

## **Developing Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Community Tourism through Countrystyle's Villages As Businesses Programme**

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### **The Goals and Benefits of Community Tourism**

Tourism is the number one industry of Jamaica and the Caribbean. It impinges on every other sector of island economies, including agriculture, agro-processing, manufacturing, furniture making, arts and crafts, music, sports, information and communications technology, education, health, construction, wholesale and retail trade and services. But in its conventional form it has limited positive impact on community development.

*"Often you speak to a non-tourism employee and they cannot identify a benefit to them as a Jamaican of the tourism value chain. That is a shame because the macro-economic principles that we all operate within could not survive without the tourism dollar." (Adam Stewart, CEO Sandals Resorts International)*

Countrystyle pioneered a holistic approach for tourism in Jamaica known as Community Tourism to broaden the distribution and multiplication of the tourism dollar and specifically to assist communities in realizing the direct benefits of tourism in their own environment. The fundamental vision was to empower and develop communities, on a sustainable basis, by dynamically marketing and exposing their natural culture, talents, passions and potential to the world and packaging each individual community as a unique destination within their general region.

Community Tourism has all the economic attributes of conventional tourism in driving linkages between and among sectors but drives them in an unconventional manner and with different effects. Quoting Adam Stewart again:

*"On any given day through our [Sandals] agitation, up to 35% of our visitors are travelling the length and breadth of Jamaica experiencing the many certified attractions and shopping opportunities, injecting millions of tourism dollars into the national economy and fueling the ability of other businesses to employ hard working Jamaicans and driving the natural linkages that tourism by design is meant to stimulate. ... However, the Community Tourism brand being actively pursued in the last several years by those that have thoughtfulness and precision of purpose, namely the Countrystyle Community Tourism Network, has taken the possibilities of direct community and 'township' participation to the next but natural level critical to making the public as a whole understand and buy in to Tourism's enormous value chain."*

Community tourism's added benefits are numerous:

- It responds to the growing percentage of responsible visitors who now choose destinations that offer a natural, authentic community experience rather than one designed specially or exclusively for tourists, thus helping sustain the industry's competitiveness;
- It retains a larger share of the tourist dollars locally than is the case with conventional tourism, especially the large resort hotel sector, and wider distribution and multiplication of those dollars means improved quality of life for more people;
- It seeks to diversify the tourism products and services on offer and, through this diversification, enhance a nation's ability to address the increasingly varied demands in the wide tourism marketplace;
- It fosters host-visitor friendships and mutual understanding and encourages repeat visits;
- Like conventional tourism, it embraces and provides for niche markets and may serve many of them more effectively, expanding local business opportunities;
- It does not require investment in specially created and managed "attractions." Indeed, these are incompatible with true community tourism and are expressly discouraged;
- It depends on and is an incentive to care for natural environments, heritage sites and indigenous cultures;
- It requires the training and involvement of community residents and businesses and brings exposure to new markets, all of which stimulate new skills, ideas, entrepreneurship and collaboration; and
- It provides a tangible incentive and a practical vehicle for holistic community development and for strengthening community cohesion and participation in governance.

For all these reasons, and especially its potential for the upliftment of communities and the nurturing of entrepreneurship and innovation, it is this form of tourism that has real promise for the future prosperity of small island economies. Recognition of its powerful potential led delegates to the first International Institute for Peace through Tourism (IIPT) Caribbean Conference, held in Montego Bay in 2003, to agree that "Community Tourism is community development through tourism,"

### **The Emergence and Functions of Villages As Businesses**

In building its model of community tourism in Jamaica and the rest of the Caribbean, Countrystyle saw the need for an organization to serve as a liaison between the visitor and the community. Hence Countrystyle Community Tourism Network (CCTN) was born to provide a range of services from training individuals and communities to tour design and management. It promotes the acceptance and expansion of community tourism, represents and partners with groups and businesses with an interest in community tourism and provides consulting services through its team of specialist trainers and researchers.

Countrystyle/CCTN developed the Community Tourism Village Programme to create economic opportunities for community persons interested in investing in their communities by offering community tourism products and attractions that build on unique natural, cultural and human capital. The village programme markets authentic lifestyles, people and experiences. It views the tourism product of the Caribbean as relating not only to specific 'resort areas' or traditional tourism establishments but to the entire country. It also sees community tourism not as an end in itself to be relied on as a primary industry but as a catalyst to broader economic, social and cultural development, innovation and entrepreneurship.

In 2011 CCTN designed Villages As Businesses (VAB) as a practical framework for formalizing and scaling up its work of preparing villages for community tourism and encouraging the development of communities as sustainable business enterprises. The objective was and remains to empower communities to offer a range of products and services, generating income, expanding businesses and providing new employment and career paths. But, as listed earlier, the process of preparing for and engaging in community tourism creates community wealth in more than financial terms, encouraging the acquisition of skills and education, requiring protection of community assets, fostering community pride, and stimulating self determination and participation in governance.

Villages As Businesses operates as a not-for-profit membership component of CCTN. Communities join when they understand the potential of community tourism and commit to developing their own brand. VAB is funded by member dues, grants, contributions and, in future, the interest generated by a nascent Community Tourism Trust Fund (COMTRUST). Its services include sensitization, training, tour preparation, business planning and entrepreneurial guidance and networked marketing. CCTN/VAB's aim is to provide as much autonomy as possible but to undertake those functions that are hard or infeasible for a community to undertake alone such as international homestay marketing, obtaining liability insurance and establishing links and partnerships with tour operators.

### **How Villages As Businesses Works**

CCTN/VAB works by first building relationships and promoting the possibilities of community tourism. When approached by a village, CCTN/VAB advises the community to establish a community tourism steering committee and mobilize as many residents of the community as possible to participate in a half-day seminar explaining the nature and potential benefits of community tourism.

Participants in the seminar learn that the Countrystyle VAB philosophy is that every community and every citizen is a potential tourism business partner, directly or indirectly, with the chance to improve earnings and become empowered and educated through involvement in the expanded industry. However, to become an effective partner, every community and every citizen needs to understand how to value, protect and promote their natural, cultural, heritage and human assets. Participating villages are encouraged to think of themselves as businesses which they own collectively, stimulate entrepreneurship and identify opportunities to add value to community assets through conservation, education and creativity.

At the seminar, CCTN/VAB facilitators and the steering committee are able to identify participants who have a serious entrepreneurial interest in pursuing one or more of the many aspects of community tourism. Those selected are invited to participate in a highly interactive five-day training course that covers community tourism in more detail, including:

- niche markets,
- linkages with other aspects of the village's economic and social life,
- identification of community assets.
- how to meet and exceed visitor expectations,
- an introduction to hospitality, community host-guiding, homestay management and careers in community tourism,
- the importance of sustainable environmental management,
- organizing for community tourism and the need for collaboration, partnerships and effective democratic governance,
- an approach to business plan development,
- marketing, and
- design of a possible Community Experience tour.

Through this initial training, CCTN/VAB aims to foster creativity, optimism and a shared vision among the participants and throughout the community that motivates everyone to seek entrepreneurial opportunities within their local environment..

It is the activities that encourage participants to describe their community and identify its assets that are key to unlocking the potential of a village. Frequently, participants come to recognize that buildings and sites that may have been shunned and allowed to fall into disrepair because of painful associations with past history have interest for visitors. Frequently also, using a new perspective, they realize that aspects of daily life and culture that they consider mundane or take for granted may be fascinating to guests.

There is always also a point when participants see that people, their personalities and their stories are the main attraction. They understand the importance and value of hospitality that is genuine and intimate and that they themselves can be marketing ambassadors for their community and the country. This recognition instils pride and the collaboration required to design a tour reinforces community cohesion.

Countrystyle/VAB takes a strongly participatory approach to developing the Village Programme, encouraging citizens to participate in and benefit from their own development by mobilizing their own resources, defining their own vision and needs and making their own decisions about how to meet them.

The concept of community represents several elements important to nation building, bringing people together for a purpose and structuring a collective mindset which involves sharing and using resources in an equitable and sustainable way. And so the CCTN/VAB approach to community building facilitation and training stresses four "Ps":

**Potential** -- the recognition of what resources are present and how these resources can be sustainably used;

**Passion** -- the creative enterprise of the human spirit and is the bridge that links potential to purpose;

**Purpose** -- that mobilizes community leadership, a division of labour to address key areas of development and full participation by all stakeholders to realize the community's vision; and

**Partnership** -- the point where all linkages are formalized between the public and private sector, where the community as a unit can begin to generate income and receive assistance from other communities with the nation and overseas.

Graduates of the five-day course are eligible for a 14-day Community Tourism Study Tour providing seminars and practical experience in a variety of settings in Jamaica. The Study Tour offers participants the opportunity to earn credits towards international BTEC (Business and Technology Education Council) certification in Understanding Enterprise and Entrepreneurship and in Customer Service in Hospitality, Leisure, Travel and Tourism.

Five-day course graduates are also eligible for one or more of Countrystyle's advanced and focused training courses in basic hospitality skills, craft skills, and niche markets such as eco-tourism, cultural tourism, heritage tourism, cuisine tourism, sports tourism, and recreational tourism. The Study Tour and other courses are offered through the Academy of Community Tourism (ACT), established by CountryStyle/Villages As Businesses in partnership with Etalon Global Solutions (EGS), an approved Pearson EDEXCEL Training and Certification Centre.

ACT continues and builds on Countrystyle's long-established training courses and is a core tool for implementing the Countrystyle Community Tourism philosophy of working through tourism to energize small and medium enterprises and to empower individuals through new skills, international certification and entrepreneurship. It is part of the Countrystyle/VAB vision that individuals who might not qualify to enter tertiary education in normal circumstances could through community tourism work towards a bachelor's or more advanced degree.

### **The Community Experience Tours**

As the catalyst for the work of Villages As Businesses, CCTN developed a dynamic marketing theme for communities. The highly regarded "Community Experience" offers visitors diverse vacations and tours anywhere in the Caribbean that promotes its nature, heritage, culture, music, cuisine and entertainment. VAB helps villages design the tours and CCTN packages the Community Experience for tour operators, travel agents and visitors. The packages take into consideration, and often are specially tailored to, the interests and budgets of local and international visitors, whether travelling in groups or as individuals or couples.

In April 2014, CCTN registered a for-profit tour company, Countrystyle Caribbean Vacations and Tours (COCAVAT) and formed a partnership with Olympia Tours, established by Caribic Vacations, Jamaica's oldest tour company, to diversify into community tourism. The partnership removed major logistical hurdles for CCTN/VAB and member villages by making liability insurance and transportation available. This has allowed a significant scaling up of

activity, which has in turn benefitted Caribic as well as the participating villages. COCAVAT/Olympia Tours also designs and operates tours for other tour companies. One of these, TUI, which came to CCTN/COCAVAT requesting a tour for all-inclusive hotel guests, recently wrote:

*"After being introduced to Diana McIntyre-Pike back in 2013 by the Travel Foundation, we first discussed the feasibility of setting up the Real Jamaica excursion for TUI customers. The aim of the trip was to expose the customers to the one of the local communities in the Negril area and enable the community to interact with the tourists to give an authentic insight into village life. CCTN/VAB worked with the community for some time raising their awareness of how they could benefit from the tour. This included extensive training on guiding techniques, what relevant content to include, and which places to visit on the tour. This resulted in the formation of the tour, its itinerary and the people that would be involved in the tour's execution. We began selling the Tour in February/March 2014 and it has proved to be a big success operating ever since on a weekly basis. The quality of the tour is to a high standard and the customer feedback has proved to be excellent. We have recently been investigating the possibility of launching a similar tour in another neighbouring community."*

On behalf of and for the benefit of member villages, the combined efforts of CCTN, VAB and COCAVAT provide an efficient destination management organization. They coordinate design, preparation, marketing and operation of the community experience tours. They respond to any special requests and deal with any problems and emergencies that may occur in a community. CCTN/VAB provides training, business development and marketing support at discounted rates to its members and assists with proposals for grant funding.

### **The Direct and Indirect Benefits of Community Experience Tours**

Participating villages gain income directly from visitors through the tours, meals and entertainment and the payment of community host/guides. Schools and churches benefit from visitors' interest and contributions. Most significantly, residents benefit because the tours include community businesses as interesting things to visit and support, adding to the diverse community experience. Guests are anxious to buy art, craft items, clothing and natural products, increasing both income and encouragement. Residents who have received VAB's homestay training are marketed via CCTN/VAB's partnership with Homestay.com.

Visitors enjoying the community tours also welcome the opportunity to assist communities by contributing to CCTN's community development trust fund, COMTRUST, and participating in our "Adopt a Village" and "Pick a Project while on Vacation" programmes. This has the effect of creating repeat business. Sometimes the exposure of guests to a village and its emerging businesses is direct and dramatic. For example, 600 guests at the Sandals all-inclusive resort hotel in Westmoreland spent a weekend assisting the village of Beeston Spring, a CCTN/VAB tour destination. In addition to reroofing the basic school, the guests built beehives for the beekeeper many of them had met and been impressed by on the community experience tour. As a result that beekeeper now has a thriving local and export business.

## **Community Tourism as an Integrative Approach to Development**

Community tourism and the Villages As Businesses Programme offer a powerful and practical vehicle for training in hospitality skills, small business management, product development and marketing, They also build awareness of the value and need for care of natural, cultural and heritage assets.

The training and the tour design activities stimulate recognition of linkages. For example, when participants learn that many of their visitors are concerned about health and wellness, they make the connection to the importance of many changes that could benefit the community and create entrepreneurial opportunities. Our villages have started businesses in organic farming for more varied and cheaper vegetables and food security, restaurants and catering featuring healthy cuisine, and natural products using native plants and indigenous knowledge about their medicinal and other uses.

Through community tourism marketing, schools, churches, business places and residents themselves become an integral part of the product, creating new tourism partners and entrepreneurs and producing opportunities for other sectors of the economy. These opportunities will continue to grow as the number and diversity of village experiences -- farms, culinary, sports, historical, adventure, nature, music etc. grow. For example, in St. Eustatius, in the Dutch Caribbean, where CCTN/VAB recently conducted its five-day training course, participants designed six tours, three of which were successfully tested during the course, and generated ideas for many more. .

In our experience, the context provided by community tourism stimulates ideas and awakens latent entrepreneurial capacity even in participants with limited formal education. It also reveals natural leaders who may become qualified community host/guides. They may move on to organizing roles or opt to continue their education in community tourism, (A list of courses offered through the new School of Community Tourism is available from CCTN.)

## **The Barriers and Challenges**

The work of developing and promoting community tourism in Jamaica has been a struggle for CCTN despite pioneering the concept over some four decades, receiving international recognition and being honoured by IIPT which branded Jamaica "The Home of Community Tourism." and in November 2013, supported CCTN's recommendation to include the Caribbean with this brand.

One of CCTN/VAB's constant challenges is funding. Scaling up community tourism requires grant funding and investment support until sustainability is achieved through sufficient economies of scale.

Uncovering, nurturing and keeping real the unique character of a community requires skilled and sensitive outside facilitation and systematic training in awareness, hospitality and business skills. That is what CCTN/VAB provides. Costs are high because communities are scattered, travel times are often long and training courses require several days. It takes more time to achieve readiness for a tour, respecting participants' other obligations and building

understanding and consensus throughout the community. While participants contribute through modest membership fees, funding has to be found to support each training intervention.

Trained communities develop the skills to conduct the regular tours themselves but continue to need other services from CCTN/VAB. As the number of villages grows, this calls for a secretariat with staff skilled in community engagement and management. This requires more than the conventional project by project funding. However, observers have noted that CCTN/VAB's role as advocate and go between for villages "tends to be overlooked because it is developed a community tourism policy but failed to mention the work of CCTN and others in community tourism. so seamless." In other words, the role is invisible to the client as well as to potential funders such as multinational donors, foundations and government agencies.

Another continuing barrier to scaling up has been that the concept of community tourism challenges the status quo, the unsustainable dominance of traditional, large resort mass tourism in Jamaica. Scaling up without grants is difficult and without the backing of a government focused on conventional tourism, grants are hard to obtain, especially when achieving project objectives means significant change. A 10 million Jamaican dollar Community Tourism Project proposed by the Sustainable Communities Foundation (which was formed before CCTN as the NGO for community tourism) funded by CIDA's Caribbean HRD Programme for Economic Competitiveness (CPEC) in 2003 – 2004 helped raise community and to some degree broader public awareness but failed to generate the support of government tourism and development agencies.

Recently, the Government of Jamaica has acknowledged the prominence of community tourism and developed a policy for community tourism but did not acknowledge the many years of work by CCTN and others. CCTN/VAB has advised the government that collaboration is offered towards the sustainable development of community tourism. The outcome remains to be seen but clearly community tourism has not reached its full potential in Jamaica -- or even come close; there is much work still to be done. That work involves sensitizing communities across the country about their inevitable responsibility to take an environmentally-friendly, sustainable, integrated and collective approach to their development. It also involves sensitizing and making administrators and authorities aware that the true development for the country rests in the passions and potential of the mass of the people that reside in Jamaica's communities. Only when a relationship of true partnership is built with these communities, and one that addresses their needs, will Jamaica truly realize development.

Michael Esposito, founder of Latin American Cultural Roots, an NGO based in Philadelphia, became acquainted with CCTN in an article posted by the Caribbean Media Exchange. Having taken one of the CCTN/VAB tours and reviewed the history of CCTN, he wrote, on September 28, 2013 on Mike Esposito's Latin and Caribbean Travel Blog:

*"When it comes to politics and especially dividing up the spoils of politics - wealth, influence and hegemony, those who would seek to retain these for themselves and their associates have to create some type of noise to destroy the credibility of a legitimate alternative. If this activity is allowed to be unchecked, politics, economy and the social fabric acquire a*

*dysfunctional nature. The best approach to counter this tendency is to stick to logic, hard evidence and the legitimate rule of law to gain public support for valid ideas, which are more difficult to ignore once their worth has been proven and the public base becomes convinced of the resultant benefits to society. For me, it is exciting to witness the growth of this grass roots initiative to develop a sustainable economic model and channel the enormous power of a well-designed tourism product to go beyond providing leisure and truly create good will between people."*

## **Partnerships**

The private conventional tourism sector is becoming aware of the need to respond to increasingly diverse demands among tourists and travelers. In Jamaica, Caribic Vacations, Sandals Resorts International and TUI/Thomson, among others, have partnered with CCTN to boost their competitiveness. They recognize that it would not be cost-effective and perhaps not feasible to attempt to build their own capacity to prepare and manage communities. In addition, a growing number of hotels are becoming CCTN/VAB patrons.

CCTN believes that through Villages as Businesses solutions can be shared and translated into successes that transform and sustain communities. CCTN/VAB therefore partners with the National Best Communities Foundation which runs the National Best Community Competition and with more specialized organizations such as the Jamaica Creative Co-operative and the Jamaica Organic Agriculture Movement. These partnerships strengthen the network of skills, experience and word of mouth marketing to the benefit of each partner.

Internationally, CCTN/VAB has a strong, long-standing partnership with the International Institute for Peace through Tourism (IIPT) and with the IIPT/Skal Peace Parks and Villages programme. We partner with Homestay.com and with the online marketing portal Let's do it in the Caribbean. Strong links are also being built with the Jamaican and Caribbean Diaspora and, through their members, with North America, Europe and Asia. International demand for our community tourism study tours and for our training and tour development services is growing as is the number of countries and regions in the Caribbean and elsewhere that have become members of the network. It is through these mutually beneficial partnerships and the expanding network that understanding and recognition of the success and potential of CCTN/VAB's approach to community tourism is growing and will continue to grow.

## **Recommendations for the Way Forward**

If community tourism is to achieve its potential as community development through tourism and a holistic tool for national advancement, a broad-based partnership to promote and manage it is essential. That partnership needs to include government but ideally largely in a supporting role, facilitating funding, encouraging linkages and promoting results but not competing.

In CCTN's experience, an independent network tends to offer greater efficiency, flexibility, continuity and grass roots connection than government agencies. While government community development agencies are welcome as active partners, it is important that they

share CCTN's philosophy and consistent but flexible approach and a genuine intention to collaborate to push forward to achievement of the Villages As Businesses vision.

Public sector tourism agencies are also welcome as marketing partners but again need to resist a desire to compete rather than collaborate. These agencies also have a tendency to over-regulate and to dismiss communities lacking well-known features or "attractions" as not "market-ready." Our experience has shown that village participants who could not meet exacting and costly government certification requirements meet inspections by top international tour companies with flying colours. Our experience has also amply demonstrated that visitors value authenticity, the opportunity to interact with residents and to hear personal stories about history, nature and culture at least as much as more conventional "points of interest."

CCTN/Villages As Businesses itself is moving forward with expanding its membership and tours and responding to requests from Jamaica and elsewhere for training, consulting and our study tours leading to accreditation in Village Tourism Management. We are planning to set up Community Tourism Centres in Jamaica and the Caribbean to offer complete community development services and information to community tourism visitors and investors in relation to the many projects identified. We also plan to hold an IIPT Caribbean Villages as Businesses Conference and Trade Show in 2016 and the 2<sup>nd</sup> IIPT Golfing for peace tournament in Jamaica to which our Caribbean members are invited.

We will also be seeking to establish baselines so that we can set target benchmarks and monitor the impacts of our work. Awards and testimonials from visitors and hosts have been welcome indicators of success so far. However, we need to be able to demonstrate our effectiveness in stimulating innovation, entrepreneurship, improved livelihoods, jobs and careers, responsibility and collaboration, better protection of resources, and lowered costs of dysfunctional lives and communities.

In summary, we believe that together through a strong community tourism network of villages and partners it is possible to expand and spread the financial benefits of tourism, increase cross-cultural communication, approach social and economic development more holistically and transform and sustain communities and lives.