



Sustainable Tourism in Belize

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Abstract

The health of Belize's economy is closely related to the health of the tourism industry, which was responsible for 40 percent of total exports of goods and services from 2008 to 2012. The tourism industry in Belize is still an emerging sector, and its continued sustainable growth is a critical factor. This technical note discusses the main characteristics of the Belizean tourism sector and its importance to the national economy, and identifies the key constraints to the sector's sustainable development and the policies currently being implemented. The note highlights the country's cultural heritage, biodiversity, and ecosystems; the threats of natural disasters and climate change; and the opportunities to achieve sustainable tourism. It also presents policy recommendations, taking into account the strategic goals of the National Sustainable Tourism Master Plan 2012–2030 (NSTMP), a strategic framework for sustainable development that guides Belize's tourism sector, as well as the goals toward regional integration in Central America.

JEL Codes: F64, F66, H21, O17, Q26, Q28, Q54, Q57

Keywords: sustainable tourism, National Sustainable Tourism Master Plan (NSTMP), tourist expenditure, biodiversity, ecosystems, natural capital, disaster risk reduction, vulnerability, climate resilience, Belize, Caribbean, tourism product, tourism destination, overnight arrivals, occupancy rate, tourist accommodations, tourism assets; cultural heritage, Mesoamerican Barrier Reef, tourist distribution, marketing development; policy framework, capacity building, standards and quality management

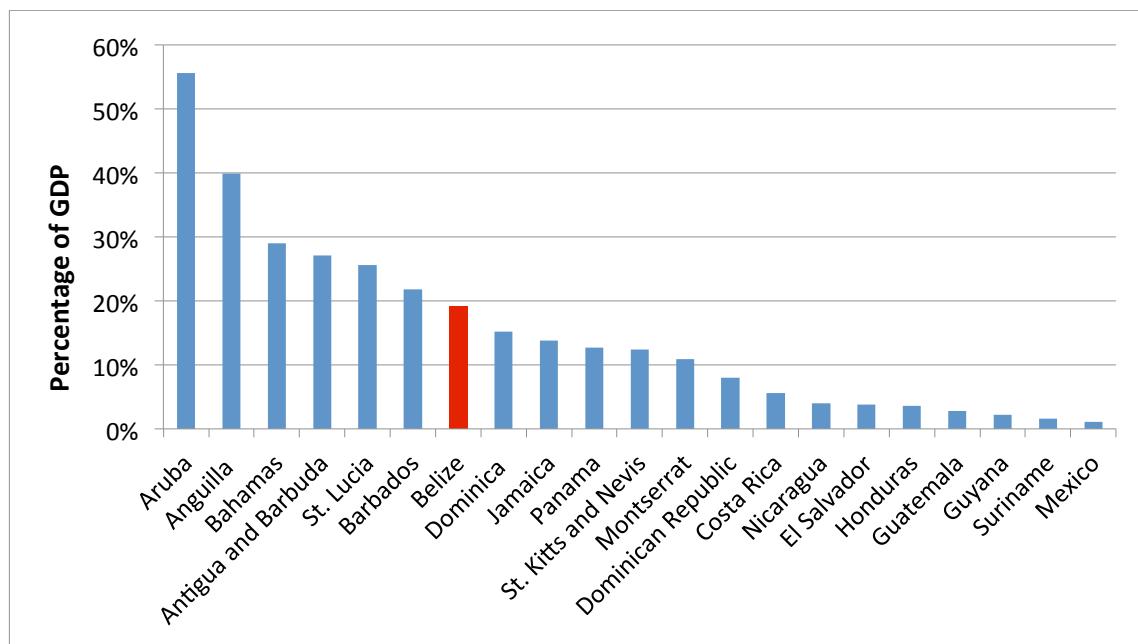
Acronyms

BELTRAIDE	Belize Trade and Investment Development Service
BTB	Belize Tourism Board
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CDM	Comprehensive Disaster Management
CTO	Caribbean Tourism Organization
CZMAI	Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute
DOE	Department of the Environment
EPA	Environmental Protection Act
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
ICZM	Integrated Coastal Zone Management
MNRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
MFFSD	Ministry of Forestry, Fisheries and Sustainable Development
MTC	Ministry of Tourism and Culture
NEMO	National Emergency Management Organization
NEC	National Emergency Coordinator
NICH	National Institute of Culture and Heritage
NLUP	National Land Use Policy
NSTMP	National Sustainable Tourism Master Plan
PPDU	Project Planning Development Unit
SIB	Statistical Institute Belize
SITCA	Central American Tourism Integration Secretariat
WTTC	World Travel and Tourism Council

1. Justification

Tourism is the most important economic base in Belize.¹ Tourism is also the largest earner of foreign exchange, with travel earnings accounting for 40 percent of total exports of goods and services from 2008–2012.² Tourism expenditures were equivalent to 18 percent of GDP from 2008–2012, which is about average by the standards of tourism-oriented Caribbean countries but far higher than that of Belize's Central American neighbors (Figure 1).³ Although official statistics do not estimate the direct contribution of tourism to GDP because Belize does not currently produce a tourism satellite account, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) has estimated that travel and tourism directly contributed 12.5 percent of GDP in 2012 and that their total contribution, when including indirect and induced effects, was around 32 percent of GDP (WTTC, 2013). Similarly, the WTTC estimated that travel and tourism generated 15,500 jobs directly in 2012 (11.3 percent of total employment), and 31 percent of employment when considering wider effects.

Figure 1: Tourism Services Exports as Percent of GDP, 2012



Source: United Nations data.

Note: For Barbados, 2010 World Bank data were used to estimate tourism service exports as a percent of GDP.

¹ It is followed by the agriculture sector, with total exports of goods and services accounting for 29 percent in 2012 and 26 percent in 2013.

² Central Bank of Belize balance of payments data, <https://www.centralbank.org.bz>.

³ IDB based on Central Bank of Belize annual reports and Statistical Institute of Belize (SIB).

Given tourism's key role, the health of Belize's economy is closely related to the health of the tourism industry. The IMF has found that tourism arrivals and, to a lesser extent, receipts per tourist have had an important impact on economic growth in the Caribbean, including by strengthening factor accumulation and productivity (Thacker, Acevedo, and Perelli, 2012).

With the government's recent endorsement of the National Sustainable Tourism Master Plan 2012–2030 (NSTMP), a strategic framework for sustainable tourism development in Belize (Tourism and Leisure Europraxis Consulting and BTB, 2011). The NSTMP sets out ambitious but feasible annual growth targets up to 2030: 3.8 percent growth in overnight visitors, 4.9 percent in visitor nights stayed, and 7.65 percent in tourism expenditures (in nominal U.S. dollars). Achieving these targets is almost a *sine qua non* for Belize's economy as a whole to grow by 5 percent per annum over the medium term, which is the target for economic growth recommended in the Inter-American Development Bank's growth assessment (IDB, forthcoming). Execution of the NSTMP and realization of its targets will require considerable public policy support and complementary investment.

Nevertheless, as is implicit in the name of the NSTMP, it is critically important that the continued growth of the tourism be sustainable. The country's best-known tourism assets of international significance depend on the country's dense forested areas, mountains and rivers found inland, and a variety of ecosystems found along the coast, such as coral reefs, mangroves, sea grass beds, and estuaries.⁴ In addition to being areas of high biodiversity and scenic beauty, these ecosystems provide a range of goods and ecosystem services, which are the foundation of a sustainable tourism sector. For example, these ecosystems often provide the best habitat for threatened or endangered species, such as the West Indian manatee and rare bird and fish species. Areas with high biodiversity serve as tourism hotspots for visitors wishing to view unique or rare plants and animals. Coastal ecosystems also serve as hatcheries and nurseries for fish species, many of which are caught in the growing sport fisheries sector. Mangroves and coral reefs (both barrier and patch reefs) provide an effective buffer that protects tourism infrastructure against storm surges. Belize's forests also provide regulating services such as soil stabilization, which prevents

⁴ For example, the Chiquibul Caves System, the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System, and the Blue Hole Marine Reserve.

excessive sedimentation of reefs and estuaries and reduces nutrient runoff from agricultural areas. Forests along riverbanks (“riparian forests”) are particularly important to regulate floods, thus also protecting inland tourism infrastructure. Finally, forests provide services related to climate change, including carbon sequestration.

Sound conservation and management of Belize’s natural capital makes economic sense in view of the overall national objectives of maintaining the competitiveness of the tourism sector and increasing its contribution to the national economy. These ecosystem services and the natural capital that provides them have economic value. Although methods to value ecosystem services are still evolving, Belize is fortunate to have been one of the Caribbean countries subjected to the most extensive valuation studies to date. Recent assessments estimate that the average annual value of ecosystem services generated by coastal ecosystems in Belize—coral reefs and mangroves—was worth 15 and 22 percent, respectively, of the country’s GDP in 2007. For example, the shoreline protection services are estimated between US\$231 and US\$347 million, or 9 to 13.5 percent of GDP, in avoided damages per year by buffering against storm surge and reducing erosion.⁵ Economic benefits from fishing add another US\$14 to US\$16 million. The total estimated value of coastal ecosystem services is in the range of US\$395 to US\$559 million annually. In terms of terrestrial ecosystems, an economic valuation of the Maya Mountain Massif—a system dominated by forest cover, found that the ecosystem goods and services provided by the area—including tourism and recreation, hydrological services, timber, carbon, and non-timber forest products—had an estimated value ranging from US\$153 to US\$663 million in 2010 (Hammond et al., 2011).

Natural disasters and climate change pose a threat to the sustainability of the tourism sector. Tropical storms and hurricanes affect Belize on average once every two years (UNDP, 2009). The tourism industry is highly vulnerable as it is largely developed along the country’s 150-km long low-lying coastal zone, in the direct path of hurricanes and tropical storms that originate in the Atlantic Ocean. Consequently, much of the tourism-related physical plant and other critical infrastructures are in areas exposed to coastal erosion,

⁵ The WRI (2008) evaluates the average annual contribution of reef- and mangrove-associated tourism, fisheries, and shoreline protection services to the economy of Belize. Coral reef- and mangrove-associated tourism contributed an estimated US\$150 million to US\$196 million to the national economy in 2007 (12 to 15 percent of GDP).

flooding, storm surge, and high winds. Studies show that storm surge and coastal erosion continue to degrade the country's coastal, marine, and terrestrial ecosystems (Bood, Cherrington, and Smith, 2012), including coral reefs, which are a core aspect of the tourism product, and mangroves, which provide natural coastal protection. Riverine flooding also affects terrestrial ecosystems. In addition, climate change and sea level rise are expected to have deleterious impact on these ecosystems, and on the coastal zone in particular, as well as other sectors on which the tourism industry depends (such as water and agriculture). A lack of or poorly enforced natural resource and land use regulation, environmental degradation, unchecked development, poor construction standards, and human settlements also contribute to the sector's increased vulnerability. The high potential losses associated with climate variability, climate change, and sea level rise could threaten tourism competitiveness and development and consequently negatively affect the country's economic growth and welfare. These scenarios point to the need for proactive steps to increase the resilience of the sector with respect to the impacts of natural disasters and climate change.

This technical note discusses the main characteristics of the Belizean tourism sector and its economic importance to the national economy and identifies the key constraints to the sector's sustainable development and the policies currently being implemented. The note highlights the close linkages to the country's cultural heritage, biodiversity, and ecosystems as natural capital, the threats of natural disasters and climate change, and the opportunities to achieve sustainable tourism. It also presents policy recommendations, taking into account the strategic goals of the NSTMP, as well as tourism development toward regional integration in Central America.

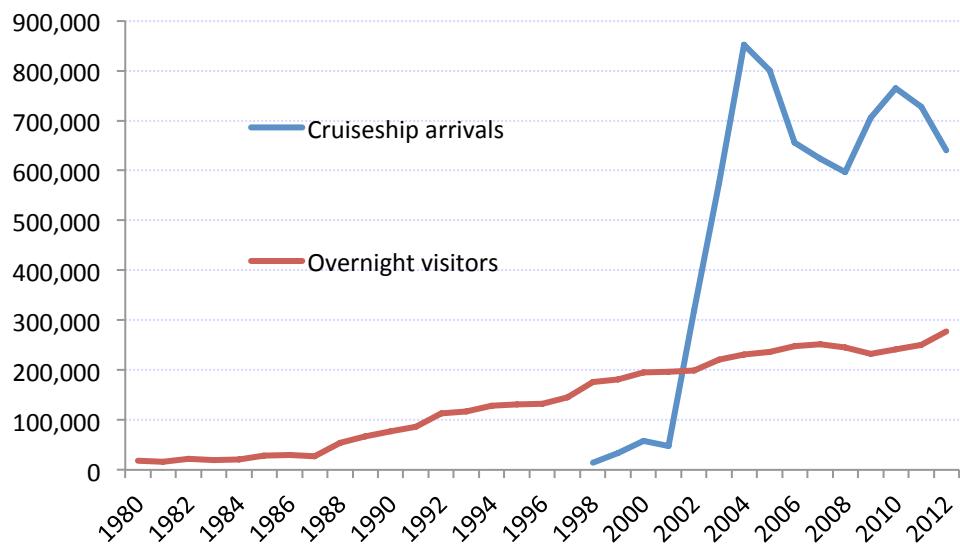
2. Assessment and Main Characteristics of the Tourism Sector in Belize

2.1 Tourism: A Relatively Young Industry

By the standards of long-established Caribbean tourism destinations, tourism is a relatively young industry in Belize. As late as 1984, tourist expenditure was equivalent to only 3.9 percent of GDP, and Belize had a market share of 0.3 percent in the Caribbean stayover arrival market. The tourism industry started to take off in 1985, when annual stopover arrivals jumped to 28,000 and tourist expenditure surpassed US\$10 million for the first time

(World Bank, 1992). Thereafter, stayover arrival numbers grew quickly. By 2004, the number of stayover arrivals was 10 times that of 20 years earlier, and Belize's share of the Caribbean stayover market had grown fourfold to 1.2 percent. Belize broadly maintained that market share from 2004 to 2011. The cruise ship segment started in 1998 but grew quickly. In recent years, there have been nearly three cruise ship arrivals for every overnight visitor (Figure 2).⁶ By 2012, Belize had a 3.1 percent share of the Caribbean cruise ship industry market.⁷ The tourism industry in Belize is still an emerging rather than a mature sector.

Figure 2: Annual Overnight and Cruise Ship Arrivals



Source: IDB based on BTB (2011) and World Bank (1992).

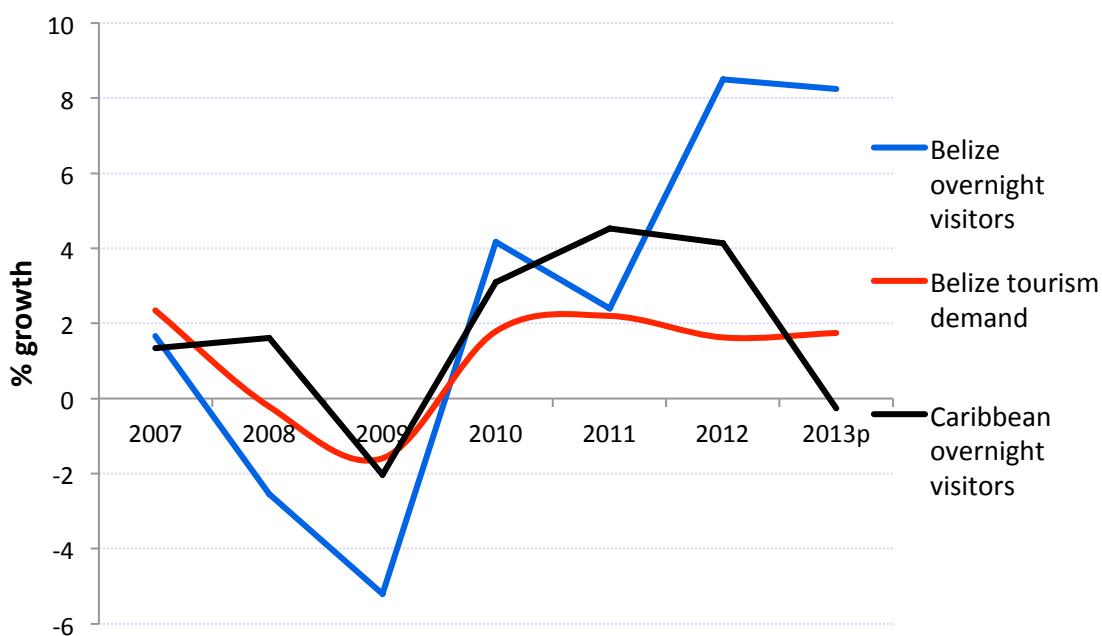
Although the 2008–2009 global recession affected Belize's tourism sector more than that of the Caribbean as a whole, tourism in Belize has experienced a stronger recovery. The number of overnight tourists rose by 8.5 percent in 2012 and 2013 (Tourism Statistics, 2013) and started out on an all-time high for Belize's tourism industry, with documented record numbers of visitors in the first quarter. For the first time ever, total overnight visitors

⁶ For the Caribbean as a whole, there are an almost identical number of stayover arrivals as cruise ship visitors but some countries receive no cruise ships while others receive three or four cruise visitors for every stayover visitor. Out of the 27 destinations for which CTO has data, only five have a higher ratio of cruise visitors to stayovers than Belize (Cayman Islands, Dominica, St. Maarten, The Bahamas, and the U.S. Virgin Islands).

⁷ IDB based on CTO (2013).

exceeded 35,000 in March 2013. Overall, overnight tourist arrivals for the first semester of 2013 grew by 8.9 percent over the same period in 2012. This recent growth in Belize's tourism is far faster than would be expected based on the growth of tourism in the Caribbean as a whole. Many Caribbean destinations, including the two most important ones—the Dominican Republic and Cuba—as well as The Bahamas and Barbados, faced declining overnight arrival numbers in the first half of 2013. The growth of Belize's tourism sector has also been far faster than the growth of real private consumption expenditures weighted by the share of tourist origin countries (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Growth in Overnight Visitors to Belize Compared to the Caribbean and Market Demand



Source: IDB based on BTB (2013) and IMF (2013).

Although cruise visitors are more numerous, overnight tourism generates most of the total tourism expenditure. While 73 percent of visitors from 2008–2012 were cruise ship visitors and only 27 percent were overnight arrivals, the latter generated more than 80 percent of total tourism expenditure.

2.2 Tourism: Product Diversity and Tourist Destinations

Despite its small size, Belize has a relatively diversified tourism product. It is strong in ecotourism and adventure and cultural tourism, while also having some degree of development in sun and beach, cruise, and nautical tourism. Belize is particularly rich in ecotourism-based tourism assets as well as cultural heritage assets. A wide range of these assets, both natural and cultural, are attractive for international tourism. The NSTMP identifies nearly 100 major tourism assets, of which 49 percent are ecotourism natural attractors (natural parks, caves, wildlife sanctuaries, and marine), 45 percent of them are cultural attractors, and only 7 percent are man-made attractors (entertainment activities). Twenty-three sites can be considered assets with international recognition, which means that they have a high degree of attractiveness and therefore great potential to attract tourism.⁸ On average, 86 percent of visitors to these assets are foreigners and 14 percent are locals. With 16 assets being graded as superior or above, Cayo is the most attractive district in Belize, followed by Toledo (12 assets) and Ambergris Caye/off-shore Belize, concentrating mostly ecotourism marine assets (10 assets).

Unique among Belize's natural assets is an extensive barrier reef along the country's approximately 584 km coastline (see Map of Belize), which comprises the single largest portion of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef, a system that extends for approximately 1,000 km across several countries and is the largest unbroken barrier reef in the Western Hemisphere (CBD, 2010; Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment 2010). Also included are rich flora and fauna of at least 1,014 native species of vertebrates, including 163 species of mammals and 3,411 native species of plants, approximately 69 percent of forested land, and 16 major catchment areas. In addition to its coral reefs, Belize possesses many other coastal ecosystems, including mangroves, forests, littoral forests, estuaries, wetlands, sea grass beds, and near-shore patch reefs.

⁸ Some examples are the Barrier Reef Reserve System, the Blue Hole Marine Reserve, which is unique in the world, the Caracol Mayan site, and the Chiquibul Caves System, hosting a great network of caves in the Chiquibul National Park in Cayo.

Map of Belize



The diversity of the tourism product is reflected in a relatively wide spatial distribution of tourism activities, particularly compared to some high-density “sun and sand” destinations. However, they are concentrated on coastal areas and in the center of the country (Cayo and Belize districts). Table 1 shows that over 70 percent of tourists visit the Northern Islands (Ambergris Caye, Caye Caulker), the Western region (Cayo) and the Central Coast (Belize City), which coincides with the data that more than 65 percent of all tour guides are concentrated in the Belize district, Cayo and Ambergris Caye.

Table 1: Tourism Distribution per Destination (*in percent*)

Northern Islands	Western Belize	Central Coast Belize	Northern Belize	Placencia	South Eastern Coast	Belize Reef	Southern Belize
32	24	15	10	8	6	3	2

Source: Tourism and Leisure Europraxis Consulting and BTB (2011).

2.3 Accommodations Sector and Occupancy Rates

A similar trend in destination preference can be observed in the concentrated investment growth in the accommodations sector, which mainly serves overnight tourism. With more than 160 hotels, San Pedro/Ambergris Caye contains over 21 percent of all hotel accommodations in Belize and is the only destination with over 3,300 beds (25 percent of the total of 13,000 beds in Belize). The Cayo district is a distant second, with around 1,900 beds (15 percent), followed by Belize City, with around 1,300 beds (10 percent).⁹ The northern and southern extremes of the country participate less in tourism. The districts of Corozal, Orange Walk (Northern Belize) and Toledo (Southern Belize) account for a total of 1,600 hotel beds (12 percent) (BTB, 2013).

Belize's stock of tourism accommodations is predominantly small scale and characterized by small boarding/guesthouses and small hotels and resorts. Since 1988, the average size of accommodations has remained remarkably stable at around 10 rooms per accommodation.¹⁰ Indeed, it has even declined slightly in recent years, from 10.5 rooms per accommodation in 2008 to 9.6 rooms in 2012. As of 2008, 67.4 percent of tourism establishments had 10 or fewer rooms, 20.5 percent had 11 to 20 rooms, 10.5 percent had 21 to 50 rooms, and only 1.6 percent (10 hotels) had more than 50 rooms. Since the Caribbean Hotel Association regards hotels with up to 75 rooms as the small hotels sector, 98 percent of Belize's accommodations are small hotels or other types of accommodations. A Caribbean Benchmarking Survey (KPMG International, 2011) found that 56 percent of Caribbean tourism establishments have fewer than 75 rooms and 14 percent have more than 200 rooms.

Although tourist accommodations in Belize were typically somewhat simple during the incipient stage of the industry's development, the present mix of accommodations is much more varied and includes a considerable number of luxury resorts, particularly for

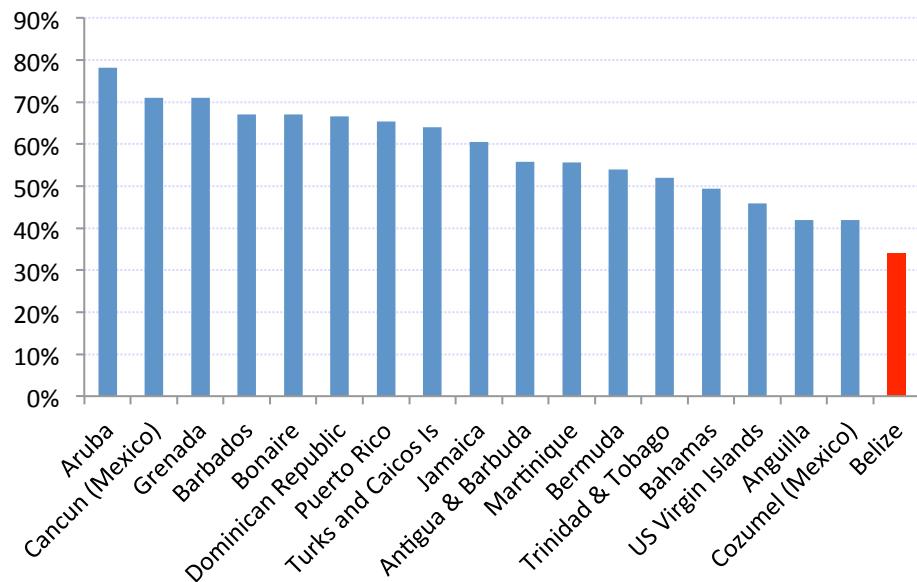
⁹ Belize City has only 32 hotels with an average size of 40 beds and caters mainly to business travelers, compared with Placencia with 120 hotels, with around 1,200 beds (9.3 percent).

¹⁰ According to the Hotels and Tourist Accommodation Act Revised Edition 2003, a hotel is defined as “a building containing not less than 10 bedrooms for the accommodation for reward of guests” or “any building containing a group of units containing not less than 10 units, and such units may consist of buildings, cottages, cabanas, apartments, or otherwise” (BTB, 2008).

high-end ecotourism. Many of Belize's small hotels have won international awards for excellence.¹¹

Hotel occupancy rates are low. In 2010, which was a year of recession for Caribbean tourism, average hotel occupancy in Belize reached a low of 34 percent. This was among the lowest in the Caribbean (Figure 4). By 2012, hotel occupancy had recovered to a more typical average of 42 percent, varying between 54 percent in the high season (February–March) to 26 percent in the hurricane season (September–October). By contrast, average hotel occupancy in The Bahamas was 60 percent. In the last decade, hotel occupancy in The Bahamas ranged from a low of 49 percent (2009) to a high of 70 percent in (2005).¹²

Figure 4: Hotel Occupancy Rates, 2010



Source: IDB based on CTO (2013).

Note: The occupancy rate is the ratio between the number of occupied rooms and the number of rooms offered by hotels and other accommodations.

¹¹ For example, in TripAdvisor's 2012 Traveler's Choice Awards Belizean hotels won the first- and third-place positions for best hotels in the world and in Central America, Belize had 6 of the top 10 hotels and 11 of the top 25 hotels.

¹² See <http://www.tourismtoday.com/home/statistics/hotels/> (Bahamas Ministry of Tourism, undated).

Hotel and restaurant employment accounted for 5.5 percent of total employment in 2012. Forty-six percent of hotel employees are female and 4 percent are foreign. In 2012, an average of only 0.7 of a person was employed per hotel room (BTB, 2012). In its 2005 survey of Caribbean hotels, Tourism Global found that the number of employees per room was correlated with the hotel rating: on average, five-star hotels employ 2.8 persons per room, four-star hotels 1.4 persons, three-star hotels 1.3 persons, and one and two star hotels 0.7 persons (Tourism Global Inc., 2006).

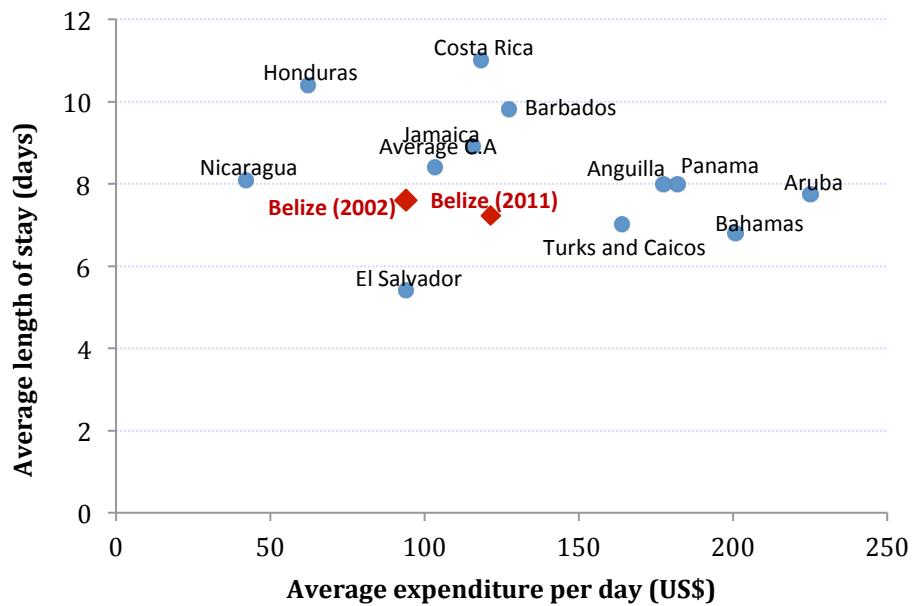
2.4 Overnight Tourism Market and Average Length of Stay

The North American market remains the main market for overnight tourists to Belize, with the United States accounting for around 62 percent of visitors in the last four years. Canadians have traditionally accounted for 4 to 7 percent of overnight visitors; this figure increased to 8.7 percent in 2012. Visitors from Europe have traditionally accounted for 12 to 15 percent of overnight visitors, but this declined to fewer than 11 percent in 2012. Visitors from the United States, Europe, and Canada collectively accounted for 83 percent of arrivals in Belize in 2012. For the Caribbean as a whole, the source market shares are the United States, 56 percent; Canada, 11 percent; and Europe, almost 11 percent. Eastern and southern Caribbean destinations tend to receive relatively fewer Americans and more Europeans.¹³ As is typical for western and northern Caribbean destinations, the majority of visitors to Belize come from the United States, while fewer visitors come from Canada and Europe. The source-country mix has implications for the average length of stay of stayover visitors and average expenditure per day. As overnight tourists, Canadians historically have the longest average length of stay (8.7 nights) in Belize (the overall average is 7.26 nights).

The average length of stay (ALOS) of stayover visitors in Belize is comparable to that of many destinations but considerably below some destinations that are comparators in certain tourism niches. For instance, Costa Rica, which is strong in ecotourism, has an ALOS of 11 days, and Bonaire, which is strong in diving, has an ALOS of 10.7 days. Moreover, Belize's ALOS declined marginally between 2002 and 2011. The average daily expenditure of stayover visitors in Belize is higher than in most Central American countries but lower than in most Caribbean countries (Figure 5).

¹³ IDB based on CTO (2013).

Figure 5: Length of Stay and Daily Expenditures in Selected Destinations



Source: IDB based on SITCA, CTO, Central Bank of The Bahamas, and Jamaica Tourism Board.

2.5 Natural Disasters and Climate Change Impacts

The tourism sector is highly vulnerable to natural disasters, including climate extremes and non-extremes.¹⁴ Between 2000 and 2011, seven extreme weather events (hurricanes, tropical storms, and floods) affected Belize; the tourism industry was adversely affected by four of these. The sector's vulnerability is related to exposure of tourism-related physical infrastructure (hotels, resorts, marinas, ports, and other critical infrastructure), settlements, and the natural assets (beaches, reefs) on which the industry depends. Much of the sector's base is concentrated in the vulnerable coastal zone that is at high risk to hurricanes and tropical storms and associated high winds, coastal erosion, coastal and inland flooding, storm surge, and heavy rainfall. Gomez (2012) notes that there is abundant evidence that Belize's coastal and marine ecosystems are deteriorating due to increased storm activity in the region, resulting in considerable adverse environmental impacts along the coast and immediate inland areas, including coastal erosion, mangrove loss, uprooting of sea grass,

¹⁴ Weather or climate events that are not extreme, when considered independently, may become extreme if an accumulation of these weather or climate events occurs.

and reef damage. The loss of capacity of these natural protection systems increases storm surge, flood, and coastal erosion potential.

Climate change and sea level rise are projected to exacerbate risk, more so along the coastal zone. Increases of 1⁰ C in temperature and rainfall changes of +/- 10 percent are expected due to climate change (O'Gorman, 2012). The country's extensive coastal zone is highly susceptible. Adverse impacts due to extreme climatic events and sea level rise (such as coastal erosion, reef degradation, mangrove loss, and inundation) in existing vulnerable locations are likely to increase, and new areas, both coastal and inland, will be affected. Mean sea level rise is of major concern for coastal communities. In a worst-case scenario, a 5 m rise in sea level would affect almost all of Belize's wetlands (Gomez, 2012). These physical changes will affect the tourism industry through increased infrastructure damage, additional emergency preparedness requirements, higher operating expenses (e.g., insurance, backup water and power systems, and evacuations), and business interruptions (Simpson, et. al., 2008). Fuller (2012) also notes that beginning in 1995, five coral bleaching events have been recorded as a result of increased global warming and that warmer sea temperature is expected to lead to more coral bleaching episodes and deterioration of the marine environment.

3. Constraints for Sustainable Tourism Development in Belize

The continued growth and success of tourism in Belize faces various constraints, including safety and security, competitiveness, accessibility, environmental sustainability, communication and promotion, and disaster risk reduction and climate resilience.

3.1 Safety and Security: “Staying in the Game”

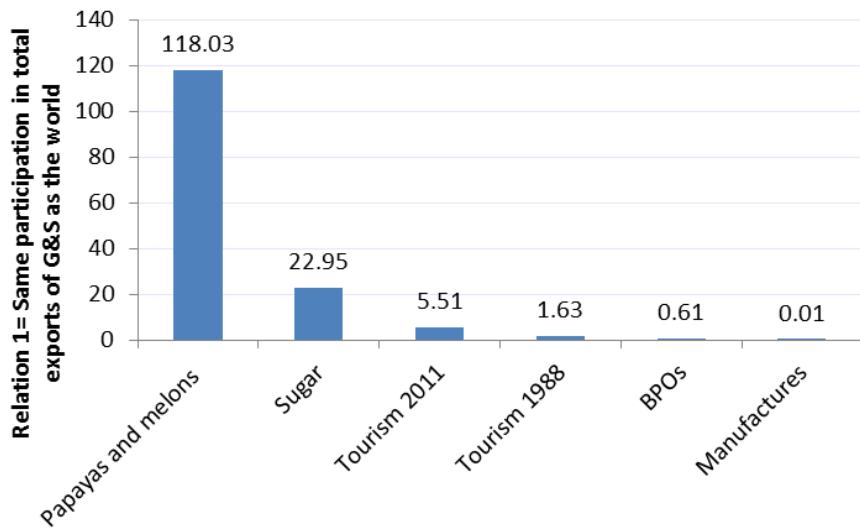
The perception of potential tourists and industry participants (travel agents and cruise shipping lines) that Belize is a safe and secure environment for tourism is almost a precondition for the maintenance, let alone growth, of the tourism industry. As the World Economic Forum put it, “safety and security is clearly linked to inbound tourism well-being just to ‘stay in the game’” (WEF, 2013). While safety and security were not issues in the first two decades of the tourism industry’s growth and development in Belize, rising crime

rates mean that crime and insecurity are now challenges that the tourism industry must confront (IDB, 2013a). The NSTMP also recognizes the need for transportation infrastructure improvements in compliance with international safety standards (e.g., for highways, roads, and regional and international airports).

3.2 Competitiveness

There is little doubt that tourism is an area where Belize has a strong comparative advantage, and this makes sense given Belize's resource endowment. Estimates of Belize's revealed comparative advantage suggest that Belize had a modest revealed comparative advantage in tourism services by the late 1980s and that this comparative advantage has strengthened considerably since then (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Revealed Comparative Advantage in Belize, 2011



Source: IDB (forthcoming).

Notes: The revealed comparative advantage (RCA) measures countries' specialization in the export of a commodity. The RCA is measured by the relative weight of a commodity in the country's total exports divided by the relative weight of world exports in that commodity. When the RCA is greater than 1, the country has a comparative advantage and when it is below 1, the country has a relative disadvantage.

Comparative advantages, however, can be developed or squandered. As Poon (1989) notes, although there are no close substitutes for tourism (unlike for many commodities, durable goods and even services), tourism destinations themselves are highly substitutable. Tourism destinations and vacation options abound, which makes tourism a highly

competitive industry. Thus, competitiveness is critical, and Belize needs to become competitive on delivery and quality, in addition to price and product diversity (Lemay 2010). In this context, the NSTMP identifies a lack of sufficient and quality tourism services and facilities due to poor training of employees, low investment by the local private sector, and few international hotel brands. These factors, it claims, result in low visitor satisfaction, degradation of Belize's tourism image, and a low degree of diversification of leisure activities.

Although not by design, it is likely that the incentive framework discriminates against tourism and lowers private investment in the industry from what it could be. Analyzing the taxation of the tourism industry, Rider (2012) argues that, contrary to superficial impressions, the tourism sector is taxed highly and in distortionary and inequitable ways. In particular, high duties on imports (through a combination of import duties, the environmental levy, and the general sales tax) sharply raise construction, renovation, and operating costs for hotels. Rider estimates that the combined cost of duties may increase the cost of hotel renovations or expansions by nearly 40 percent, thus constituting a significant disincentive. Certain economic activities, such as the retail sale of fishing rods and reels to support the game fishing industry, simply do not exist because of high import duties (Rider, 2012). Similarly, high duties and quantitative limitations on imports designed to protect and/or stimulate certain local agricultural activities may have negative repercussions on the tourism industry by inflating the cost of or reducing the quality of food that hotels can serve to their guests.

The high cost of utilities, notably electricity and telecommunications, in Belize also increases hotels' costs. In terms of expenditures, electricity is the largest utility cost for hotels but Belizean hotels may not suffer a competitive disadvantage vis-à-vis Caribbean competitors, because many of them also have high electricity tariffs. On the other hand, the high cost and low quality of telecommunications service in Belize may detract from the visitors' experience.

Since the 1980s, there have been concerns with human resources and the availability of appropriately skilled labor in the tourism industry. Although there has been considerable progress in establishing tourism-specific training and developing expertise in the sector, labor skills and attitudes are still considered by some to impede development of the sector.

Finding replacement staff is difficult, not because of a tight labor market but because of the overall lack of workplace skills (Lindauer, 2013).

According to Lemay (2010), market readiness depends on delivery and quality, which in turn are inextricably interwoven with establishment, compliance and enforcement of standards. She underscores the importance of developing standards in a number of service and product areas, and ensuring that they are aligned with needs of the tourism industry.

3.3 Accessibility: Air and Road Transportation

The NSTMP identifies poor accessibility both externally and internally as constraints on the tourism industry. International flight connections, especially to Europe and Latin America, are regarded as scarce, resulting in low arrival levels of European visitors (which are considered a lucrative market segment), and a reduction in average length of stay due to nights spent in transit outside the country. Connected with Belize's low population density, Belize has a relatively low density of paved roads. The small number of paved roads leading to the tourism assets results in an uneven distribution of tourism flow in the country, causing overcrowding in some sites and underutilization in others (IDB, 2013b). Many Mayan heritage sites are difficult to access by road, including the Caracol Mayan site, which is regarded as the most important of Belizean Mayan sites and one of Belize's "four unique tourism assets" (NSTMP, 2011).

3.4 Environmental Sustainability

Tourism development must be environmentally sustainable in order to preserve the natural resource that is the foundation for Belize's comparative advantage in its various niches of tourism. Environmental sustainability, however, can also be a source of competitive advantage and product differentiation. Indeed, the World Economic Forum (WEF) found that for emerging economies, environmental sustainability is the most important factor in generating stable growth (WEF, 2013).

With its fragile natural environment, Belize faces several challenges in ensuring that tourism development is environmentally sustainable. Insufficient solid waste disposal can result in unhealthy conditions and is visually unattractive. Inadequate sewerage systems and

treatment can cause contamination and damage fragile ecosystems, particularly the barrier reef (see also IDB [2013c]).

The lack of quantitative data limits the ability to monitor the health of the country's natural capital. Limited data exist on these ecosystems, but available estimates show, for example, that there were approximately 74,684 ha of mangroves remaining on Belize's mainland in 2010 (2 percent of the mangroves of the Americas) (Gomez, 2012). This includes mangrove ecosystems of outstanding ecological value in islands such as those in the Pelican Caye Range, which are part of the South Water Caye Marine Reserve and the Bird Cays near Ambergris Caye. Available data show a decline in the health of coral reefs in the country. Data are limited in terms of the parameters, geographic coverage, and historical and distributional trends. Nevertheless, using the percentage of live coral cover as an indicator (which is commonly used in reef health assessment), live coral cover declined from 80 percent at Glover's Reef in 1971 to 20 percent in 1996 and to as little as 13 percent in 1999 (MNRE 2010).

Fifty percent of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef is in "poor condition." More recently, data presented in the State of the Belize Coastal Zone (2003–2011) report (Fuller, 2012) indicate that Belize reefs were slightly below the average of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef, with no reefs in "very good condition," 3 percent in "good condition," 39 percent in "fair condition," 53 percent in "poor condition," and 5 percent in "critical condition." Unless Belize can reverse the trend of degradation of its reefs, it will gradually erode one of the most attractive tourism assets, which accounts for a considerable portion of the sector's competitiveness. Both man-made and natural pressures are probably contributing to deteriorating conditions of coral reefs although, once again, quantitative data are limited. Major marine-based causes of deterioration include overfishing and unsustainable fishing practices, marine debris and oil pollution and drilling (Healthy Reef Initiative, 2012). Major land-based threats include the expansion of coastal infrastructure particularly for tourism, nutrient loading from sewage, storm water runoff, fertilizers and other sources, sediments from coastal dredging, and industrial waste.

The lack of land-use regulation contributes to degradation of coastal and terrestrial ecosystems. Belize's forests have also been deteriorating, affecting their attractiveness for tourism. Until recently, available estimates indicated that deforestation rates in Belize were

on the order of 2.3 percent (89,000 acres/year), nearly twice the annual deforestation rate in Central America—and riparian forests in deforestation hotspots were cleared at an annual rate of around 13 percent (World Bank, 2011). Updated estimates suggest lower deforestation rates on the order of 0.6 percent (25,000 acres/year), and total forest cover declined from 76 to 63 percent between 1980 and 2010 (Cherrington et al., 2010). The most recent estimates for 2010–2012 suggest that deforestation rates may be increasing, in part due to an increase in forest loss as a result of natural disasters (Cherrington et al., 2012).

3.5 Communication and Promotion

Another challenge identified by the NSTMP is deficient communication and promotion of tourism assets, resulting in a lack of international awareness of Belize as a tourism destination. It is not clear how much of a constraint this has been in the past, and arguably, Belize has been quite adept in its promotion of the tourism industry. Nevertheless, as the NSTMP identifies, continued effective communication and promotion of the tourism industry will be key for the successful growth of the industry in the future.

3.6 Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Resilience

There has been limited investment in sustained vulnerability reduction and in increasing climate resilience in the tourism sector. There is insufficient public and private sector investment in sustained vulnerability reduction in the tourism sector, specifically related to public awareness and education, the implementation of climate-resilient infrastructure including the use of ecosystem-based solutions, regulation and legislation, institutional strengthening, and coastal protection.

The key policy issue relates to the lack of mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in the tourism sector. There is a need to incorporate an integrated risk management approach in the sector as well as in other sectors/areas to which it is inextricably linked, namely, coastal zone management, as a core strategy for sustainable tourism. This approach integrates risk management solutions that explicitly address current and future vulnerabilities related to natural disasters and the impacts of climate change and sea level rise, in tourism and coastal zone management policy, planning, and development, with an emphasis on ex ante risk reduction and increasing resilience.

4. Policy and Institutional Framework

4.1 Lead Institutions and Strategic Partners in the Tourism Sector

Tourism is the domain of the Ministry of Tourism and Culture (MTC), recently renamed the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Civil Aviation (MTCCA). The Belize Tourism Board (BTB) within the MTC is a statutory body, governed by a board of directors appointed by the minister. The BTB works in conjunction with the private sector, including the Belize Hotel Association, the Belize Tourism Industry Association, and the Belize National Tour Operators Association, and is dedicated to building tourism in the most economically and environmentally sustainable manner. As a part of its responsibilities, the BTB promotes Belize as a premier tourism destination to both in-country and international consumers. As part of its outreach to the international travel market, the BTB markets the country's unique attractions to travelers, members of the travel trade industry, and media outlets in key markets. The recently presented BTB Action Plan 2013–2015 embraces the NSTMP, based on the BTB mandate to market Belize locally and internationally and to direct tourism planning and development.

In 2012, the National Institute of Culture and History (NICH), also a statutory body within the MTC, facilitated a highly participatory process for the development of the National Cultural Policy (NCP). One of the key priorities of this policy is the development of historic and colonial structures, archaeological reserves, and parks as attractive destinations for tourism and education. The NCP also suggests: (i) revision of current cultural protection legislation and policies; (ii) enactment of new ones; (iii) support of initiatives to restore and conserve sites and monuments; (iv) engagement in new partnerships with public and private sectors to promote cooperation; (v) research and education on cultural archaeological resources; and vi) public awareness campaigns.

Belize's Horizon 2030 Development Strategy (Government of Belize, 2010) puts a clear focus on sustainable, long-term social and economic development. In 1999, Belize drafted legislation to put in place a national sustainable development framework. More recently, the country's development priorities have been identified in a number of planning instruments developed through national consultative processes. Among these are the Horizon 2030 Development Strategy, the 2009–2013 National Poverty Elimination Strategy

and Action Plans, and the National Medium-Term Development Strategy (2010–2013). Sector-specific plans, strategies, and policies are guiding the operational direction and the framework for national sustainable development action. They include, among others, the Belize Rural Area Development Strategy, the National Land Use Policy and Planning Framework, the National Environmental Action Plan, the National Environmental Policy and Strategy, the Sustainable Chemical Management Action Plan, the National Protected Areas Policy and Systems Plan, the Land Suitability Mapping System for Belize, and the NSTMP. There is also an interest in exploring a pathway to green development (MFFSD, 2012).

4.2 The NSTMP: A Strategic Framework for Sustainable Tourism Development

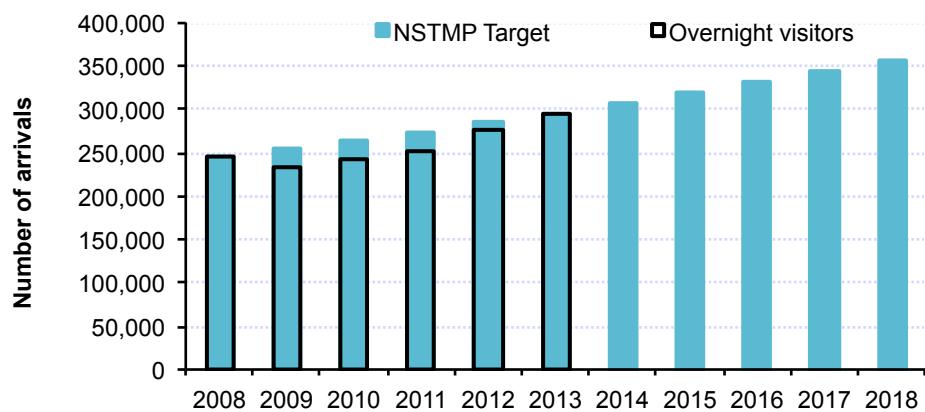
The NSTMP, as a strategic planning instrument, promotes low-impact and high-value tourism. With the recent endorsement of the NSTMP, a strategic framework for sustainable tourism development guides Belize's tourism sector. The NSTMP encompasses the strategic priorities of the Horizon 2030 Development Strategy, as they relate to building a sustainable and responsible tourism product. The NSTMP is tourism product-driven, with a National Destination Plan, including a destination-specific physical development plan. In addition, the Sustainable Tourism Project, co-financed by the IDB, provided the Government with a Tourism Taxation Study and developed a Tourism Data Management System for BTB as well as a Hotel Standards Framework and Classification System.¹⁵ The following are the strategic goals as outlined in the NSTMP:

- *Leadership*: Support Belizean stakeholders in taking leadership over sustainable tourism development
- *Optimization*: Optimize socioeconomic benefits from tourism
- *Sustainability*: Undertake sustainable and planned tourism development
- *Competitiveness*: Achieve competitiveness as a world-class destination

¹⁵ The Tourism Taxation Framework and the Hotel Standards Framework and Classification System are pending final approval.

By 2030, the NSTMP aims to develop enhanced overnight destinations, doubling overnight arrivals to 556,000 arrivals a year (Figure 7). The economic impact of overnight tourism on the Belizean economy (generating approximately 6 million overnight stays in tourism facilities) would increase 7.6 times and reach approximately US\$1.2 billion a year. A controlled cruise tourism development is expected to level at an average compound growth rate of 3.8 percent in the same 20-year horizon and reach 1.5 million cruise passenger visits, resulting in an optimized economic contribution to the Belizean economy of US\$134 million per cruise season.

Figure 7: Master Plan Targets for Overnight Visitors and Actual To Date



Source: IDB based on Tourism and Leisure Europraxis Consulting and BTB (2011) and BTB (2013).

Implementation of the NSTMP is divided into two phases: phase I (2012–2020) allocates 44 percent of the plan's total estimated budget (US\$1.305 million over the period 2012–2030); and phase II (2021–2030) allocates the remaining 56 percent (Figure 8). The Tourism Product Macro Program is leading the budget allocation, with intensive investment planned for 2015–2020. Cultural and nature-based tourism will lead this development. The aim is to create a solid and competitive offer for the international market. Governance projects are key for the success of the plan.

Figure 8: NSTMP Program Costs



Source: Tourism and Leisure Europraxis Consulting and BTB (2011).

As the lead institution of the tourism sector, the MTC is responsible for ensuring that the NSTMP is executed. To ensure the long-term sustainability of the NSTMP, the responsibilities of implementation and control will be centralized in a unique coordinating agency established within the MTC, which will coordinate the actions of the implementing agencies and strategic partners (governmental, nongovernmental, and key private stakeholders involved in the tourism sector) and monitor and evaluate implementation progress. This agency—the Project Planning and Development Unit (PPDU)—will be managed by a technical team and be responsible for executing the objectives of the NSTMP. It comprises three supporting units: management, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. The implementing agencies will support and implement the decisions of the PPDU and its units. These agencies are public organizations and associations specialized in specific domains, such as public works, education, business, and investment.

The PPDU will advise on policy decision making as it relates to tourism development, planning, and destination management. It will develop a funding mechanism to ensure the long-term sustainability of the NSTMP (the National Tourism Trust Fund) as well as promote public-private partnerships in the sector. The strategic partners represent the organizations and the tourism companies that will have a role in the specific projects

outlined in the core programs. The PPDU is guided by the Project Implementation Manual as a management and control tool, which provides a synthesis of the identified lead implementers per core program, alternative budget scenario analyses, key priority investment projects, a results framework, and risk management guidelines.

4.3 Regional Tourism Integration

Regional tourism integration and the tourism policymaking process are works in progress. Belize is a member of the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) and the Central American Tourism Integration Secretariat, the key institutions responsible for the overall regional management of tourism policy. The Central American Tourism Council is a subsidiary body of the Central American Integration System, comprising an executive committee composed of the seven Central American ministers of tourism, which aims to “facilitate and promote the development of tourism in Central America and to integrate industry as a strategic sector in each country with the aim of contributing to sustainable tourism development in the region. In addition, it aims to facilitate and stimulate the development of tourism across the region, eliminating any obstacle and impediments to the free movement of people in the region and integrating tourism promotion into all activities of the different branches of government (Ferguson, 2010). The governance core program in the NSTMP, however, fails to strongly articulate a high-level coordination mechanism between regional and national institutions.

4.4 Conservation and Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

Belize is committed to the conservation and sustainable use of its natural resources through the designation of a network of marine and terrestrial protected areas. Several pieces of legislation provide the legal foundation for the declaration and establishment of protected areas: the National Parks System Act CAP 215 Revised Edition 2000, the Forest Act CAP 213 Revised Edition 2000, the Fisheries Act CAP 210 Revised Edition 2000, and the National Institute of Culture and History Act CAP 331 of the Substantive Laws of Belize. Belize has also demonstrated its commitment to the conservation of its natural capital through the ratification of a number of legally binding multilateral environmental

agreements.¹⁶ While Belize is considered to have a national network of protected areas with good geographic coverage and representativeness of its ecosystems, one of the challenges has been to ensure effective management of these protected areas, including the required financial sustainability to finance management actions such as planning, ecological monitoring, enforcement, and public awareness.

Capacity to monitor compliance and enforce the conditions set in environmental licenses for tourism developments is limited. The Environmental Protection Act (EPA) of 1993 established the Department of the Environment (DOE), which, since 2012, has been under the Ministry of Forestry, Fisheries, and Sustainable Development (MFFSD). The EPA grants the DOE broad regulatory and enforcement authority for the prevention and control of environmental pollution, conservation and management of natural resources, and environmental impact assessment. The DOE is responsible for the enforcement of several regulations made under the EPA,¹⁷ amended in 2009 to provide for greater environmental control and management of the petroleum industry, to make improved provisions for the protection of the Belize Barrier Reef System, and to establish an environmental management fund, known as the Protected Area Conservation Trust (PACT).¹⁸ Gaps relevant to the tourism sector include limited capacity to: (i) monitor compliance and enforce the conditions set in environmental licenses for tourism developments; (ii) prevent conflicts with other non-compatible uses; and (iii) deal with cumulative impacts in environmentally sensitive areas.

The Association of Protected Areas Management Organizations (APAMO) was formally established as a legally registered nonprofit, nongovernmental organization (NGO) in 2007. The APAMO established itself as the largest network of protected area management organizations in Belize with 14 member organizations responsible for and involved in the management of 18 terrestrial protected areas and nine marine protected areas. It provides training to build the institutional capacity of its member agencies,

¹⁶ These include the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on World Heritage Sites, Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially As Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (Land Degradation), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, among others.

¹⁷ These include the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations (1995), the Environmental Protection (Effluent Limitations) Regulations (1995) and the Pollution Regulations (1996).

¹⁸ Accessible at: <http://www.pactbelize.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=EhyJs5oeNzo%3D&tabid=72&mid=416>

advocates for legislation and policies that provide for the long-term integrity and proper management of protected areas, and champions the adoption and implementation of the national policy and system plan for Belize's protected areas system.

Adequate implementation of the National Land Use Policy (NLUP) can make a significant contribution to sustainable tourism development based on natural and cultural capital. The recently finalized and Cabinet-endorsed NLUP addresses comprehensively the use, management, conservation, and distribution of Belize's land-based resources in the national context, and takes international standards and approaches into consideration. The guiding principles of Belize's NLUP are based on a holistic approach that incorporates considerations of equity, efficiency and practicability, development, and sustainability. The policy recognizes that there are certain lands where the best use is conservation due to a variety of factors ranging from watershed protection, to landscape values, to habitat importance. This new policy can make a significant contribution to ensuring that potential conflicts are avoided and minimized between the objective of sustainable tourism development based on natural and cultural capital and other less compatible uses.

The Coastal Zone Management Act of 1998 establishes the Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute (CZMAI), charged with overseeing and coordinating activities in the coastal zone. The CZMAI is a semi-autonomous public statutory body within the MFFSD with the mandate to control the use of coastal resources through the development of an integrated coastal zone management process, bring together all the different agencies and interests, public and private, for the overall preservation and good of the coastal zone. In order to fulfill this mandate, coastal zone and coastal waters were defined and mechanisms were established to monitor a variety of activities within these areas. The Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Strategy outlined a clear strategy for improving the management of Belize's coastal area. The strategy, which underwent extensive public consultation, was endorsed by the Government and adopted as a national policy document in 2003. In addition, using the framework of the Cayes Development Policy, the CZMAI prepared development guidelines for the country's more than 1,000 cayes, including the three atolls. The development of the national ICZM strategy and site-specific development guidelines for the Cayes were the preparatory phases for the development of an ICZM plan. As a result of considerable scaling back of financial

resources in 2005, however, the CZMAI had to limit its activities, and coastal planning activities were abandoned.

The opportunity to develop the first coastal and marine spatial plan in the region is promising. With the reinstating of the CZMAI in 2008 and the coastal planning program in 2010, planning activities resumed, the main goal of which is to formulate the ICZM Plan. The approach to developing the plan is innovative, as it employs a cutting-edge ecosystem services assessment tool. Based on the analyses of current and anticipated uses of the coastal and marine environment and using the outcomes from the ecosystem risk assessments, a coastal and marine spatial plan will be developed (Natural Capital Project/Marine InVEST). It will be among the first such plans in the Caribbean and Central America.

4.5 Mainstreaming of Comprehensive Disaster Management

Efforts to strengthen the legal framework for disaster risk management are underway. The Disaster Preparedness and Response Act (2000) is the primary legislation governing disaster risk management in Belize. The Act established the National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO), headed by a National Emergency Coordinator (NEC). The Ministry of Tourism and Culture is part of a network of operating committees established under the Act to support the NEC in coordinating “the general policy of the government related to the mitigation of, preparedness for, response to, and recovery from emergencies and disasters.” One gap related to the tourism sector is that the Act focuses on preparedness and response, with minimal articulation of policy commitments that could contribute to sustained vulnerability reduction and increased resilience in the sector. Efforts to strengthen the legal framework for disaster risk management are underway through the preparation of a Disaster Risk Management Act.¹⁹

In 2001, Belize endorsed the Enhanced Framework for Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM).²⁰ Under CDM, the country agreed to strengthen national and community-level capacity for mitigation, preparedness, and coordinated response and recovery from natural and technological hazards and the effects of climate change. The mainstreaming of CDM in the tourism sector is identified as a key priority under the

¹⁹ Through technical assistance provided to NEMO by the IDB: “Support for the Preparation of an Integrated Disaster Risk Management” (BL-T1015).

²⁰ The CARICOM-endorsed regional strategy and framework for managing disaster risk in the Caribbean.

enhanced framework for CDM. The National Hazard Mitigation Policy (Government of Belize, 2004) was approved in 2004 and has the following goals: (i) sustainable social and economic development and environmental management through the integration of hazard risk reduction into national development processes; and (ii) national institutional strengthening for disaster risk reduction. The policy has not been implemented to date. Other key national policy documents promote the integration of disaster risk management into the planning process. For example, the National Coastal Zone Management Strategy emphasizes cross-sectoral coastal area planning and development and includes confronting coastal vulnerability as a component of a strategic objective to support planned development.

5. Policy Recommendations for the Tourism Sector

The following policy recommendations take into consideration the assessment and main characteristics of the Belize tourism sector, the constraints for sustainable tourism development, and the existing policy and institutional framework, as described in Sections 2 through 4. Based on the proposed implementation schedule of the NSTMP, some policy recommendations are assigned higher priority than others (phase I or phase II). With the design and endorsement of the NSTMP, Belize has chosen the policy option to follow a low-impact, high-value sustainable tourism concept.

5.1 Improve Participatory Governance and Strengthen Institutional Capacity

Although the design of the NSTMP was based on national and regional consultations, with the final endorsement and implementation of the plan, it would be necessary to: (i) support institutional strengthening and capacity building of the MTC and its key partner institutions (BTB, NICH, and Belize Trade and Investment Development Service [BELTRAIDE]); (ii) identify the strategic partners and key stakeholders at all strategic levels and for each core area and macro program, and encourage them to ensure that their priorities are aligned with the sustainable development of tourism-related economic resources; (iii) empower and support local and cultural SMEs as an essential element of the holistic development of destinations and tourism sites (e.g. BELTRAIDE and NICH) and find mechanisms to link

tourism activities with poverty alleviation and gender equity where possible (see also policy recommendation 5); and (iv) foster horizontal integration of tourism governance with those policy sectors that will make the sector resilient and sustainable. This includes, for example, MTC, BTB, and other tourism stakeholders entering into partnership with: (i) CZMAI, to contribute to the ICZM Plan implementation and development of coastal building guidelines; (ii) the Forestry Department, to create forest conservation incentives (e.g. REDD+); (iii) Ministry of Natural Resources and Agriculture and local government for the collection and disposal of solid waste and waste water management; (iv) NEMO, for disaster risk reduction and management; (iv) the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre, to promote climate change adaptation research; and (v) stimulate and promote cross-border tourism initiatives between regional and national institutions and/or private sector tourism towards regional tourism integration in Central America.

5.2 Enhance Tourism Standards and Quality Assurance

The objective is to raise the quality standards of the tourism service offering in order to reach international market demand standards and assure sustainable development of tourism economic resources. In this context, MTC should develop standards and quality policies and regulations in conjunction with local tourism stakeholders, and BTB's Sustainability Quality Assurance Department should undertake the executive task of enforcing quality standards and operational licensing.

Improve Standards and Quality Management

Improving standards and quality management would raise tourist satisfaction ratings and customer loyalty. It will be necessary to: (i) design new tour guide licensing categories and requirements, create tourism operational guidelines and minimum standards, and revise current licensing requirements with the aim of increasing the income-generation potential of the tourism sector by improving overall service standards, legislation mechanisms, and support services; (ii) ensure that the Tourism Integrated Quality Management (IQM) System and Certification is subject to constant monitoring in order to raise the quality bar through standardized and regulated tourism operation service delivery.

Increase Training and Capacity Building

Increasing training and capacity building would respond to the need to professionalize human resources in the tourism sector and address the existing gap in qualified tourism human resources through: (i) revision of vocational training and tourism management curriculums and institutions; (ii) revision of tour guide training accreditation programs; and (iii) increased capacity building in new innovative technologies.

5.3 Improve Infrastructure for Tourism Destinations

In order to enhance positive sustainable impacts from tourism, the destination must be equipped with basic infrastructure, transportation infrastructure, tourism supply and facilities and skilled human resources. Basic water and waste infrastructure and transportation infrastructure needs are presented in IDB (2013b and 2013c).

Develop Basic and Road Infrastructure, Facilities, and Support Services

These services should be developed in cultural and natural tourism sites such as Mayan ruins and caves sites. Welcome centers should be managed by skilled reception and welcome personnel and trained tour guides.

Improve National and Bi-national Connectivity

Improve public and private transportation to national tourism sites, including roads and waterways (ferries and boats), connectivity, communication infrastructure (mobile phone and Internet), emergency road service and first aid assistance, bi-national road connectivity, and border tourism assistance (tourism security guards).

Ensure that Tourism Infrastructure is Low-impact and Hazard-resistant.

Infrastructure should be designed according to improved safety standards and building codes to meet climate and disaster resilience criteria.

5.4 Improve National Marketing Development

This would target promotion and communication efforts toward the local and international markets. The BTB Marketing Department and Product Development Department would be

the lead agencies for developing strategic and operational models and implementing them in partnership with local stakeholders, Belizean “ambassadors,” and international representatives.

Improve Strategic Marketing

Strategies and country guidelines should be designed for marketing, including civil awareness about “tourism as a key asset.” They should generate the appropriate climate for a complete tourism experience, including the integration of the natural capital concept to address the economic value of terrestrial and marine natural resources.

Enhance Marketing Network

The marketing network should be enhanced in order to organize the contact points to reach the market, either at the source markets or at the destination once in Belize.

Promote Operational Marketing Strategies

These strategies should: (i) include communication, travel, trade, and promotional activities; (ii) follow up on new technologies, trends, and opportunities for marketing; (iii) increase and ease connectivity of Belize in all means of transport (air, sea, land), as well as lobby for new connections, frequencies, and conditions to operate in Belize.

5.5 Promote Diversification of Sustainable Tourism Product

Diversification should: (i) foster private sector investment and/or public private partnerships to develop new products that enhance the value of the country’s biodiversity and ecosystem services and cultural heritage; (ii) increase the flow of benefits from tourism reaching vulnerable groups (low-income people, women, and minorities) by diversifying opportunities for their participation in the tourism value chain through key segments such as food and beverage, arts and crafts, or accommodation and by building the capacity of these groups to provide quality tourism products and services that meet the requirements of international demand.

Belize's Competitive Advantage in Nature-based Tourism should be Consolidated by Enhancing its Ecotourism and Adventure Tourism Products

Belize should: (i) create a system of themed natural and man-made nature-based concepts, structured into integrated recreational ecotourism and adventure sites and centers; (ii) design of diverse nature-based themed routes and trails, such as the National Nature Tourism Trail System and a National Caving Trail System, catering to the interests and needs of different niche segments; (iii) commercialize unique natural tourism assets, such as the Barrier Reef, Blue Hole and Aktun Tunichil Muknal Cave under well managed sustainable development guidelines.

Cultural Tourism Product Concept should Focus on the Development of Cultural Heritage and Living Culture Subproducts

These include the development of a National Museum of Anthropology and others that develop the Mayan heritage sites as a homogeneous tourism concept for all Mayan archaeological sites.

Create a Chain of Enchanting Villages

These villages would have charming Belizean style appeal and would include rural tourism sites and routes and seasonal tourism attractions such as traditional markets, festivals, and themed programs.

5.6 Improve Conservation and Management of Tourism Assets and the Natural Capital that Supports them for Sustainable and Inclusive Development

These assets and capital would provide the framework that will ensure the balance of the three pillars of sustainable tourism development: social accountability, environmental conservation, and economic benefit through: (i) tourism resource management and conservation that aims to identify and assess the economic value of the natural capital relevant to tourism in order to raise awareness of the economic benefits of conservation while also ensuring effectiveness in the management of tourism assets and compliance with environmental and social safeguards; and (ii) tourism land use planning and development support that aims to create a framework for tourism land use allocation that optimizes the

compatibility with surrounding land uses and minimizes conflicts. Within this context, two specific measures should be pursued.

Implement the National Land Use Policy

This policy is guided by a holistic approach that incorporates considerations of equity, efficiency and practicability, development, and sustainability.

Invest in and Manage the Natural Capital Tourism Asset

This asset includes: (i) land use and marine spatial planning to protect terrestrial and marine natural assets; (ii) defining tourism carrying capacity and limits of acceptable change (i.e., balancing stayover and cruise ship tourism)²¹; (iii) valuing the economic contribution of the natural capital to the tourism sector (i.e., making the financial case); (iv) ensuring the financial resources for managing the assets (raising the resources for the protected area network and CZM and adjusting the tourism fee structure to ensure a sufficient flow of funds for the effective management of cultural and natural sites); and (v) initiate a targeted communication strategy on the economic value of natural resources for the tourism sector.

5.7 Reduce Vulnerability and Increase Resilience to Natural Disasters and the Impacts of Climate Change and Sea-level Rise as a Necessary Strategy for Sustainable Tourism

Mainstream Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation in the Tourism Sector

Improve knowledge, understanding, and awareness of risks through vulnerability and risk assessment of the sector and knowledge dissemination and stakeholder education on risks and risk reduction/adaptation options and strengthen tourism policy and legislative frameworks by incorporating risk reduction and adaptation in an explicit manner, including the requirements for: (i) the routine consideration and incorporation of information on the impacts of natural disasters, climate change, and sea level rise in the siting, design, and

²¹ Tourism carrying capacity is defined as “the maximum number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic, socio-cultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors' satisfaction” (WTO).

implementation of new public and private sector tourism development, as well as in retrofitting the existing tourism infrastructure and support infrastructure (such as transportation and drainage infrastructure); (ii) enhancement of institutional capacity and coordination in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, including strengthening interagency partnerships with the CZMAI and NEMO; and (iii) strengthening disaster preparedness, with a focus on priority tourism destinations identified in the NSTMP, through business continuity planning, evacuation planning, and community-based adaptation.

Increase Coastal Resilience

Coastal resilience can be strengthened by: (i) facilitating decision making in coastal planning based on robust vulnerability and risk assessments; (ii) requiring that the design and implementation of future investments in coastal protection incorporate climate change risk criteria, including the use of green infrastructure options; and (iii) building capacity for disaster risk reduction and adaptation in the CZMAI.

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