

Challenges to kingston's tourism industry



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Kingston has many natural, heritage and infrastructural assets that lend themselves to the development of urban tourism and, at one time, was viewed as a viable tourist destination. The city's history, however, indicates a level of creeping neglect and social turmoil which has led to what is today, an almost non-existent tourist presence.

However, it is the social problems that are faced by Kingston, in the form of poverty, crime, and violence, that form the strongest arguments in favour of the development of tourism infrastructure in Kingston. It argued that these are merely symptoms of the greater problem of social exclusion and the lack of economic opportunities for the community at large. Therefore infrastructural development that leads to the creation of sustainable employment opportunities is required.

The city's current dependency on manufacturing and related industries has failed to provide the growth or economic benefits required, particularly since the liberalization of the Jamaican economy and the removal of trade protection. Jamaica has not been competitive, neither as a low cost producer of manufactured goods nor as centre of excellence in any particular manufacturing process, not even when compared with its Caribbean neighbours, such as Trinidad and Tobago. It is therefore unlikely that this sector will be the engine of future growth required to provide the people of Kingston with the economic and social benefits required. Conversely, Jamaica has gained significant comparative advantage in tourism, even though its capital city has not been central to this thus far.

Many cities in the US and around the globe, facing decline in their manufacturing or primary industries, have embarked on a similar development path and like these cities, Kingston has few available development options. However, research suggests a positive relationship between investment in infrastructure and between performance as well as between tourism and welfare. The writer suggests that properly managed tourism infrastructure in Kingston has the potential to provide significant benefits to its citizens.

There is, however very little indication that tourism development in Kingston is high on the agenda of tourism policymakers. The Tourism Master Plan, while acknowledging Kingston's assets, does not make it a priority and merely passes the responsibility to the UDC. Additionally, while a number of papers, studies and plans exist that relates to various sections of Kingston, and some of these do acknowledge the tourism potential, there appears to be very little co-ordination of these initiatives and no central body that is responsible for guiding the achievement of the various plans.

It is recognized that the successful development of tourism in Kingston requires the involvement of the central government, local government, the private sector and active participation of the community. It is suggested that while the government will have some role to play in the provision of basic infrastructure, the major investment in tourism infrastructure should come from the private sector. Beyond this however, the government needs to create the environment to encourage this private sector investment and act as facilitator to the development by addressing such issues as:

- Creation of the tax regime that would facilitate the development
- Development and encouragement of the capital markets
- Legislation to facilitate removal of derelict buildings and facilitate city cleanup
- Inner city housing solutions that provide good living conditions for the community
- Assessment and address of social and environment issues
- Provision for security of citizens and assets

Tourism planners need to have a clear understanding of the key drivers that affect the demand for tourism products and extensive research may be required into the key factors affecting the major sources of tourists that would gain value from visiting Kingston. Markets include the, dsts VFR, CariEuropean markets, which are not heavily penetrated by the present offerings of resort towns, would make ideal initial candidates markets to be studied, applications of Butler's Area Life cycle Model to the destinations in Jamaica may be useful as it is possible that the creation of Kingston as an alternative location could strengthen Jamaica's strategic offerings. This is especially important as the resort towns approach the later stage of the life cycle and over-capacity becomes a more significant limiting factor for tourism growth an issue.

At present, the government's ownership of the national airline Air Jamaica arTe Jamaica UTban Transit Company Limited (JUTC) and the ownership and operation of the Norman Manley International Airport make it an active player in the provision of tourism transportation in Kingston. In addition to its ro as policy setter and regulator the government will and therefore require

fulg of the factors affecting the tourism demand and s tourism transportation. It is anticipated that Kingston will become a major cruise shipping destination and this will potentially raise issues and conflicts with the container shipping industry.

There is little doubt that crime and of the major issues facing the markets acceptance of Kingston as a viable destination. However, , it is important that this is not used we do not use this as of investment. It is noted that in Jamaica's crime against tourists is relatively low and it is also noted that other countries that have high crime levels, are considered as viable tourist destinations.

While the hosting by Jamaica of the semifinal of the Cricket World Cup in 2007 will may not be judge a shining success either financially or as a catalyst for tourism, the hosting does provide a number of lessons which need to be utilized in the future. It cannot be denied that the use of such events to “ Kick Start” tourism in Kingston, if properly planned and managed could be an important part of the tourism planners' strategic tool kit.

A Strategic Plan is required

In the writers opinion there is a clear need for a Strategic Plan for the development of Kingston; a component of which should be the development of tourism. This plan must have as one of its deliverables; the formulation of a clear vision for tourism in Kingston. This vision must be shared among the stakeholders including, national and city Government, the relevant Public Sector bodies, the private sector and the community.

A clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of Kingston as a potential destination for tourists is required and in this regard it is important that the discourse on crime and violence and the impact on tourism is clearly understood.

A significant output of the strategic plan should be a full inventory and assessment of the existing attributes, tourism assets such as attractions, potential attractions and infrastructural assets in the Kingston Metropolitan Area (KMA). This will need to be compared with the desired assets and infrastructure to determine the required investments.

This investment is likely to be very significant and, given Jamaica's current fiscal constraints, is not likely to be accommodated in the present budgetary environment. The discussion of PPII does touch on infrastructure financing, though it is recognized that creative and innovative ways need to be developed to finance the development.

A key issue, which must be fully considered, discussed and evaluated in the strategic plan is the issue of Leadership and Politics. While this has not been discussed in detail in this paper, it cannot be ignored as it represented a common theme in a number of the case studies that were reviewed, including St Louis, Baltimore and especially Montreal.

Additional Research Required

It is recognized that it is beyond the scope of this paper to consider all the applicable areas that require consideration. There is, for example, significant scope for new research to be carried out in order to understand the attitudes of the community, in Kingston and Jamaica generally, towards the active

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development of tourism in Kingston. It is important to determine whether the community will view such developments as being positive, viable and beneficial to them. and therefore we wish to , the the benefits that will the stakeholders in the unity will expect tain from delivering that value to the tourists and, the positive and negative social and environmental impacts that re expected to result from increased tourism and the related development need to be answered?

There is also a need to carry out research into the potential markets mentioned earlier before embarking on significant infrastructural or marketing expenditure. Additional data on what type of tourist may be targeted, where they will come from and what value will they get they will get from would be beneficial to future developers.