

SPANISH IN JAMAICA: BLESSING OR SCOURGE?



The former Jamaican government claimed that the country desperately needed foreign investments and thus lured numerous Spanish hotel investors and offered them assistance. Over the last six years the Spanish hotel industry players have been investing significantly into the island and now they are investor even bigger than the US. The Spanish investment projects in Jamaica are worth US\$1.8 billion. They have created 10,000 rooms and approximately 40,000 jobs. The Spanish hotel chains have established a number of relatively cheap all-inclusive hotels here and they target the down-market customer.

The investments, however, cause a harsh controversy now. First of all there are the negative impacts on the environment. The construction of some of the hotel causes real troubles. For example a RIU construction (RIU Hotels & Resorts hotel chain) is accused of polluting the beach in Mammee Bay. It breaks the Environmental Act by disposing of what can be considered the toxic wastewater. The water has reportedly caused skin irritation to many bathers. Another RIU construction in Montego Bay is disturbing guests of the adjacent Sandals hotel because the work on the construction takes place since early morning until late night. The RIU management is said to behave arrogant and they are not honoring the agreed time period for the work at the construction sites.

There are also various safety problems. Some of the constructors do not adhere to the approved safety measures. In one case for example the RIU Hotel constructor in Montego Bay has built four floors instead of three as approved before. The building was required to have only three floors because it stands in the flight path of the aircraft flying to the Sangster International Airport, near the hotel.

Last but not least, the Spanish hotels also create an unwanted competition. Jamaican hoteliers aim at rich customers and therefore their prices are high. Now with Spanish chains offering much cheaper accommodation and services, the Jamaicans have to lower their prices and face lower profits.

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