

Haiti's future tourism prospects grim essay

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Haiti's Future Tourism Prospects Grim

The republic of Haiti is a Caribbean nation, occupying the Hispaniola Island located in the Antillean Archipelago, which it shares with Dominican Republic. Some of the historical uniqueness associated with the country includes the fact that it was the first nation in Latin America to gain independence and also that it was the first independent black led republic in the world (Federal research Division, 2010). The Federal Research division of the library of congress reports that the country's history has been marked by natural disasters, racial discord, political instability and poverty. Political instability has been a hallmark in the country's struggle to development with many recorded coups and assassinations in both the 19th and the 20th century.

As late as the late 20th century, the country has been corruptly and poorly run with two key leaders, Francois Duvalier (1957-1971) and his son ' Papa Doc' running the country in a dictatorial, corrupt and tight control system that impoverished the country's systems of finance, justice and military. Hopes for political salvation occurred momentarily during the 1990 election when a Roman catholic, Jean-Bertrand Aristide was voted democratically. His pro-poor government only lasted for barely two years when a Junta-led coup overthrew his government and wallowed into wanton destruction of all established systems of government coupled with widespread violence characterized by extrajudicial killings, ethnic hatred and social segregation (Federal research Division, 2010).

With such a historical background, there has been little investment in promotion of the tourism sector in the country that can be used as a springboard for its future prospects. The tourism sector has been in

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deplorable state primarily due to the historical political upheavals and underdeveloped infrastructure. Despite this however, its tourism sector had in the past shown periods of potential having recorded an average of 150,000 tourists annually in the 1970s and 80's (Federal research Division, 2010). In a BBC analysis in July 2010, the country was reported to have misused its tourism potential that traditionally existed due to the country's tropical climate, history and culture which has at its center an accepted voodoo belief system (BBC, 2010). The country's tourism sector currently is at its worst. A booming tourism sector requires a number of support factors which must be in place first before tourists can be lured to make visits. Some of these fundamental factors include infrastructure in the form of transport network such as accessibility through air, roads and water. According to Federal research Division (2010), this kind of infrastructure is practically non-existent in Haiti.

The road system has been traditionally plagued by seasonal torrential rains and insufficient funding that have ravaged them over the years. With 36 vehicles/ 1,000 persons, means of traversing the country are not sufficient for individuals who may wish to tour the country. Where available, the availability of connecting means between one region to the other are poor mainly due to breakdown of bridges that once joined ridges and mountainous regions that dots the entire country. Although the country's urban areas such as the capital, Port-au-prince are well served by roads, their states are poorly maintained leading to frequent traffic snarl ups in the passable areas. In addition, drivers of public vehicles have no formal training

since the country does not have established driving institutions for relevant certifications of the residents (Federal research Division, 2010).

As a consequence, there are many instances of public transport paralysis due to lack of clear rules, systems and guidelines on proper usage of the country's only reliable transport. Other means of transport such as air, railway and water exist at dismal levels. In 1998, the US department of transportation had examined the only international airport based at Port-au-prince and declared it unsafe. Air transport problems forces travelers to rely on helicopter transport especially for foreign agencies operating in the country.

The country is also socially polarized with the huge wealth gap between the minority French speakers and the majority Creole speaking inhabitants reaching unprecedented levels. The minority group owns and controls approximately 50% of the country's wealth leading to widespread poverty and associated social ills such as high rate of crime (Federal research Division, 2010). In addition to this, the government is highly corrupt having been cited by Transparency International in 2006 as being the world's most corrupt country (BBC, 2006). In addition to already existing challenges in the tourism sector, the country's overall economy and the tourism sector was dealt a catastrophic blow in January 12, 2010. According to the US Geological survey Center (2010), a significant portion of the country was hit by a catastrophic earthquake of magnitude 7. 0Mw whose epicenter was traced at Leogane, a town approximately 25km west of the country's capital, Port-au-prince.

Casualty figures indicate that over 230, 000 people perished while over 3 million people, close to 40% of the country's population, were gravely affected by the earthquake. To the tourism sector, the earthquake worsened the situation by destroying the power centers of telecommunications, demolition of transport networks, collapse of hotels and accommodation places. The earthquake also doomed the country's social and national morale due to the overwhelming fatalities experienced (BBC, 2010). Lacey (2010) is also of the opinion that the quake may have destroyed virtually all that was left in the country's artistic world. Some of the country's most important tourist sites such as the Notre dame cathedral, the supreme court, the national palace as well as small scale structures where the country's artists sold artistic works have all vanished (Lacey, 2010). Just before the earthquake, in December 2009, the government had entered into a construction contract with Venezuela to construct a new international airport at Cap-Haitien. There was also an increased foreign investment interest in the country with companies such as the Royal Caribbean cruises, owner of the world's largest cruise ship, ' the new oasis of the seas' allowing the cruise ship to stop over weekly at a beach resort in the country's coastal town of Labadee (Charles, 2009). Choice Hotels International, a global hotel brand had also been on implementation plans of building two international hotels at the country's historic town of Jacmel (Lollis, 2010).

Other futuristic plans that could have served as tourist attractions include the linking of Haiti's world Heritage site with Labadee. The country's major future challenge lies in rebuilding its support infrastructure that can support its tourism sector. Economists at Inter-American Development Bank (IADB)

had on February, 2010 estimated that the cost of rebuilding would reach \$14 billion (Fletcher, 2010). With such a high financial base needed for the rebuilding and provision of basic amenities, it may take a long time for sectors such as tourism to be given critical attention by the government.

As such, the tourism sector in the country in the near future is very grim and will require critical strategic intervention measures that will first address critical economic, social, educational and political stability (Kallis, 2010). It is noted here however that should the strategies at recovery prove fruitful and focused and if foreign intervention in the country would help stabilize the system of government; key investments in areas such as educational training (Cooper, 2010), proper governance and infrastructural investment can play a crucial role in tourists interest in sampling the country's deep culture, alluring climate and topographical

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