



Flogging the Dead Horse

Tourism, the word invokes white skins, white sands and green paper. It is both the bane of and reason for Jamaica's continued existence. Tourism is the service based industry comprising a number of visible and less visible components. The visible elements include transport, foods and beverages, tours, souvenirs and accommodation, while the unseen elements involve education, culture, adventure or simply escape and relaxation. Tourism has for a long time been Jamaica's crucial income generator and is responsible in large part for the vibrancy of Montego Bay. However, it carries with it lots of crucial elements which maybe responsible for the friendly city's demise. Tourism in Montego Bay has been a dead horse, which both central and local government have been flogging for a long time now.

Tourism has been responsible for crucial cultural changes to the island in general and Montego Bay in particular. It has single handedly created the rent-a-dread phenomenon and pseudo accented, ad-hoc tour guides that sometimes plague the city. The brand of tourism that is continuously flogged by the heads of state, has done very little to advance the country and the city. Montego Bay's entire economy is tied to the fate of tourism, and as such it is my belief that the government ought to seek to diversify the city's economic options now before there is any collapse in the world sphere that may affect tourism. Montego Bay suffers from severe brain drain that needs to be addressed urgently. If addressed appropriately, this could lend it self to bettering the tourism product as well as diversifying the brand or type of tourism the friendly city now has.

The relevant authorities need to start flogging the dead horse properly if we are to ever see its resurrection. Firstly there needs to be a proper demographic study of the type of tourists we have, those we cater to and those we may very well need to be catering to. That is to say someone needs to take a look now, at who comes to the country and why. I have seen a Smithson report that sited Jamaica as the third most popular "cultural tourist" destination after Europe and Asia. Cultural in the regard that tourists come here not to see the hotels and the mass produces facades we have, or to eat McDonalds and Burger King which they already have at home, but they come here to see and experience our real way of life; the social and cultural circumstances that produced the likes of Jimmy Cliff and

Bob Marley. Another report I saw indicated that European tourists tend to spend more than American tourists who are usually struggling middle income earners or struggling college students. If this is the case, why is our tourism product, still so heavily tailored to suit the Americans, and why do we still sell “Sun, sex, sand and sea?”

It is time started seriously investing in eco-tourism and cultural tourism. Montego Bay the tourism Mecca of the island is without a well established Museum, one that offers a look into the rich history of the city and even the parish. There needs to be one that shows the history of the rest of the island, the history and anthropology of the Tainoes, the Arawaks, the Slaves and the sugar industry. It is about time Montego Bay looked into incorporating the authentic Rastafarian community (such as the Nyahbinghi camp in Granville) into our product, instead of defaming the legacy of our homegrown religious form, with the promotion of the rent-a-dreads who mainly cater to frivolous sexual fantasies. Montegonians also need to incorporate the other religious groups, the Kumina and Pocomania into our product so that it is an experience in real Jamaican life. Not a television advertisement. It is also time citizens of the friendly city seek to integrate the neighboring Maroon settlements into our product, so as to really revamp and invigorate the cities tourism product. Montego Bay has more heritage sites like the old railway lines and the old architecture in the board houses that have long been taken for granted, not just the Rose Hall Great house or the other plantation houses we love to advertise.

Montego Bay and its relevant governing bodies need to also start examining ecotourism in a very serious way instead of the limited efforts we have put in. Ecotourism is a tourism market based on an area's natural resources that attempts to minimize the ecological impact of the tourism. As an internationally recognized tourism hub Montego Bay needs to seriously incorporate environs such as the Montego River and the Aviary in Anchovy. Not only is it an environmentally friendly brand of tourism but it is also one that require little financial investment to get it going ad it requires minimal if any infrastructural changes or implementation. It is only until Montegonians start giving serious thought to what it is we are doing with what we have that we can seriously start to reap real benefits from tourism, not just financially, but socially and culturally.

Finally the government and relevant tourism interests need to look into strategic marketing. There are large markets hungry for Jamaica's culture, which is not sufficiently tapped. Regions such as Trinidad in the Caribbean, Brazil which is a neighboring region with a population larger than all the Caribbean islands put together, there are Germany, Japan and China, as well as Hawaii to name a few. If The City targeted these locations and did the necessary research, it would undoubtedly pay off. However if it is that we seek to flog, whip, and lash the dead horse of this old commercial and played out brand of tourism we have not much to look forward to other than what is now labeled in some circles and arenas of thoughts as ‘whorism,’ social decay and the inevitable deterioration of our beloved city.