

News

Litter turns off tourists

by Shawn Cumberbatch

There is often concern about the negative impact crime can have on Barbados' tourism industry, but dirty beaches are a potential major deterrent to visitor arrivals.

As a result, a group of international researchers think Barbados should not only ensure that its

beaches are clean but can consider financing the effort via "modest" tourism taxes or fees.

The recommendations came in a new study **Visitor Preferences And Willingness To Pay For Coastal Attributes In Barbados**.

It was authored by Peter W. Schuhmann (Department of Economics and Finance, University of North Carolina Wilmington), Brittany

E. Bass (Department of Economics, University of California Irvine), James F. Casey (Williams School of Commerce, Economics and Politics, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia), and David A. Gill (National Socio Environmental Synthesis Centre, Annapolis, Maryland).

Their research started in 2007 and the final results were released recently.

pay for clean beaches shown here, the proposition put forth by [previous research] that investments in litter prevention and removal could be financed using modest tourism taxes or fees appears to be well suited for Barbados."

The study sought to understand visitor perceptions of environmental quality, preferences for coastal amenities and willingness to pay for changes in coastal lodging attributes.

While there are efforts to diversify Barbados' tourism product away from simply sea, sun and sand, the researchers said this remained a major attraction for visitors. Beaches with litter were a no-no.

"While visitors strongly prefer beachfront lodging, they derive approximately the same satisfaction from a two- to three-minute walk to a clean beach and beachfront lodging at a marginally dirty beach. Similarly, it appears that visitors would be more satisfied with a six- to eight-minute walk to a clean beach relative to staying beachfront at a beach with a high level of litter," the study stated.

"As is the case with many Caribbean destinations, tourists are drawn to Barbados by the beauty of the coastal and marine environment. It is estimated that 95 per cent of tourism areas in Barbados are located in the coastal zone and over 70 per cent of hotels are located along the coastline. In spite of their importance to the economy of Barbados, coastal resources are under considerable pressures."

Willing to pay

They concluded: "Visitors to Barbados are willing to pay significantly more for lodging options near beaches that are free of litter. Visitors are willing to pay approximately the same amounts to avoid walking to the beach and to avoid litter. Willingness to pay to avoid narrow beaches is significant, but is clearly less valued than litter and beach proximity."

The research added: "Perhaps the most salient takeaway from this research is that, of the policy-relevant attributes examined, maintaining the cleanliness of beaches via clean-up efforts, targeted waste policy or education and outreach seems to hold the highest promise for significant short term economic net gains vis-a-vis tourism demand."

Industry's role

"Given the role that the tourism industry likely plays in the generation of beach litter, and the illustration of visitor willingness to



Diamond team member Davina Reynolds (right) receiving her award from Sandals Halcyon general manager Christopher Elliott. (GP)

Sandals praised for marketing region

Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association president, Karolin Troubetzkoy, has complimented Sandals Resorts International for the role it has played in marketing Caribbean destinations to the world, and urged other hoteliers to become more involved where this was concerned.

Troubetzkoy was addressing the **Sandals Halcyon Beach Staff Prestige Awards** held recently and noted that it was no surprise, therefore, that Sandals founder Gordon "Butch" Stewart was honoured with the inaugural Caribbean Hotel and Resort Investment Summit **Lifetime Achievement Award** this month.

She said: "If it was not for the Sandals brand right now, advertising your Caribbean resorts online, in magazines, radio and television

internationally, the world right now would hear very little of our amazing Caribbean region."

The Sandals ad runs on a major network in North America every 30 seconds, and Troubetzkoy said it was important that other hoteliers play their part in marketing the Caribbean,

"Because it is unfair to Sandals that they should be holding all of us up. We need to work together; we need to combine our resources and brains to promote our destinations as a Caribbean region. This helps all of us, so let's find ways of doing it together."

One of the most important factors in attracting visitors to the Caribbean is the people who staff the region's many resorts, and Troubetzkoy commended initiatives such as the **Sandals Prestige Awards** for recognising the efforts of its team members. (PR)

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