2006, the travel and tourism economy generated more than 10 percent of world gross domestic product, outpacing all other economic sectors (World Travel and Tourism Council, WTTC). In 1950, there were 25 million international travelers. By 1990, there were 450 million annual tourism arrivals globally, and 2006 saw an all-time record of 842 million tourists — an increase of more than 3,000 percent over 1950. The UNWTO forecasts that over the coming 15 years, the number of tourists will rise to 1.5 billion, twice the current total. In 2007, tourism is expected to generate more than \$7 trillion in economic activity worldwide, up 5.7 percent (WTTC). In terms of job creation, travel and tourism employment is expected to reach 231.2 million jobs in 2007, representing 8.3 percent of total employment worldwide, or 1 in every 12 jobs on the planet (WTTC).

Tourism can be an opportunity or a threat to the people and places where tourism growth occurs. This is amply demonstrated in dozens of case studies around the world.¹ If global tourism were represented as a country, it would consume three times the amount of fresh water contained in Lake Superior in a year (10 million cubic meters) and produce the same amount of solid waste as France (35 million tons per year) (United Nations Environment Program, UNEP). How tourism grows and develops is therefore of great consequence to the future of the environment; to national, regional, and local economies; and to the local peoples whose lives tourism growth will impact.

Ecotourism

Ecotourism, defined as “responsible travel to natural areas that protect nature and sustain the well being of local peoples” (International Ecotourism Society), emerged as a response to the rapid growth of tourism into wilderness areas where large-scale projects were having negative impacts on the lives of local people and the natural environment.

It was more than an environmental effort. The birth of ecotourism reflected the emergence of a new tourism market that took shape in the late 1980s and early 1990s. More tourists became interested in experiencing nature, visiting communities that retained their traditional character, and helping to protect remote wilderness areas and local ways of life. The front page of the *New York Times* travel section called this changing tourism demographic the “goodwill tourist” — someone who wants a vacation that gives something back. In a paper presented at the Global Ecotourism Conference in Norway in May 2007, *Modern Traveler* magazine editor Frances Figart reported that 90

¹ See *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development: Who Owns Paradise?*, Honey, 1998; *The Encyclopedia of Ecotourism*, Weaver, 2001; *The Environmental Impacts of Ecotourism*, Buckley, 2004.

percent of the U.S. population say it is important for companies they buy from to be mindful of the environment,² and 75 percent of Canadians say they would change their buying habits to purchase more environmentally friendly goods and stay at environmentally friendly places. Figart also reported that, “people who are looking for ecotourism experiences comprise one of the fastest growing demographics in the United States.” Three *Newsweek* cover stories in the past 24 months report that more and more people of the “baby boomer” generation want to connect to the natural environment when they travel and are seeking out new adventures as a way of life. They want to be enriched by cultural experiences. Above all, today’s travelers want authenticity, and they want to enjoy a great tourism product that also rejuvenates them. This means good food, good accommodations, and meaningful activities, but not at the expense of losing wilderness and nature.³

Sustainable Tourism

Today, the principles that were first associated with ecotourism have evolved into what is called **sustainable tourism**. Sustainable tourism includes environmentally sensitive resort operations, direct and tangible economic benefits to local communities, and enhancing the cultural and natural heritage of the destination.

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) identifies a **sustainable tourism destination** as a country, region, or town that has shown dedication to and success in tourism development that maximizes benefits to the natural environment and local communities and minimizes negative impact. WTTC states that a sustainable tourism destination supports preservation of the destination’s natural and cultural heritage, local character, and sense of authenticity. It brings direct and tangible economic benefits to the local people and educates tourists and local communities about the importance of supporting sustainable tourism practices.

Sustainable practices are defined as low-impact, environmentally sensitive tourism operations (e.g., sound environmental management, green building design, alternative and renewable energy use, recycling, etc.), conservation of natural habitat, support for cultural heritage, and local community employment at fair wages.⁴

The National Geographic Society Center for Sustainable Destinations (CSD) defines **sustainable tourism destination planning** as a key way to develop the most beneficial and least disruptive form of tourism that highlights the natural, historic, and cultural assets unique to a destination. According to CSD, sustainable tourism requires businesses and other tourism stakeholders to “anticipate development pressures and apply limits and management techniques that sustain natural habitats, heritage sites, scenic appeal and local culture. ... It aims for quality tourism, not quantity.”

² “Corporate Social Responsibility: Consumer Understanding and Influence,” Natural Marketing Institute, 2005

³ *Newsweek International*, “Why Moving Less and Seeing more is the New Mantra for Today’s Traveler,” May 14, 2007;

“The Greening of America,” July 17, 2006; “Damage Control: Tourists Can Be a Force for Preservation,” April 10, 2006.

⁴ WTTC Tourism for Tomorrow Program, 2007.

The United Nations Declaration on Ecotourism, which grew out of the World Ecotourism Summit held in Quebec, Canada, in 2002, states that, in order to meet **sustainable tourism destination standards**, private sector tourism developers should, among other things:

- Conceive, develop, and conduct their operations minimizing the negative effects on, and positively contributing to, the conservation of sensitive ecosystems and the environment and directly benefiting and including local communities.
- Ensure that the design, planning, development, and operation of tourism facilities incorporates **sustainability principles** such as site-sensitive design and community sense of place, as well as conservation of water, energy, and materials and accessibility to all categories of the population without any discrimination.
- Cooperate with governmental and nongovernmental organizations in charge of protecting natural areas and conservation of biodiversity.
- Make increasing use of local materials and products, as well as local logistical and human resource inputs, to increase the proportion of financial and other benefits that remain at the destination. To achieve this, development companies should invest in training the local workforce.
- Formulate and implement company policies for sustainability with a view to applying them to each part of business operations.⁵

To respond to this change in the tourism market, even traditional travel companies like the Hertz Corporation (the world's largest rental car agency) are changing how they market themselves and what they offer their clients. In 2007, Hertz announced their new line of vehicle options, including the Green Collection for the ecotourist. The WTTC and the UNWTO both have major sustainable tourism initiatives under way, and popular travel magazines like *Condé Nast Traveller* and *Travel + Leisure* now offer their readers information on destinations that focus on sustainable tourism as a catalyst for protecting nature and supporting cultural heritage. Sustainable tourism is part of a growing public demand for goods and services that are driven by a larger mission of environmental responsibility. This large market segment has led to a 20 percent annual growth of the organic foods market and a major expansion into green technology and environmentally friendly products by General Electric and other companies.

Sustainable tourism is not about a small niche market in the travel industry; companies like Fairmont Hotels and Resorts, based in Canada with more than 40 hotels and resorts worldwide, has made sustainable tourism a core company practice. Vermont won two major global tourism awards (in 2003 and 2007) for embracing sustainable tourism principles; Wisconsin and Minnesota are turning to sustainable tourism to replace once thriving timber and agricultural industries; the European Union has passed legislation to make sustainable tourism an economic development priority; and countries like Australia and Costa Rica are instituting national policies on sustainable tourism. Today, a tourism

⁵ 2002 United Nations Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism

destination that protects its remote wilderness and wildlife while ensuring that the local way of life and cultural character are a priority when considering any form of development is literally investing money in the bank. Wilderness areas and cultural sense of place are resources that are increasingly limited in supply, and accessible wilderness continues to grow in value with every passing year as the tourism market expands, with nature and adventure tourism leading the growth curve.

The new tourist is willing to travel farther and spend more money to experience primitive wilderness recreational opportunities. Places that are marketing to nature and adventure travelers are the destinations poised for tourism growth. Embracing a sustainable tourism model positions a destination for the economic benefits of tourism now and in the future. In the United States alone, \$115 billion is spent annually on nature and adventure travel. In 2006, 55 million Americans took a nature or adventure vacation, up 14 percent over the previous year. In a 2006 survey conducted by the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA), all the top 10 destinations selected by U.S. travelers represented outdoor experiences, with 8 of the 10 being wilderness environments representing rafting, hiking, biking, etc. The tourism industry is witnessing a transformation, with the market moving away from the mass tourism experience and toward the interests of the environment-minded tourist. Another survey by *National Geographic Traveler* magazine and TIA revealed that more than 58 million U.S. tourists (38 percent of the 154 million U.S. adult travelers between 2000-2003, based on a representative survey of 3,300) would be willing to pay more to use travel companies that strive to protect the environment over those that do not. More than one-third of U.S. travelers (39 percent) would choose a travel company that supports the historical and cultural aspects of a destination even if the cost were higher. Travelers now care more about the places they visit and support destinations that are actively promoting the protection of their traditional character and their wilderness areas.

In 2002, UNEP and Conservation International, a Washington, D.C.-based organization monitoring the state of high biodiversity wilderness areas around the world, commissioned an international team of experts to map tourism's expansion in relation to these areas. Their report, "Tourism and Biodiversity: Mapping Tourism's Global Footprint" (2003), confirmed what the tourism industry had already been experiencing as a major shift in tourism trends over the past 15 years: Tourism was expanding fastest in and around wilderness areas that were rich in biodiversity and unspoiled nature, and that still maintained a sense of place. This coincides with other studies revealing that nature and adventure tourism — wildlife viewing, fishing, kayaking, canoeing, hiking, skiing, camping, climbing, etc. — are the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry. Even traditional tourism sectors like cruise ship travel are now focusing more on nature-based destinations. For example, in 1990, Belize was a tiny developing economy based on a commercial timber industry and small-scale agricultural production. Over the past 10 years, cruise ship visitation to Belize has grown by 1,000 percent — not for shopping, casinos, or nightlife, but for Belize's abundant unspoiled wilderness in the form of rainforest and coastline. In Mount Desert Island, Maine, cruise ship tourism more than doubled over 5 years, up from 39 ships in 1999 to nearly 100 in 2007; in Alaska, cruise ship tourism grew by more than 300 percent during the same period. These examples

share a common element: accessible wilderness and a traditional way of life that is still largely intact.

Overdeveloped tourism destinations are now paying the price as the tourism market moves away from large-scale mass tourism resorts and large developments that have changed the character of once beautiful natural areas and small communities representing the local way of life. Cancun, Mexico, is a good illustration. In the 1970s, large-scale tourism development was proposed for Cancun, premised on promoting economic benefits to the local community of fishermen, merchants, and small innkeepers. Little attention was given to the optimum size of planned developments (the idea was that bigger is better), the natural environment, or the sense of place. Cancun's forests were cut down and lagoons filled to make room for a series of large hotels, condo resorts, and vacation housing subdivisions. The wildlife disappeared, and with it many local families who were marginalized as land prices increased and outsiders took the majority of jobs. The authenticity of the area disappeared. With no provisions made for affordable housing for the low-income workers who flocked to the area, a shantytown developed, and the sewage produced by 75 percent of the population flowed untreated into the nearby bay. The result is that Cancun has become a victim of its own tourism development strategy. Cancun has had to slash rates to fill beds and has turned increasingly to low-end tourism as the market has moved away from the "bigger is better" model in favor of a "small is beautiful" approach where destinations retain their natural and cultural heritage.

The coasts of Spain and France have had similar problems. Big resorts from the 1970s and 1980s are being demolished as planners attempt to recreate what they once had: small towns and villages, local businesses, and the family-run hotels, restaurants, and shops that go with them and provide a sense of character and place. In 2006 Africa, with its rural villages and wilderness areas, was the world's fastest growth region for tourism, at 8.1 percent compared with 4.5 percent globally (UNWTO).

Dominica Sustainable Tourism Destination Plan

With lush rainforests, healthy coral reefs, a vibrant culture, rich heritage, and businesses still operated by local families and area residents, Dominica has the necessary cultural and natural heritage attractions, along with sense of place, to be a world-class sustainable tourism destination. Dominica can avoid the mistakes made by other destinations that developed their tourism products poorly and out of character with local needs and sustainable tourism industry trends. With careful planning to preserve the future of its natural and cultural resources to ensure that tourism development does not engulf the country's character, Dominica will be planting the seeds for national and global tourism marketing attention as a sustainable tourism destination. Sustainable tourism will strengthen Dominica's wilderness recreational opportunities and support the local way of life as foundations for a growing economy. What would a Dominica Sustainable Tourism Destination Plan look like?

- Tourism development would be carefully monitored and controlled.
- A broad group of stakeholders would help develop and manage the plan.

- Tourism would provide direct benefits to local communities.
- The private tourism sector would ensure minimal impact on the environment.
- Tourism projects would be in keeping with the size and scope of the character of the land, with small resorts (10-100 rooms) clustered and located close to existing infrastructure, providing economic benefits to local communities. It would include preferential tourism development zoning approval to businesses committed to sustainable development and carrying out specific practices.

In summary, a Dominica Sustainable Tourism Destination Plan will develop tourism to provide economic benefits for today while preserving Dominica's cultural and natural assets for future generations to enjoy.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategic Partners and Initiatives

Sustainable tourism development is a national priority for the Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica, resulting in the decision to establish a dedicated tourism promotion agency, the Discover Dominica Authority. The agency is responsible for implementing the government's tourism strategies and policies, such as the National Tourism 2010 Policy to promote Dominica as a sustainable tourism destination and to grow the island's tourism sector. To accomplish this goal, Discover Dominica should partner with and support initiatives that are working with destinations to implement sustainable tourism policies and programs. The following is a summary of potential partners. It is recommended that Discover Dominica assign at least one staff member to oversee the execution of these partnerships and initiatives.

1. **World Heritage Alliance.** In late 2005, Expedia Inc. and the United Nations Foundation (UNF) established a membership-based initiative called the World Heritage Alliance (WHA) with the mission of promoting and protecting World Heritage sites through sustainable tourism. WHA works to (i) support local community tourism initiatives at World Heritage sites as an important means of site conservation and sustainable development, (ii) educate travelers on responsible tourism in and around World Heritage sites, and (iii) engage tourism companies, principally through Expedia's suppliers and partners, to adhere to sustainable business practices, especially around World Heritage sites.

In October of 2007, WHA expanded to the island of Dominica, the most biodiverse island of the Eastern Caribbean and home to the Morne Trois Pitons World Heritage site. The UNF, Expedia, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)⁶ spent two weeks in Dominica training hotel personnel on hotels on the importance of World Heritage conservation and sustainable tourism principles while building the capacity of local community groups, particularly in the southeast, to develop and market sustainable tourism assets to promote local development and conservation of the adjacent World Heritage site through the Expedia Employee Volunteer Program and support from the USAID Caribbean Open Trade Support (COTS) program. These activities helped raise awareness in government, the private sector, and the community of the importance of sustainable tourism and World Heritage conservation.

Discover Dominica should join WHA as an Associate Partner and work with the alliance to support sustainable tourism around Morne Trois Pitons National Park and throughout Dominica by engaging communities and the private sector in this initiative. For more information, visit: <http://www.worldheritagealliance.org>.

2. **National Geographic Geotourism Strategy.** In June 2007, *National Geographic Traveler* geotourism editor and CSD director Jonathan Tourtellot visited

⁶ The training on sustainable tourism to hoteliers was conducted through Solimar International.

Dominica with the support of the Dominica Hotel & Tourism Association (DHTA), to present the concept of geotourism. Geotourism is defined as tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place — its environment, culture, aesthetics and heritage and the well-being of its residents. The presentation was very well received by communities and the private sector. In the recently released annual Destination Scorecard article in *National Geographic Traveler*, Dominica scored the highest in the Caribbean, with a ranking of 13th out of 111 islands. Dominica is positioned to work with the CSD to develop and execute a geotourism strategy for Dominica.

As part of the Research, Conservation, and Exploration Division of the National Geographic Mission Programs, the CSD is dedicated to protecting all the world's distinctive places through wisely managed tourism and enlightened destination stewardship. The core strategy for achieving this mission is promoting geotourism. By working with many allied organizations, both global and local, CSD helps develop and disseminate information to encourage communities, tourism professionals, and travelers to adopt the geotourism approach.⁷

Discover Dominica should allocate a portion of the marketing budget and identify additional funding partners to develop a catalytic program similar to the Geotourism Map Guide Project that other destinations have executed with National Geographic. The total cost of the project would be between \$150,000 and \$250,000. For more information, visit:

http://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/programs_for_places.html

- 3. Small Tourism Enterprise Project (STEP) and Caribbean Experiences.** STEP was started by the Organization of American States (OAS) to create a support and assistance service for small hotels in participating Caribbean countries. The primary emphasis to date has been on technology and hotel management support through volunteer programs. With additional support from the OAS, the program is moving toward implementation of a range of services for Caribbean small tourism enterprises, as well as a greater emphasis on environmental management and marketing of small enterprises participating in the program through the Caribbean Experiences brand.⁸

Dominica has participated in the STEP program from the beginning, and with the majority of all tourism enterprises in the country falling into the “small” category, it is recommended that Discover Dominica continue to support the program and help coordinate and execute training for small hotels. Discover Dominica should also help collect tourism information from participating hotels and attractions for use in promoting these businesses through the Caribbean Experiences brand. For more information, visit: <http://www.caribbeaninnkeeper.com>.

⁷ National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations, <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/>.

⁸ Caribbean Experiences brand and standards, http://www.caribbeaninnkeeper.com/mktg_cebrandstandards.asp.

4. **UNWTO Center of Excellence for Destinations.** In January 2007 the UNWTO, together with its founding partners the Canadian government, Tourism Montreal, the University of Quebec, George Washington University, and *National Geographic* magazine, launched the UNWTO Center of Excellence for Destinations (CED). The mission of the CED, a nonprofit organization based in Montreal, is to provide tools to develop competitiveness and sustainable development in tourism. The CED serves as a catalyst for partnerships and collaborations with public and private stakeholders with expertise that could improve the performance of tourism destinations.

The CED is currently developing monitoring and evaluation tools to help destinations measure excellence in sustainable tourism development. Discover Dominica should contact the organization, explain the government's commitment to sustainable tourism, and ask to pilot the tools developed by the center. This will help Discover Dominica put into place a measurement system to evaluate the effectiveness of a sustainable tourism strategy and further position the island as a sustainable tourism destination. For more information, visit:

<http://www.cifort.uqam.ca/ced/index-en.html>

Destination Stewardship Council

Understanding and recognizing that sustainable tourism and destination stewardship involves the protection of everything that makes up Dominica's sense of place, including environment, culture, heritage, communities, land planning, tourism services, etc., it is important to engage various actors and stakeholders in the development and execution of a **sustainable tourism plan** for the country. While the government will play an instrumental role in this strategy, the best way to ensure successful destination stewardship is to engage other organizations and businesses to accomplish this vision. The Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica has experience in creating public-private advisory groups as part of various sustainable development projects. The most recent brought together stakeholders to oversee the activities of a European Union (EU)-funded ecotourism project. However, often such groups fall apart after the funding runs out, as happened with the EU project.

Discover Dominica should convene and establish a permanent destination stewardship council that brings together various stakeholders to oversee the development and execution of a sustainable tourism strategy. By designating a council secretariat, preferably a small nongovernmental organization with the resources and drive to lead the effort, the council secretariat will ensure the sustainable tourism strategy is executed and efforts are maintained indefinitely with the support of the different actors on the council including public and private sectors as well as civil society. In keeping with the National Geographic CSD strategy, the council would be created based on the following guidelines created by National Geographic's Center for Sustainable Destinations:

A Geotourism Stewardship Council is a nongovernmental or public-private entity that could be national, regional, or local. It may go by any name or coalesce around an existing group, but has the characteristics described below.

The Council would be responsible for overseeing and advising on the four elements of a geotourism strategy: identifying, sustaining, developing, and marketing the geotourism assets of a place. The council's advice and activity should be in keeping with the interests of the communities, with good conservation and preservation practices, and with responsible economic development. It would encourage appropriate tourism in appropriate places and discourage inappropriate tourism in unsuitable places. The council should subscribe to the principles embodied in the Geotourism Charter and in the geotourism definition:

Tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place — its environment, heritage, aesthetics, culture, and the well-being of its residents.

Council activities are intended not only to promote geotourism assets to tourists, but also to be a catalyst for local communities to help them discover their own distinctive tourism assets and provide economic benefits and an incentive for protecting them. The council should monitor sustainability and ensure that tourist numbers do not become excessive. Catalyst activities might include:

- An annual “power of place” festival to build local pride and awareness while garnishing some tourism revenue.
- A Geotourism Map Guide created with National Geographic or a local university, with extensive local participation.
- A regular report and set of recommendations on tourism developments and proposals.
- Serving as gatekeeper and clearinghouse for community-generated geotourism information

Council members should, at a minimum, represent the following interests:

- Historic preservation
- Natural conservation
- Communities
- Indigenous peoples and other cultural minorities
- Art and traditional performing arts (music, dance, theater, storytelling, reenactments, etc.)
- Destination management
- Farm/restaurant programs, agrotourism, slow food
- Beautification programs (signage, architecture, landscape concerns)
- Other stakeholder groups emblematic of the locale government (tourism, planning, and environment, for example)
- Private companies compatible with geotourism

Local collaborators and advisors potentially include:

- Geotourism innovators: guides, innkeepers, restaurateurs, tour operators, etc.
- Local craft co-ops, music groups, or other heritage groups
- Agricultural cooperatives, historic preservation groups, conservation organizations (including ecotourism leaders)
- Community leaders or individuals with deep knowledge of the area’s heritage, especially older individuals
- Church groups, school associations, universities, volunteer/charity organizations
- Local geographical author who covers the region
- Historians, naturalists, librarians
- Local minority heritage groups and experts
- Specialists in locally based food and drink

Proactive people from this list may also be appropriate members of the Geotourism Council.

Operationally, the Council can work in a continual cycle:

- *Plan* — planning, including identifying stewardship aspects and establishing goals
- *Do* — implementing, including training and information dissemination
- *Check* — monitoring and progress reviews
- *Act* —taking corrective action as indicated ⁹



Public Awareness and Participation

Dominicans play a very important role in the sustainable development of Dominica’s tourism product. In addition to those who are directly involved in the tourism industry, local communities, schoolchildren, teachers, business owners, and community leaders must understand the importance of sustainable tourism development and ensure that visitors have memorable experiences and friendly interactions with Dominicans. To achieve this, Discover Dominica should develop a program to raise public awareness among Dominicans about the importance of sustainable tourism. This can be achieved through a festival celebrating everything unique about Dominica, or a participatory mapping exercise similar to the National Geographic Geotourism Map Guide process, in which community members nominate attractions that should be placed on the map, or a national competition that asks Dominicans to develop a “Dominican authentic tourism day tour.” All these activities could be executed with the support of the Destination Stewardship Council and should make use of the local media to spread the world.

⁹ About Geotourism Stewardship Councils – National Geographic Center for Sustainable Tourism Destinations
<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/>

Destination Management System & Call Center

A Destination Management System (DMS), also known as a destination database, destination marketing system, or visitor information system, is intended to provide complete and up-to-date information about a destination. The system is designed to collect, store, and distribute information in an effective and user-friendly way. Its core goal is the distribution of information and facilitation of reservations to a destination.

A DMS ensures that all businesses, large and small, as well as all relevant sites, attractions, transportation options, festivals, and other tourism related information, are provided to the visitor through one central system, usually a Web site. The DMS consists of several components, including a content management system, a customer relationship management system, and the Web site.

Currently, Discover Dominica's primary tourism marketing Web site, <http://www.discoverdominica.com>, serves as the country's central database of tourism information. The site effectively presents information that a visitor would want to access when planning a trip to the island. However, while the site helps visitors contact hotels to make accommodation reservations or purchase packages, it leaves attractions, tours, and transportation services as descriptions without a call to action.

Tourists around the world are increasingly using the Internet to find information about destinations and book travel. Travelers want high-quality, easy-to-find, actionable information to help them organize their trip. Destination management systems are a response to this need, providing the traveler with up-to-date, relevant information that can be used to educate travelers about a destination and organize travel to and around the region. There are many DMS examples. Two good ones are:

Cumbria, England — <http://www.golakes.co.uk>

This is a good example of a functional DMS that drives visitors to bookings. All the accommodation facilities are presented together through one system. The site incorporates:

- Direct booking (you can book and pay for a hotel with a credit card through a secure booking engine)
- Delayed booking (you make the reservation, provide your credit card information, and if there is availability you receive confirmation and your card is charged)
- Pass-through booking (you are directed to the e-mail, phone, etc. of the business but cannot book it or reserve it through the system)

New Zealand — <http://www.newzealand.com/travel>

This is a visually appealing site with an emphasis on multimedia (pictures, video, etc.) and dynamic packaging features. Like the Cumbria site, the focus is enabling visitors to learn about the destination, find relevant information, and organize/book a trip. It is purely a pass-through site, educating visitors and allowing them to package trip components for their ideal trip. For booking,

visitors are directed off the site, either directly to the businesses or to a travel company that can create the package. This way, the site avoids handling bookings but provides visitors with relevant information that then drives them to the businesses and promotes travel to the destination. The “call to action” on the New Zealand site provides visitors with relevant, actionable information that drives them to bookings (see illustration).



Discover Dominica should consider launching a DMS to better service the Dominican tourism business by converting the significant tourism traffic on its Web site from “lookers” to “bookers.” A new, comprehensive Discover Dominica DMS will:

- Better inform and educate visitors about the tourism sites and attractions in Dominica.
- Drive interest in Dominica into bookings by retaining visitors longer on the site and directing visitors to relevant booking information.
- Better connect Dominican tourism businesses throughout the country by bringing small and medium business onto the Web so they are on a level playing field with larger businesses, and by creating a process to drive bookings to these small businesses even if they do not have Internet access.

The Discover Dominica site is the interface between the visitor and tourism businesses or sites in Dominica. It is the “retail store” that is fed tourism content from the “tourism data warehouse.” Having a clean, user-friendly Web site that encourages the visitor to remain on the site will help visitors find the information they are looking for and facilitate more visits to the country. An effective national tourism Web site has to have good information about the destination, as well as specific tourism businesses (tour operators, hotels, etc.), as this is what visitors are looking for in a destination site. Increasingly, visitors are also looking for interactive and multimedia content to give them a better idea about the experience. This includes pictures, video, virtual tours, and user-generated content such as discussion forums, visitor testimonials, etc.

The site will start as a non-bookable site, providing information about tourism in the country (destinations, businesses, sites, etc.). This will allow users to narrow their searches according to their interests. The second phase of the Web site will incorporate more dynamic packaging and bookable content through partnerships with organizations such as the DHTA and other private entities.

The bookable part of the Web site should remain separate from Discover Dominica, that is, it should be housed within another entity so as to avoid the government getting too involved with the transaction component of the Web site. This way, the system can feed bookable content to the Discover Dominica site but, where appropriate, also feed that content to other systems and booking engines. The Discover Dominica site should be developed similarly to the Cumbrian example cited earlier, where content is pulled from a central systems that houses bookable and non-bookable tourism components. The Discover Dominica website is therefore the “store” for all tourism business and sites, but once the bookable content is selected, the user is effectively booking on a system outside Discover Dominica. Discover Dominica may charge a small transaction fee for all bookings that come through the site, but the operation and management of the system will not be housed within the government agency.

Additionally, Discover Dominica will ensure that the smaller businesses and sites that are not bookable online are included in the system and displayed on the site. This will ensure that the visitor can find all the information they need to either book online or be directed to book through offline channels, ensuring that all businesses are equally represented.

The major goal of the DMS is to facilitate bookings to Dominica in a way that promotes both large and small businesses and different tourism sites in an unbiased way. There are of course challenges to collecting content from and facilitating bookings to all facilities in the country, and not everything can be done entirely through the Web.

The booking process for a potential tourist needs to be looked at as two booking channels that both start in the same place. Visitors use the Web site to find information relevant to their interests and make the decision to travel to Dominica. At this point, visitors will either wish to connect directly to a travel agent/tour operator who can provide them with

a package tour, or more independent travelers will want to book parts of their trip through the Web site or directly with businesses, then plan the rest when they arrive in Dominica.

To help create a system that services both markets, Discover Dominica will need to partner with private organizations that can help facilitate the flow of information to tourists and the booking process. Three suggested partners for DMS operation and management will help to service these markets.

1. ***Discover Dominica***. The role of Discover Dominica is to collect and manage content on the DMS, to educate businesses and tourism sites about the benefits of entering their information into the system, and facilitating the information entry process. As a credible source of tourism information in the eyes of the visitor, Discover Dominica should be responsible for ensuring that Web site content is up to date, correct, and relevant. Discover Dominica is also in a position to conduct outreach/marketing on a national scale to attract interest in Dominica. The Discover Dominica site will cater to travelers looking for a structured tour as well as the independent traveler, directing visitors to book through a tour operator/travel agent or to use the site to book individual trip components according to their interests and needs. Discover Dominica would also facilitate the interaction between the private sector booking entity and the DMS system developer.
2. **Private Sector Booking Entity**. This is the facility that will help independent travelers book specific trip components or tours. This could be the DHTA or another private sector organization (e.g., Whitchurch Travel Agency or Jungle Trekking Adventures and Safaris). The responsibility of this organization is to manage the booking transaction. This could be a direct online transactions from inventory for larger businesses or phone/e-mail enquiries for small businesses where the organization acts as the intermediary, receiving the enquiry from the traveler, answering any questions or concerns, then contacting the business directly to make the reservation. The motivation for this entity **MUST** be profit. The system could be put out to bid by Discover Dominica as a concession, but it must be run as a business where the business makes a profit from commissions on sales, ensuring that they are responsive and reactive to tourist enquiries and needs. Alternatively, this component could be split between online directly bookable businesses (large hotels, tours, etc.) and small, non-directly bookable businesses. In this case, the DHTA could manage all bookings for their larger members (including inventory, real-time bookings of hotels and tours, etc.) where the hotels or travel agents effectively manage their own inventory in the system.

The second entity (possibly a concession from Discover Dominica) would be responsible for managing all transactions that are not directly bookable on the site. That is, this entity services the businesses that are offline and need to be booked through phone or by other means. Discover Dominica would act as the marketing channel for these bookings and possibly take a small commission for helping to manage the system. The private sector entity will manage visitor

enquiries, directly call tourism businesses, and communicate availability back to the visitor to complete the transaction. This can all be integrated into the DMS, with the only exception being the final (offline) link to the tourism business, which is managed by the private sector booking entity. This would allow the user to complete the whole transaction online except for the offline communication with the tourism business.

3. **System Developer and host.** This organization is responsible for managing the software and hardware requirements of the system. They develop and manage the Content Management System (CMS), Customer Relationship Management (CRM), and other software requirements. They are responsible for “pushing” content on the system to other sales outlets, such as Expedia, away.com, international travel agents, etc. They are also responsible for “pulling” content such as flights and other non-Dominica-based travel content from other systems, such as the Global Distribution Systems (GDS) systems. The Discover Dominica Web site (front-end) may be developed by this organization or could be developed by a specialized Web design company.

By initiating a DMS, Discover Dominica will effectively become the facilitator of Dominican tourism promotion. They will host and manage tourism information while leaving the booking and transaction part of the process to the private sector; however, through strategic partnerships with the private sector, Discover Dominica will ensure that the tourist visiting the Dominica site can easily find and book information and plan a trip to the country.

Product Development Guidelines

Based on research, Dominica’s target market is defined as “Life Enthusiast.” They are people who have achieved an advanced level of self-awareness and are in touch with their personal needs. They understand that in order to maintain physical, mental, and spiritual wellness, they must be in contact with nature. They know that nature brings balance to their lives and are willing to proactively pursue it. They are participants, not spectators. They seek out authentic experiences, personal challenges, and the possibility of the unknown. They use travel to fulfill their needs. They travel to gain new experiences, see new places, and meet new people. They travel to recharge their batteries and return feeling fresh and rejuvenated with a strong sense of accomplishment.¹⁰

With an understanding of Dominica’s target market and their demand for authentic travel experiences, Discover Dominica should focus product development activities on helping the private sector understand how to incorporate everything that makes up Dominica’s sense of place rather than try to recreate Caribbean mainstream tourism products. This begins with the way a hotel is designed and constructed and extends to the ingredients used to prepare the visitor’s meals. Most importantly, the private sector must understand how to develop authentic experiences that can be delivered only by Dominicans. This may include a community tour, a stop at a local fruit stand, or the opportunity to observe

¹⁰ *DiscoverDominica* 2008 Marketing Strategy

a traditional way of life. Authentic tours require community participation and economic benefit. Such products need minimal financial investment, but substantial capacity building and time to create an experience in demand by the visitor.

An example of the way products are developed is the day tour created by Exotica Cottages, Whitchurch Tours, and a local community. Together, the three groups developed a unique authentic tour that combined the opportunity to visit and interact with a local community with learning how to cook authentic Dominican cuisine. The tour is successfully marketed and sold to cruise ships, providing substantial economic benefits to the local community.

Private Sector Guidelines

Discover Dominica can play a key role in mainstreaming sustainable tourism in the private sector. The organization should promote and publicize sustainable tourism initiatives (e.g., exemplary practices) through yearly awards and coordination of marketing campaigns, conferences, and training events; by providing information, technologies, and resources for improving social and environmental practices; and through technical assistance to businesses willing to practice sustainability. Sustainable certification programs should be strongly supported and promoted by covering or subsidizing the costs of certification for tourism businesses, especially for small and medium enterprises, through tax credits or deductions, lower interest rates on loans, discounts on concessions, or other direct subsidies. Discover Dominica can also provide financing and in-kind support to media (newspapers, magazines, guidebooks, television or radio productions, etc.) that promote sustainable tourism and certification. Tourism training institutes and academic programs are also important venues for introducing educational and informational resources on sustainable tourism and certification.

Discover Dominica can promote the adoption of the newly created baseline criteria for sustainable tourism developed by the UNF, the Rainforest Alliance, the IUCN, the Sustainable Tourism Certification Network of the Americas, and ECOTRANS. The baseline of international criteria for sustainable tourism has been developed from the bottom up by using as inputs the sustainability requirements from more than 40 certification, ecolabeling, best practice, codes of conduct, and other international guidelines with the purpose of identifying common sustainable tourism requirements from initiatives across the world. The new criteria will be officially launched to the world in December 2007, providing a common language for hoteliers to operate their businesses according to the principles of sustainable tourism. For more information, visit: <http://www.sustainabletourismcriteria.org/preview>.