

NEW ECO-PROJECT TO HELP ST. KITTS AND NEVIS TOURISM



While people usually envision a relaxing vacation in the Caribbean, there's another side of the coin that's seldom noticed by tourists and tourism professionals in general. Native people and associations such as The Nature Conservancy Environmental Organization which have an interest in protecting the Caribbean in general have been advocating for a more eco-friendly attitude towards marine life, mainly coral reefs, turtles, and stingrays. Especially St. Kitts and Nevis tourism might feel the dire effects of environmental problems.

Coral reefs are what provides nourishment to all types of fish. If these become extinct, many types of fish will die. On top of that, more and more turtles are and will fall prey to fishermen's nets due to the scarcity of actual fish in the sea. This is especially evident in the strip between St. Kitts and Nevis, a popular vacation destination for many people worldwide.

What do Hotel Owners Have to Say?

Hotel owners are not against fishermen activity of course, as this would affect food supply and their own business accordingly. **They are worried about the situation and support to varying extents the programs and activities proposed by the Natural Conservancy.** Hotel owners, however, are facing an uncomfortable situation. Fishermen are fishing in their private beaches which affects their reputation and clients' satisfaction.

In the future, this practice will be banned though. This ban will not only protect hotels' interests but also the coral reefs. Alistair Yearwood, a hotel owner states that he "wants to see the fishing industry not only grow but thrive" which shows the willingness of looking for a win-win situation on behalf of hotel owners.

What do Fishermen Have to Say?

Fishermen state that ever since the St. Kitts and Nevis tourism started growing and expanding less fish have been available in the sea. Some of the fishermen quitted their jobs. Fishing has become unprofitable due to the low volume of fish they can trap each day. Others who are still in the business state that they have been trying to survive fishing smaller fish (which people aren't used to eat) due to the scarcity of other types of fish which are more commonly eaten by the population.

The Natural Conservancy states that fishermen also bear responsibility of what's happening in this part of the world. They have been using metal traps which are left in the sea for as long as a week resulting in damaged coral reefs. The fishermen defend themselves saying that the reason they are leaving the traps is because they can't find them due to the high activity there is due to tourism. This is true taking into account the large number of cruises and boats that roam the sea creating a stream that move the traps to unknown locations.

A Possible and Feasible Solution to the Conflict

Local associations have worked together to prepare a plan to preserve the marine ecosystem. **This is what they propose in their 4 million euro project that includes the six main Caribbean**

islands - St. Kitts and Nevis, Granada, Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Lucia, and St. Vincent and Grenadines:

- Delimit and implement marine-managed areas (areas in which fishing isn't allowed). There will be two main classes of areas, one which can only be used by tourists and another that can be used only by fishermen.
- Educate fishermen in the construction and usage of biodegradable fishing traps as opposed to the non-biodegradable ones they are currently using.
- Create new jobs for fishermen in the field of tourism.

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