



A DICHOTOMY OF CULTURES



THE NATURE OF JAMAICAN
RESORT DEVELOPMENT



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An abundance of private resorts and luxurious destinations have cropped up across Jamaica and most of the Caribbean over the last several decades. As the demand for and subsequent development of these gated resorts increase, the potential for economic dependence and marginalization of native peoples can increase as well. Decades of resort-based tourism and cruise liners shuttling Westerns throughout the Caribbean offer proof that the promises from international organizations of modernization and local jobs come with a hidden price tag. Doves of middle- and upper-class Westerners flock en masse to these resort destinations, bringing with them negative externalities that extend far beyond fiscal woes: disenfranchised local businesses and a society segregated along a series of borders and hinges. Advocates and activists in Jamaica and its neighboring countries have long cautioned against this particular brand of tourism. V.S. Naipaul, a noted Caribbean writer, has gone so far as to call it a 'new slavery' (Gibson, 2014, p.340).

Across the Caribbean, countries are facing similar struggles brought about by the rise of luxury resorts and the particular brand of tourism these resorts market. The islands too often lack the

national agency or will to implement policies that regulate the sort of unchecked development created as a result of the current tourism paradigm. Furthermore, CARICOM, the regional planning organization in the Caribbean, has not been able to effect plans that address the externalities of the industry.

As economic growth and development in the region are closely linked to the tourist industry – tourism brought \$850 million to the region in 2000 – Caribbean countries often seem to be competing against each other to attract the newest resort, port, or crowd of holidaymakers (Gibson, 2014, p.342). For the most part, this competition has not bred innovation; rather it seems to create a race to the bottom, draining communities of resources in efforts to lure the largest resort developments, amplifying a stagnant form of tourism. Without the necessary leadership, island nations struggle to prevent the erosion of delicate cultural and natural systems. As islands invest in the false promises of a bright future through mass tourism, one is left to question the effectiveness of economic growth when the capacity to create a sustainable, equitable future is missing.



In the eyes of tourists and developers, Jamaica, with its famous cultural icons and several hundred miles of development-worthy beachfront, stands apart from its island neighbors. And Montego Bay, on the northwestern coast, offers some of the best luxury resort destinations on the island.

Half Moon Resort, an all-inclusive destination and one of the oldest resorts in Montego Bay, offers an escape to paradise for those who can afford the high price tag. Walls extending into the ocean and guarded gates enclose these private resorts, creating a hard border that divides two different Jamaicas.



Resort culture has rapidly altered the Caribbean landscape. Public beaches have always provided a market for local businesses, but in recent years, the effects of unbridled resort development and private beaches have harmed beach communities such as this one. Jacob Taylor Beach, once a

successful fishing town with small shops and food stops, has experienced economic decline following nearby private development. The construction of a wall divides the existing community from the newcomers, with each side representing two disparate ways of life.



In contrast to the authentic public beaches, resorts offer duty-free shopping villages selling mass-produced Jamaican culture and restaurants cooking foods imported for American and European palates. Resort tourism is breeding a neocolonialism in which Jamaica, along with

other countries, exports agriculture it does not consume or process and imports foods it does not grow (McCook, 1996). And locals will tell you that the increase of resorts in Montego Bay forced many well-established restaurants and businesses to close.



Tourism has been marketed as a catalyst to help move countries like Jamaica into the 21st century, but this modernization appears to be selectively dispersed. The nature of the development of these resort destinations creates a polarizing

spatial fabric in the coastal communities of Jamaica – a checkerboard of haves and have-nots. This separation of people by socio-economic backgrounds, statuses, races, and experiences seems to further segregate society.



To remain competitive with Caribbean neighbors, countries offer financial incentives to attract foreign investment and travelers. Duty-free shopping is offered in the resorts as one such incentive, but decades of not collecting sales taxes have taken their toll on the host countries. Since foreign companies own many of these resorts, the

World Bank estimates that as much as 80 percent of tourism revenue does not stay in the country (Gibson, 2014, p.344). Despite the long-term negative effects and cultural and economic malaise, these countries have become dependent on the jobs the tourist industry creates.



The duty-free shopping may be alluring to tourists, but the reality of Jamaica not receiving taxes from resort business takes shape in degrading public services. As bus stations and roads deteriorate, access to local communities decreases, further reducing local business consumption and sales tax

revenue. The negative symptoms of foreign-owned resorts and duty-free shopping seem to outweigh the national benefits of Jamaica's resort culture, suggesting that a reevaluation of regional planning efforts may be in order. ■

REFERENCES

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McCook, Stuart. (1996). H-Net Reviews. Retrieved from <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=654>