

Roots and Reef

8 November 2010

FREE

My Thoughts On Cruise Tourism

by Charles Leslie, Jr.
Placencia Village Council Chairman

Before I start, I must say that people visiting areas on a cruise ship are called "Visitors" for they do not spend more than 24 hours in a visited area; to be called a tourist you must spend more than 24 hours in an area.

Cruise Ship Companies:

The cruise ship industry is highly concentrated and dominated by three companies.

Carnival which is the largest

Royal Caribbean

NCL North America

I must admit that when I first heard about cruise tourism coming to the south and Placencia area; I was enthused and simply thought, "Hey, this could be more jobs for people in this area and more jobs mean more money circulating in this region." However, I contemplated the significant effects, both negative and positive that cruise tourism will have on everyone's life in this area and decided to do some research...the more researched I did the more my smile turned to a frown. It became apparent that the negative effects seem to far outweigh the benefits; and in this case the only benefit I can see in cruise tourism is a financial benefit and that in its self seem to be only for a handful of people who are already wealthy.

The current fiasco that has been un-folding in the media about the cruise tourism situation in the Belize City area and what has been happening to local tour guides and operators; that brings even greater concern for me and from canvassing Placencia Villagers from tour guides, tour operators and residents; the sentiment is that we are all concerned about having cruise tourism in our area.

At this point we lack any concrete information; as to what exactly we will be dealing with; so far the only information I received about the capacity of Royal Caribbean's boats will be 1200 passenger boats...and might I add that I did not get this information from the Ministry Of Tourism or the Cruise Company; I got this information hand delivered to me on behalf of the cruise company by the real estate agent who facilitated the sale of the lands at the point of Placencia...in other words we are being kept in the dark by the people who should have been feeding us proper information on a timely manner.

The plan that was shown to me by the head of the Century 21 office in Placencia is of a Cruise Tender Arrival area/Tourist Village at the point of Placencia Village where Royal Caribbean has purchased prime real estate in that area.

This also rubs me the wrong way; why would Royal Caribbean build a tourist village in a Tourist Village? Why not come into the area approach local businesses and say, "We want your establishment to be of certain quality for our guests, and we are willing to invest in your businesses so that you can upgrade to our standards?" Unfortunately, research will show you unequivocally that this simply is not how cruise companies operate; they operate by buying and owning everything so that when their cruise visitors get off their boat and into the 'tourist village' and shop; they will be advertently buying from the same cruise company, but the cruise visitors think they are buying from local owned businesses and most do not care either way.

I have discussed the matter of control with as much people as possible; one comment that keeps coming up is: What is happening in Belize City area where cruise tourism already exist; is that there seems to be a lack of con

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Comparison of Weekly Local Spending by Cruise Ship Passengers and Overnight Tourists in Placencia Village

As shown in the chart below, just 28 overnight tourists will put more money into Placencia Village in one week than 800 cruise ship passengers. These numbers show that it also takes over 82 cruise ship passengers a week to equal the amount spent by just two fishermen a week, and over 87 cruise ship passengers a week to equal the local spending of one family of 4.

However, studies in Honduras, Costa Rica and the Caribbean have shown that cruise ships chase away overnight tourists.

So, for about the same amount of money, who would we rather have visiting our cayes, reef, Mayan sites, jungle and lagoons? Twenty-eight overnight tourists who respect the local culture and environment, want to get to know local people and come back time and again --- or 800 cruise ship passengers who come, take pictures of the natives, leave behind 99 times the amount of garbage and sewage and cross us off their list of places to see, never to return?

Notably, the figures below also prove that even in the low season, local Placencia Village businesses make as much as they would if cruise ships came all year round, which they don't. Is giving up our overnight tourists for cruise ship tourists a good deal?

	One Cruise Passenger	Overnight Tourists	
		One Fisherman	One Family Member
Hotels	0	BZ\$180.00	BZ\$125.00
Restaurants	BZ\$10.00	44.57	44.57
Bars	21.00	18.00	18.00
Tours	62.62	282.00	94.47
Transportation	0	63.78	20.00
Souvenirs	9.50	20.00	20.00
Daily Rate	BZ\$103.12*	BZ\$608.35	BZ\$322.04
Number of People/Week	800 (2 ships x 400 people)	12 anglers x 7 days	16 family members x 7 days
Total Spent Per Week	BZ\$82,496.00	BZ\$87,169.88	
Total x 22 weeks/year		Total x 52 weeks/year	
BZ\$1,814,912.00 (17,600 passengers)		BZ\$4,532,833.76 (1,456 overnight tourists)	

*Cruise ship passengers spend about BZ\$230 while on-shore, but only BZ\$103.12 goes to local businesses, while the rest, BZ\$126.88, goes to the cruise ship companies themselves.

(Rates are per person per day and are in Belize Dollars. Rates for a fishing trip are based on two anglers staying in a moderately priced hotel for 7 nights and fishing for 5 days. Rates for the family trip are based on a family of four staying in moderately priced lodging for 7 nights and taking 4 tours. Cruise ship passenger rates are based on a study sponsored by the BTB for Belize City cruise ship passengers in 2005, adjusted to 2010 rates. All rates are for dollars spent at locally owned restaurants, bars, hotels and gift shops in Placencia Village and with Tropic Air or Maya Island Air for transportation to Placencia.)

Taking Care of Business

(What a Guide, Tour Operator, Shop or Restaurant Owner Should Ask about Doing Business with Cruise Lines)

As a business person, you wouldn't agree to be the tour operator or a dive, snorkel, fishing or inland guide for a resort without knowing what you were getting into, right? You'd want more information than just "Trust us, you'll make a lot of money," wouldn't you? Well, isn't the same true of a cruise ship company, especially when you don't know the people running their operations? Shouldn't you be asking for the following information so that you can make a rational decision about whether cruise ship tourism can give you a good job or if it's good for your business?

1. The name of each tour operator which operates INSIDE the tourism village in Belize City – both marine and inland – including the names of the owners of each of the companies and contact information. Also names and contact information for at least four tour operators who operate OUTSIDE the tourism village. (Wouldn't it be good to be able to call and talk to these people personally?)
2. What is the daily pay for an entry level guide and for a top guide who work for one of the tour operators inside the tourism village? What hours are worked each day, how many days of the week and how many months out of the year? What are the qualifications required to be a top guide?
3. Requirements for boats, vehicles and other equipment necessary to obtain a tour operator contract with a cruise ship company.
4. Copy of a sample contract between Royal Caribbean and a cruise ship tour operator.
5. Profit margins for an average inland and an average marine cruise ship tour operator out of Belize City.
6. Schedule for the conduct of carrying capacity studies for sites that will be visited in the South by cruise ship passengers. How will carrying capacities be enforced?
7. Amount and type of liability insurance that must be carried on boats and vehicles carrying cruise line passengers. Approximate yearly cost of the insurance and what do you have to do to quality for the insurance.
8. The number of times last year (2009) in which any cruise ship company, cruise ship tour operator or guide was fined or penalized in any way for violating Belize's Cruise Ship Guidelines, including violating guide to passenger ratios.
9. Lease rates for stores within the tourist village. Number of locally owned shops in the tourist village and how long they have been in business there. How many locally owned businesses have closed up shop in the tourist village since 2005? How much insurance must be carried and its cost. Terms of operating requirements such as number of employees that must be in a shop or restaurant, business hours and the commission that must be paid to the cruise line or owner of the tourist village.
10. Average annual income earned by a hair braider or souvenir vendor outside the Tourist Village.
11. The names of each of the investors in cruise ship – related properties in Placencia, including country of residence and amount of ownership interest.
12. The names of each person who benefited financially from the sales of the Placencia properties, directly or indirectly, including real estate agents, brokers and middlemen.

See www.nocruises.org for more information on cruise ship and overnight tourism in southern Belize.

Sea Turtles of Placencia: The Threat of Coastal Development



By Dr Annelise Hagan, Science Program Director, Southern Environmental Association,
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Sea Turtle Laying Eggs

Turtle nesting season has just ended, and out at the cayes, and to a lesser extent, along Placencia beach, mother turtles have just finished clambering up on beaches to lay their precious clutches of eggs.

Three species of sea turtle nest on Belize's beaches – Hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), Loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*) and Green (*Chelonia mydas*) all of which are endangered, with the Hawksbill being listed as 'critically endangered' on the Redlist of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

We should feel special that turtles have chosen our corner of the world for their annual gathering, but humans are making it increasingly difficult for them and are limiting their chances of survival.

Turtle facts:

- Turtle nesting season in Belize: June - October
- Turtles become sexually mature at around 20 years
- Typically a female turtle will lay 100-200 eggs per nest
- The same turtle can nest up to 8 times per season (laying eggs as often as every 2 weeks)

- Eggs take 45-60 days to hatch
- Chances of survival to adulthood: 1 in 1000!

If you've ever seen a turtle laying eggs, you'll know what a laborious process it is. Attracted by the light of the moon, turtles, so graceful in the water, haul their huge bodies up onto the beach. Site selection may not be straight-forward and it can take up to an hour of scoping before the turtle finds a suitable place to nest. The location of the nest site is crucial. Too close to the water line and the eggs could be washed away and if the area is too exposed (completely free of vegetation), the eggs may bake in the sun. Once a suitable site has been found, digging commences; vigorously using her back flippers, the turtle excavates a 70cm deep nest in which to lay her ping-pong ball sized eggs. Once laying is complete, she covers the nest completely with sand and heads back to the sea. The whole process may take several hours. The eggs are naturally incubated by the warm sand around them, and sex development is temperature dependent. Typically a nest will result in half male offspring and half female, with warmer temperatures producing more females.

Human modifications to the coastline are disrupting the natural ecological balance and the more development there is along our peninsula, the more difficult it is for our local turtle population. Specific threats include:

- Artificial lights of hotels and houses disorientate nesting females and recently emerged hatchlings. Attracted by the lights (thinking it is the moon), hatchlings often venture inland, away from the sea
- Beach chairs and tables can obstruct nesting
- Dogs can torment turtles coming ashore and may dig up and eat turtle eggs
- Heavy construction machinery on beaches can crush eggs buried in the sand
- Clearing natural vegetation increases sun exposure on the buried eggs, which may cause them to bake in the sun
- Land reclamation alters the natural coastline that has been used by turtles for nesting in previous years
- Development and land reclamation in the lagoon damages seagrass beds, an essential food supply for many sea turtles

Adult turtles come back to the same beach where they were born in order to lay their eggs. If development continues along the peninsula at the present rate, will there be any safe haven left for mother turtles to come to? Although impossible to stop coastal development, there are a few measures that can be taken in order to help:

- Turn off bright lights on buildings at night during nesting and hatching season
- Clear the beach at night - hotels should remove beach chairs to give the turtles space to move around
- Do not let dogs roam loose at night
- Remove any large logs/other objects that are washed up that may inhibit turtle movement up the beach
- If you see a turtle on the beach at night, do not use flash lights or flash photography and stay quiet
- Become 'turtle aware' during nesting season by looking for tracks and evidence of nesting. Remember... turtles may want to use the beach as much as you!
- Contact an expert for advice...

If you think you see turtle tracks or nesting activity along the peninsula, please contact the Southern Environmental Association (SEA) office on 523 3377. One of the science team will be happy to come and take a look, and can relocate the eggs to a safer environment if necessary.

**"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot,
Nothing is going to get better. It's not."**

— *Dr. Seuss, from The Lorax*

Letters to the Editor

"... look at the facts, think long term and stop selling the country short ..."

I watch with amusement and sadness at the controversy taking place in Belize City over the handling of tours for the cruise lines...and cannot help but note the implications for what is being contemplated for the expansion of cruise tourism to southern Belize. Of course in the battle between local tour operators and a foreign owned company is a fight in which both sides are right. Local companies SHOULD handle the tours yet at the same time the cruise lines SHOULD be able to hire the most competent from amongst all operators. The problem here is not with any individual on either side of the issue; the real culprit is structural. As long as the cruise industry operates the way it does, those people in countries like Belize trying to make a living off cruise tourism will always be fighting over the crumbs that fall off the table. Why?

The three companies that control the bulk of the world's cruise trade are huge. Carnival Corporation alone generated gross revenues of over 13 BILLION US dollars in 2009...and this was at the height of the global economic meltdown. Compare this to the total revenue of the Belize Government during the same period of around 360 MILLION and you get some idea of the disparity of strength when these two parties sit across from each other at the negotiating table. A single cruise company is nearly forty times as large as our entire government! What, one wonders, is the balance of power when Carnival sits down with a single Belizean tour operator? To use an analogy that many Belizeans can relate to, it's like the relationship between the man driving an Escalade and the crack head who wants to wash his car...and just to be clear: we're not the guy in the Escalade.

By the way, in case you are wondering, for all its global operations in 2009 Carnival paid a total of only US\$16 million in income tax on profits of \$1.7 billion. This is roughly the same amount of business tax paid by our own BTL, a company around two hundred times smaller than Carnival. It should be obvious that the cruise companies did not get where they are by being stupid. Their guiding principal is the same as that followed by the meatpacking industry. When asked to list the parts of the pig his company made use of the slaughterhouse manager replied "everything but the oink". So too the cruise lines seek to squeeze every last cent out of their passengers leaving little or nothing to go to "waste". Having calculated exactly how much the average passenger will spend on any given cruise both on and off the ship it is the aim of the cruise company to make sure that as large a portion as possible of that total spend winds up in the corporate pocket. If a passenger books a cave tubing tour for a hundred dollars the cruise line keeps fifty as a "booking fee". That leaves the local tour operator with only fifty to run the tour and make a little profit. And while trying to scratch a few cents out of that fifty after paying guides, bus, food and administration our hard pressed tour operator needs to keep pushing down his own costs because next year his desperate competitor may offer to do the tours for forty-five. For most local businesses getting involved with cruise tourism is a lot like stepping into the Princess casino: for every winner there are a hundred losers.

In cultural terms the imbalance is just as great. Look at overnight tourism. For over two decades it has been the country's largest single engine of economic growth. Beginning from next to nothing in the mid 80's this initially foreign dominated sector has grown impressively in both size and local involvement to the point where Belizean resorts have come to consistently dominate the top spots in annual polls of Latin America's best travel destinations. Speak to any resort based tour guide working with bird-watchers, fly fishermen or divers and virtually every one will tell you that they regularly correspond with favorite visitors who come back year after year. I know many guides who have established such close friendships with their clients that they and their families go to the States for regular visits and even form productive business partnerships.

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Fair Comment

We receive a wide variety of comments from readers of *Roots and Reef*: they run from “good serious work,” to “I had no idea the level of corruption in the government,” to “what insanity,” to a much asked question, “Don’t you get tired of knocking your heads against the wall?”

Anyone who attended the cruise ship consultation in Placencia knew we are being lied to. Not a done deal, eh? They got the land, they got the plan, and NOW they come to talk to us? Why even bother to oppose cruise ships when the perception is it is indeed a done deal?

Yes, “wall” is the exact word to describe our frequent dealings with government departments and political representatives.

When we request information that is in the public domain, information that every Belizean has a right to see, and government departments refuse to provide it, we hit a “wall.”

When we observe and document environmental violations and our repeated emails, letters and phone calls to government departments go unanswered, we hit a “wall.”

When government makes covert deals with moneyed interests that are not in the public interest, we hit a “wall.” When our political leaders do not listen to the voices of the people, we hit a “wall.”

So why even bother, why continue “knocking our heads against the wall?”

Why not just quietly roll over and let government do with us what it will?

That apathy and inaction is exactly what government wants from us. The politicians already have our vote, otherwise they wouldn’t be in office. So now they don’t need us anymore, and can just ignore us.

By ignoring us, they hope that we will simply, passively, and quietly go away. The walls that we keep running into are what they have built to insulate themselves against the people.

As citizens of a democracy, we must think of knocking down those walls, of tearing down the barriers placed in our way. As citizens of a democracy, it is our responsibility to do just that. Power in a democracy does not come from the top, it comes from its people.

It is our obligation to take action to identify our problems, and work on their solutions.

This active responsibility is even more crucial in a world dominated by professional politicians, moneyed interests, and compromised bureaucrats.

Your vote means the same as the Prime Minister’s: one person, one vote. Each vote is equal.

A group of a few elected officials cannot claim a political monopoly in a democracy: the people voted for them. Our political officials are our tools, an avenue for the people’s voices to be heard.

The Greek philosopher Plato wasn’t keen on the idea of a democracy. He thought the people too ignorant to rule themselves well.

If we do nothing, then we truly are ignorant.

The fact that you are reading *Roots and Reef* means you are curious about what is happening to your own environment, in your own precious backyard.

Take what you read, hear, and see with your own sensitive eyes, and become an advocate for what you feel is right. Talk to your village chairman and village councilors. Write letters to the newspapers and call in on the radio talk shows, let your area representative and your village, city or town councils know what you think about local issues – and that you are holding them responsible for acting in the best interest of the public – not their own best interests.

Keep at it, do not give up, because at some point the walls will start to come down. Maybe only a nail or a board at a time, but small changes do matter. PCSD’s complaints

Placencia Cruise Ship Consultation



On 6 January 2010 Prime Minister Dean Barrow announced that cruise ships were coming to Placencia - we had been consulted and we wanted them, he said. We had not been consulted.

A few months later, Placencians learned that Royal Caribbean International (RCI) and “private investors” had purchased four properties at the point. (We still do not know who these private investors are.)

On 22 October 2010, approximately 300 people attended government’s long promised public consultation — finally held over 10 months after PM Barrow’s initial announcement about cruise ship tourism in Placencia.

The consultation began with a seemingly mandatory denial of cruise ship tourism in Placencia as a “done deal” by everyone attending the consultation at the behest of the Belize government: Seleni Matus, Executive Director of the Belize Tourism Board (BTB), Mr. Michael Singh, Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Tourism, Melvin Hulse, Area Representative for Stann Creek West, Lindsay Garbutt, BTB Chairman, Mr. John Tercek, VP of Commercial Development for RCI and Shabir Walji, a private developer.

Rich Wilson, independent consultant hired by the BTB to investigate local attitudes toward cruise ship tourism, presided over the meeting.

Many questions, but very little factual information was provided — such as the size of ships planned for Placencia, how often they would visit, who would pay for infrastructure such as garbage, whether local guides and tour operators would be employed and how much money would actually be spent with local businesses.

When asked about the environmental record of Royal Caribbean, John Tercek answered, “No Comment.”

Information that *WAS* provided at the consultation, included:

*Plans for a tourism village to be developed by Walji on the properties purchased at the point. This tourism village would include a 26-room hotel, gift shops, restaurants, bars, grocery store, swimming pool and a pharmacy — all for cruise ship passengers. (When an audience member pointed out that Placencia itself was a tourist village and already had a pharmacy, grocery stores, gift shops and restaurants, Mr. Tercek responded, “I don’t get your point.”) The tourism village plans also include dock space for three to four 150-passenger tenders and two 400-passenger tenders, plus a staging area so that passengers can meet their tour operators in the cruise ship tourism village without being required to go into Placencia Village.

*The financial gain from the sale of the Placencia point properties realized by Michael Singh, as owner of the Century 21 franchise for Belize. Century 21 sold the properties to Royal Caribbean and the “private investors” through Bradley Rinehart, the local Century 21 office realtor.

*A change in the BTB Action Plan just one day before it was presented to the public, and just two days before the public consultation in Placencia. Until this change, the Plan had stated that the purpose of the Placencia consultation was to help Placencia figure out how to “manage cruise ship tourism,” not whether cruise ship tourism is wanted at all.

Comments from audience members during the consultation were overwhelmingly against cruise ship tourism in Placencia. The consultation ended when the audience shouted a loud and emphatic “NO!” in answer to the question “Do we want cruise ship tourism in Placencia?” posed by Charles Leslie, Jr., Chairman of the Placencia Village Council.

to DOE resulted in the removal of an illegal wastewater discharge pipe at the Placencia Hotel and Residences (see page 1 of this edition of *Roots and Reef*). It was a small victory, but a victory nonetheless. Just remember, the more people out there knocking at those walls, the faster they’ll come down. So when you see something wrong, complain, knock your head against the wall. Who knows, your knock may be the one that brings down the whole wall.

WE MUST NOT GIVE UP! And, here are contact names and information to help you make things right.

Department of the Environment: 822-2816, 822-2542
envirodept@doe.gov.bz and envirodept@btl.net

Department of Forests (mangrove removal): 822-1524
windsorbelize@yahoo.com

Department of Geology (dredging): 822-2651, 822-2178, 822-2232
cemmoore@yahoo.com

Land Utilization Authority (seawalls, piers, fences, 66foot right of way): 822-1526
elida_williams@yahoo.com

Department of Health (septic tanks, sewage systems):
Abelia Sho (Independence), 523-2019, 523-2167 or Mr. Williams (PG), 660-7340

Amandala: editor_amandala@yahoo.com 202-4476/4477/4703

Reporter: editorreporter@gmail.com/reporternewspaper@gmail.com 227-5303/1617

Belize Times: belizetimes@btl.net 224-5757

Channel 7 News: tvseven@btl.net

Channel 5 News: gbtv@btl.net

Plus Television: plustelevision@yahoo.com

KREM Radio: kremnews@yahoo.com, 204-4409

Love FM: lovefmbelize@yahoo.com, 203-2098

Coastal Planning: What Goes Where, When and Why — And Who Decides?

When we decide to take a trip to the cayes, we know we have to plan for that trip – whose boat will we take, where will we go, who is going, how much food do we need to bring, and what kind? Who is bringing the plates, the trash bags, the fishing gear? How do we pay for gas and how long will we be gone? Because if we don't plan, we know that we might end up in the wrong place or going hungry or thirsty because we ran out of gas or supplies.

So we know we need to plan for a trip to the cayes, but what about planning for other things - things like where is the best place for people to live, go to school and work, the best place for roads, hotels, restaurants, bars and shops?

This type of planning is particularly important for Belize's cayes and coastal areas along the mainland because so many people in our country depend on these areas for food and protection from storms. So, what areas should be developed and what areas left alone to provide habitat for fish, lobster, turtles, dolphins and manatee? Where should mangroves remain to stabilize the shoreline and protect communities from storms? How big should developments be, and what kind of development? Hotels, condos, golf courses, residential homes, parks, casinos, marinas? One-story, two stories -12 stories? What should be where and why?

Enter the Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute (CZMAI), established by the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1998. CZMAI's job is to coordinate the sustainable use of Belize's coastal areas and cayes through a national development plan called the "National ICZM Plan." (ICZM stands for Integrated Coastal Zone Management.)

The goal of this National ICZM Plan is answering the questions of what should go where, when, how and why.

Under the law, when CZMAI develops this Plan, it must take into account advice from people living and working in our country's coastal zone such as fishermen, tour guides, tour operators, business people, educators, residents and local organizations. It does that through Coastal Advisory Committees for each of the country's coastal planning regions. In the South, these regions are (i) Dangriga and Tobacco Cayes, (ii) Placencia and Laughing Bird Caye, and (iii) the Southern Cayes. (Northern regions are the Northern Cayes and Ambergris Caye, while the Central regions include the Belize City Cayes, Turneffe Isles and Lighthouse Reef Cayes.)

Back in 2004, these Committees came up with development guidelines for each of the coastal planning regions. Unfortunately, the government then severely cut back CZMAI's funding and the coastal planning process stopped.

But, good news, because in 2008, the government brought back CZMAI, which is now re-starting the Committees so that they can update the 2004 development plans for each region. These updated plans will include detailed site-specific development standards for each of the regions, taking into account the environment, local cultures, economic conditions and what's already been developed in each region. The plans will be reviewed on a national level after the Committees complete the regional plans. Once the national review is completed, these plans will become the National ICZM Plan, which will regulate the use of the entire Belize coastal zone.

CZMAI plans to start re-activating the Committees in September 2010. That can't happen too soon because it's critical that we plan for the future – know where we're going and what needs to be developed or protected so that we don't end up like we would if we didn't plan our cayes trips -- in the wrong place and without food or water for the coming generations.

For more information, please contact:

Coastal Planner
Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute
Princess Margaret Drive, P.O. Box 1884
Belize City, Belize
Tel: (501) 223-5739/223-0719
Fax: (501) 223-5738
E-mail: coastalplanner.czmai@gmail.com

Placencia Village Beginning Composting and Recycling Program

The Placencia Village Council and the Placencia Sanitation Company are working on putting together a composting and recycling program for Placencia Village businesses and households.

The residential portion of the program will begin with voluntary composting using a simple system in which all household food wastes (including cooked food wastes) are deposited in a plastic bucket with a lid. Food wastes are sprayed with a non-toxic microbial liquid each time food is put into the bucket. The spray keeps the food from smelling and breaks it down into organic compost very quickly—for most people, in about a week.

The compost is then buried near plants and trees where it will fertilize the plants and trees. Waste paper can also be added to the compost when it is buried.

The goal of the residential composting program is to reduce the amount of waste that needs to be transported to the garbage dump, which will reduce the cost of garbage collection for Placencia's Sanitation Company — and hopefully ultimately reduce the cost of garbage collection.

The Village Council and the Sanitation Company are also working on a recycling program for area businesses to further reduce wastes.

The Village Council and the Sanitation Company will provide more information as it becomes available.

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My Thoughts on Cruise Tourism

(cont. from page 1)

trol. Some people say; "Maybe if we can make sure we control the situation we will not run into the same problems."

Let's be realistic, it is well documented all over the world especially in the Caribbean that once a cruise company enter a particular country and the way that the cruise industry operates, we have no chance in controlling anything they do. How can we control a multibillion dollar a year industry? Royal Caribbean alone generated over \$13 billion dollars in 2009 while, during the same period the entire country of Belize only generated around \$360 Million. This gives you an idea of the disparity of strength when these two parties sit across from each other at the negotiating table. We can barely control our borders; our national parks; our fisheries to name a few and we are to believe that we will be able to control - An analogy would be like an ant trying to control a speeding locomotive.

Also, I find it very odd that not any cruise company has ever received a fine in Belize for pollution; even though under the MARPOL convention; which Belize has signed on to; strictly states that cruise ships should not dump their waste near coastlines; right now they dump it just a few miles in front of Belize City. Why no fine, then? This just shows that no one is looking.

Importance of Overnight Tourism industry:

There are three types of tourism in the Caribbean: Land based tourism; yachting tourism and cruise tourism; it is a known fact that land based tourism provides 90% of the tourism earnings and employment.

Apart from a need to invest in port infrastructure, the increased size of the cruise ship and the increase in the number of berths available to the Caribbean result in congestion. The increasing size of the cruise ship will cause overcrowding of port facilities, the urban setting and attractions. We are seeing this right now at many of the sites in Belize such as Altun Ha and Caves Branch.

At current, Laughing Bird Caye and the Silk Cayes, which are big island attraction in the South; are over capacity during the high season from overnight tourism and many of the land based tourist sites such as Southern Mayan Sites and the Cockscomb Jaguar Reserve simply cannot handle such large capacities.

According to a World Trade Organization report, such overcrowding will only get worse when three to five similar sized cruise ships visit a port at a particular time, a state of affairs that is common in the more popular cruise ports such as those in St. Thomas, St. Maarten, the Bahamas or Cozumel.

The Congestion has two components that are areas of concern:

The first concern - is exceeding environmental thresholds, such as infrastructure for waste disposal or sewage treatment. Also, natural areas.

The second component of congestion is the perception of overcrowding by residents, tourists and cruise ship visitors. Residents and tourists may avoid visiting certain attractions and facilities because of the anticipated overcrowding by throngs of cruise ship visitors, which is already a reality in areas that cruise ship visitors travel to. Eventually this can result in stagnant or less tourist arrivals (or substitution of higher income tourists by lower income tourists) and consequently in less tourism expenditures. This is a situation that may underlie the stagnant tourist arrivals in the Cayman Islands, St. Thomas or St. Maarten.

Infrastructure:

Security - at present we can barely handle the crime situation with the resources we have. It is an inevitable fact that we will have to deal with an increase in crime in the area such as robberies; burglaries; drug pedalling et al.

Garbage - At current we have a serious garbage problem and are struggling with the equipment, man power and financial resources we have.

Traffic - At current we almost have gridlocks on busy

days in most areas of Placencia Village due to the fact that we only have one street in and one street out; we will need significant road infrastructure put in place to deal with the influx of automobiles in the area.

Public facilities - At current we have virtually no public facilities; no beach area showers or restrooms in and around the village.

These are just a few of the immediate infrastructural problems that currently exist and if these are to be upgraded; who will pay for it? To boot; these upgrades will run into the 10s of millions of dollars if not more.

I have asked these questions to CEO of Tourism, Mike Singh and I did not receive one single answer to any of the questions. I think that most of the questions should have had an answer, if even briefly. In retrospect; history has shown that we are treated like children and have often been disrespected and neglected in the South; we have always been kept in the dark until the powers that be decide that we see the light.

Earnings & Employment: The two major objectives of engaging in tourism are maximizing tourism revenues and employment. At times though governments and tourism authorities seem to focus on maximizing the number of visitor arrivals and conveniently add the number of cruise ship visitors to the number of hotel tourists. This procedure does not take into consideration the large difference between the spending of a hotel tourist as compared to the cruise ship visitor. This is what is taking place in Belize right now.

There are a wide variety of cruise ship visitor expenditures. On the high end are destinations such as St Thomas and Cozumel with cruise ship visitor expenditures of US\$250 or higher. On the lower end of the scale are destinations such as Trinidad and Tobago or Belize with expenditures below US\$50.

Therefore if cruise ship visitors substitute hotel or yachting tourists in Belize, we may suffer a major loss in tourism receipts and direct and indirect employment.

The increased market share of the cruise ship tourism stems partly from clients who would not have visited the Caribbean otherwise but also of clients who would have taken a land-based holiday at some point in time. It is the latter category that is a cause of concern because the decision to take a cruise ship holiday implies a loss of tourism earnings and employment for the region.

Environmental impacts:

Pollution:

A considerable amount of water pollution stems from generated-waste (including unprocessed waste and plastic products) which is illegally discharged into the ocean. It has been argued that degradation of land and marine areas coastal areas of the Caribbean can have irreversible and large reaching effects.

Some of the pollution occurs because a proportion of the ship-generated waste (treated or untreated) is discharged (legally or illegally) into international waters and carried by strong currents throughout the Caribbean and the Antilles. Other pollution can be attributed to illegal discharge within harbours and coastal areas, as can be seen in Belize City.

The Caribbean has an estimated 9 percent of total global reef reserves. These coral reefs are a primary draw for tourism, combined with the appealing crystal-clear waters and the many species of tropic coral and exotic fish.

Environmentalists have long suspected that the discharge of waste material is detrimental to marine life. It is thus alarming that the Caribbean also claims the world's highest density of ocean cruises and coastal

tourism. Ironically, the pollution levels caused by the cruise ship industry could degrade the reef structure and undermine the sustainability of tourism in the area; and some argue that it can be irreparable.

The Fallacy of Development:

We, as a country, are spending a significant amount of money on shore-side revenue plans based on tourist arrivals due to the cruise industry, for example the now proposed Big Creek Port area. Realistic figures show, however that the bulk of the tourist expenditures depends on air travellers or stop over visitors. Yet we are spending considerable money to attract and accommodate more and larger cruise ships.

It is also significant to note that employment for native people from the cruise industry is minimal, while the rate of people entering the work force is increasing. Therefore, formal employment figures are not positively enhanced by the cruise industry.

Economic Growth:

Of course, economic growth for Belize, at present, rests on the continued success of the tourism industry.

However, mass tourism can irreparably damage our country and effectively destroying the very social and environmental features that makes us attractive.

To conclude - The 3 Main Reasons Cruise ship tourism is not worth it:

1. Overnight Tourists simply spend more money and causes less impact on our natural assets.
2. The money from cruise tourism just is not there.
3. And with the environmental damage that will be inevitably caused, it is just not worth it.

What should we do then? Some may ask:

The highly-touted eco-tourism industry present real opportunities to exploit a comparative advantage to attract much-needed foreign investment and spur entrepreneurial development.

Eco-development, where ecological management and development are considered as mutual goals, is a more sensible approach and can provide revenue for preservation and conservation projects.

We need to look at ways at allowing local tourism businesses access to cheaper money to invest in their businesses; this can be started by enacting the Usury Law forcing the banks to offer reasonable interest rates on business loans.

Government can assist by looking at a system that will allow tour companies access to lower fuel prices.

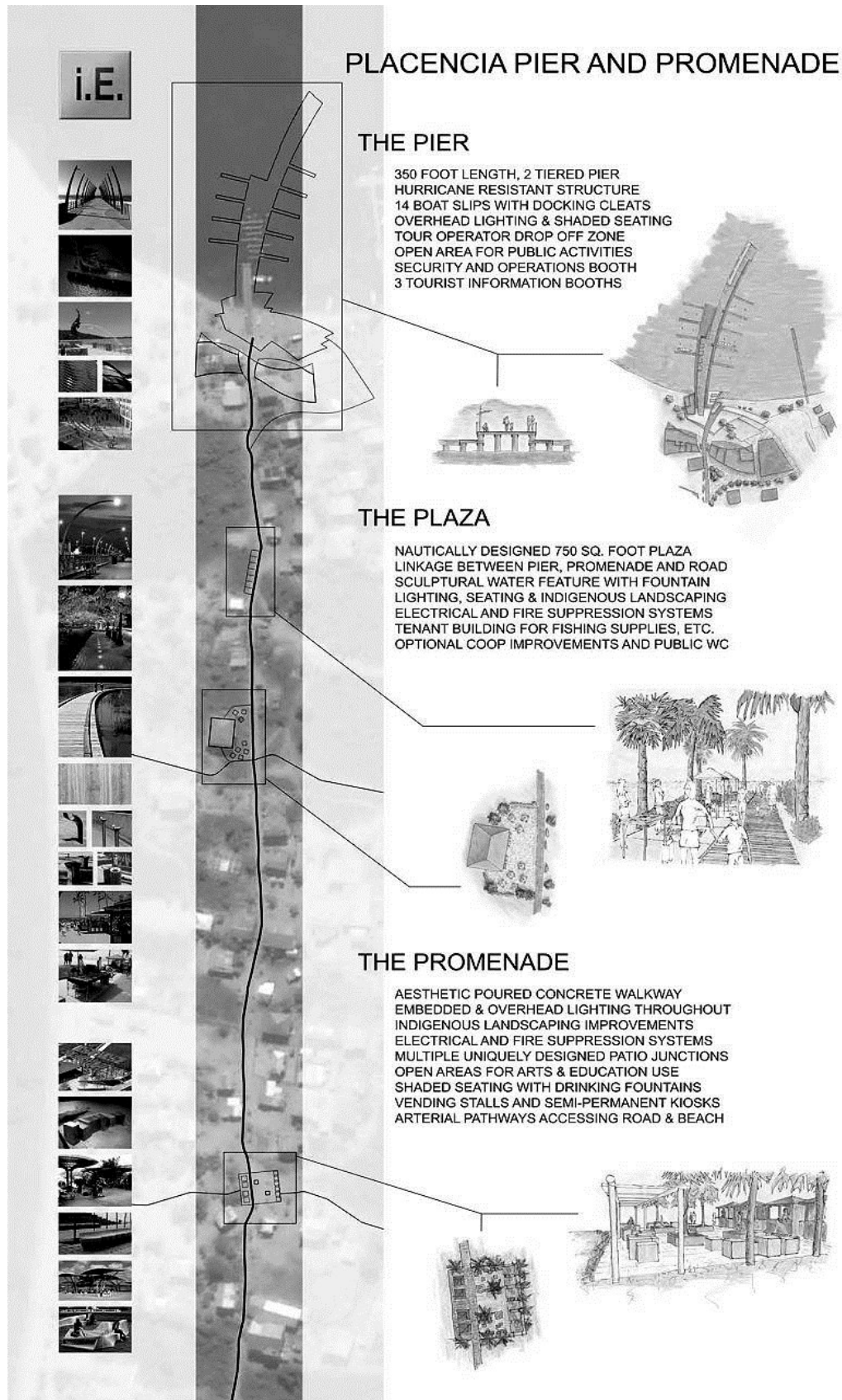
In essence; we need to look at all the counter-productive practices we, as a nation are doing right now; assess these practices and then make the proper adjustments in restructuring; thus stimulating growth and allowing us to be more competitive in the region.

Do you really believe that the national government is looking out for OUR welfare by bringing cruise ships to Placencia and southern Belize?

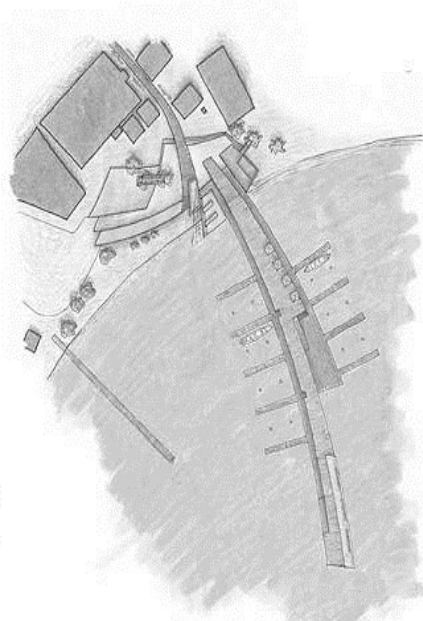
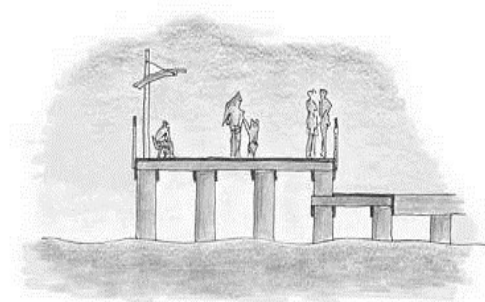
Do you really believe that WE can control cruise ships when nobody else in the world can?

Where are the FACTS from the people who want the cruise ships? They've had plenty of chances to give them to us, but they haven't. Why?

Proposed Placencia Dock Project



PIER & PLAZA SHOWING EXISTING BUILDING LOCATIONS



In 2009, Belize borrowed US\$13 million from the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) to strengthen tourism in 4 destinations, including Placencia, which will receive approximately US\$2.2 million for infrastructure improvements in the Village. Another US\$2.4 million of the IADB loan is earmarked for master tourism plans for each destination, including Placencia (see page 7).

On 30 September 2010, the Placencia concept plan was presented at a public consultation in Placencia. iE Architects, a Belize architectural firm, developed the concept plan and is owned by Daniel and Carlos Arguelles, brothers of Emil Arguelles, speaker of the Belize House of Representatives.

As presented at the consultation, the plan will include a new dock to replace Placencia's existing public dock, and improvements to the Placencia Sidewalk (referred to as the "Promenade" in the diagram at left).

According to the concept plans:

- **Dock:** The dock will be lengthened to approximately 350 feet, will have two levels and will include a public area for events such as fishing tournaments and swimming competitions, docking space for 12-14 boats, an area where passengers can be picked up and dropped off, lighting, and an area for kiosks where information can be provided to tourists or products sold.
- **The Point:** The area of the beach adjacent to the dock will become a plaza with seating where people can wait for boats and relax. (Boats will no longer be able to pull up onto the beach as they do now.) The plaza will also include an area for fishermen to use to clean fish.
- **Sidewalk:** The Sidewalk will be widened, more lighting will be added, the entire length of the Sidewalk will be landscaped and at least one plaza with seating, commercial kiosks for product sales and a performance area will be constructed.

The following issues were raised at the consultation:

- Private ownership of the land along the Placencia Sidewalk may make some of the planned improvements impossible in some areas (such as widening of the Sidewalk).
- Private ownership of land adjacent to the Placencia Sidewalk may make development of the plaza areas difficult because land would need to be donated for the plazas.
- The length of dock may interfere with boat traffic in the channel.
- Paying for maintenance and repair of the improvements once they were finished is likely to be a problem for Placencia Village.
- How cruise ships and a tourism village will affect the project.

IADB representatives explained that if Placencia approved the concept plan, they would then start to identify areas where the Sidewalk could be expanded and the plaza installed. Also, local experts will be consulted about the placement and length of the expanded dock. The IADB consultants also said that a cruise ship tourism village at the other side of the Point would not affect the project. Rent from retail space included in the plan is intended to provide income to fund maintenance and repairs.

IADB representatives also agreed to look into whether the dock area plans could include permanent offices for the Placencia Village Council and the Tourism Center.

Although not mentioned at the consultation, the IDB Terms of Reference (Feasibility Study for the Pier/Plaza) states that the docking spaces at the proposed dock will be a "maximum 42-48 ft in length with draught of no more than 4 ft . . ."

The concept plans for the proposed dock and sidewalk improvement project was approved by Placencia Village residents by a show of hands at the consultation.

i.E. Architects will now begin preparing plans and blue prints for improvements. According to IADB representatives, the plans and blueprints will be presented to the Placencia community again at a community meeting before being finalized.

Comments on the project can be made to IADB by phone at 227-2687, or by using the form on the IADB Website at www.sustainable tourism.org

Tourism Master Plan for the Peninsula

In addition to loaning money to Belize to finance the development of Placencia's dock and sidewalk (see p. 6), the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) is funding a Twenty-Year Master Tourism Plan for the entire country. This Master Plan targets four key destinations – Placencia, Ambergris Caye, San Ignacio and Belize City.

On Wednesday, 6 October 2010, international tourism development consultants and local IADB staff met with representatives from Placencia businesses and organizations to obtain feedback on the components of the plan that affect the Placencia Peninsula.

Under the Master Plan, the Peninsula has been split into two clusters: northern Placencia Peninsula and southern Placencia Peninsula. The density of the northern end of the Peninsula (where Copal Beach, The Placencia Estate and Residences and the Placencia Marina are or will be located) is already physically becoming a medium density development area. However, the consultants believe that the rest of the Peninsula should remain a low-density development area geared toward high end overnight tourists.

The consultants categorized southern Placencia as primarily oriented toward eco-tourism and adventure, culture, sun and beach and nautical tourism. Notably, the consultants told meeting attendees that they did not recommend cruise tourism for southern Placencia. Instead, the consultants explained that **IF** Belize chooses to introduce cruise tourism into southern Belize, the most appropriate location is in the area of the under-construction international airport.

The consultants asked meeting participants to submit written comments on the consultants' density recommendations for Placencia North, Placencia South, and the other areas targeted in this study. Participants were also asked to advise the consultants in writing on whether they agreed with other portions of the plan including the targeted market for Placencia (high-end overnight tourists).

After all consultations are completed, the IADB consultants will amend the master plan to reflect the comments and concerns of local groups, which will then have a second opportunity to review and comment on the revised master plan before it is formally presented to the Belize government for adoption.

Hatchet Caye Development



On 23 February 2010, the Belize Department of Environment (DOE) authorized expansion of Hatchet Caye Resort to include:

- Helipad to be located at the end of a pier;
- One main building and restaurant and bar;
- Four (4) double room cabanas;
- One (1) staff house;
- Power house;
- Tool shed;
- New pier and renovation of two (2) existing piers;
- Dredging of approx. 16,000 cubic yards of material for use as fill;
- Installation of a 20kw solar system with 2 back-up generators; and
- Installation of 7 MoDAD II wastewater treatment system.

The Environmental Compliance Plan (ECP) for the development is signed by DOE and Doug Ingersoll, as Director of Hatchet Caye Limited.

Dredging for the development includes areas in which coral reef is located. The dredging was approved to allow the developer to obtain enough fill to raise the low lying areas of Hatchet Caye to 3-5 feet above mean sea level and for filling of geo-tubes for

use as shore protection. The ECP requires the developer to relocate coral from the dredging area whenever feasible.

The ECP requires the resort to transport garbage to the mainland for disposal, most probably in the Placencia landfill. A package sewage system will treat sewage, but the ECP does not explain where sludge from the system will be disposed of.

A contractor at the Hatchet Caye development states that no mangroves have or will be removed and that the sewage system for the development will transform sewage and oil from the restaurant kitchen into water of drinking water quality.

The contractor also states that the resident permit, bones and jacks have increased in number since Hatchet Caye Limited took over ownership and management of the island.

DOE did not require an EIA or any public consultation before approval of the expansion of Harvest Caye. Peninsula communities received no notice of the proposed development.

A Law Enforced! (mostly)



Until late August 2010, the pipes shown in the picture to the left discharged wastewater from The Peninsula Hotel and Residences directly into the Caribbean Sea.

Local residents estimate this discharge has been going on for about five years. The wastewater was pumped from a holding pond about three hundred feet from the shore, and the pipe discharged the wastewater only a few feet north of the Placencia Chapel where people are baptized in the open sea.

PCSD notified the Department of the Environment (DOE) about the wastewater pipe. After DOE's Compliance team inspected the discharge, the hotel finally removed the pipe in late August 2010. DOE took water samples for fecal chloroform and total chloroform, but these samples were spoiled because DOE did not get them to the lab quickly enough. DOE does not expect to take any other water samples.

Section 8 of the Belize Environmental Protection Act (Cap 328) prohibits discharging wastewater in a public waterway, especially into marine environments such as the Caribbean and Placencia Lagoon. The punishment for violating this law is a fine of

\$5,000 to \$25,000 and/or imprisonment for up to two years, plus an additional fine of up to \$1,000 a day for every day after DOE sends notice of a violation.

DOE said the hotel was not fined, but would not say why not. DOE has also not responded to questions about whether the discharge is now being run into the Placencia Lagoon instead of the sea.

Protection of Sport Fish Habitat

On 13 October 2010, local fishing guides and tour operators attended a meeting sponsored by Green Reef to discuss the best way to protect critical sport fish habitat and the sport fishing industry in Belize.

Mito Paz of Green Reef, an Ambergris Caye conservation organization, chaired the meeting, assisted by Valentine Rosado of The Coral Reef Alliance.

Recommendations from Placencia and Monkey River guides included:

- A national ban on gill netting;
- Splitting off Fisheries from Agriculture and creating a new Ministry of Fisheries;
- Better enforcement of existing laws for aquaculture, dredging and land reclamation;
- Including snook as a protected species, and
- Giving SEA the revenues from sport fishing licenses and penalties to use for enforcement of fisheries laws in this area.

Green Reef is now compiling recommendations from fishing guides and tour operators in all coastal parts of the country, and will soon submit the top recommendations to the Ministries of Agriculture and Tourism, along with ideas on how to turn these recommendations into law.

Letters to the Editor

(continued from page 2)

What does this have to do with cruise ships? Only that I know few cruise guides who establish meaningful relationships with their tourist clients. How could they when they are shepherding 40 impatient day trippers on a mad dash up and down a Mayan temple so they can make it back to the boat in time for free ice cream and salsa lessons? Tourism, at its heart, is a cultural encounter. Long relaxed unhurried stays by visitors who have time to meet, interact with and understand Belizeans and Belize not only means more money in our pockets for beds, food, drinks and tours; it produces the kind of relationships that small countries in a highly competitive world find increasingly necessary. In short, Belize needs all the friends it can get: the richer and more powerful the better. Overnight tourism promotes these valuable international personal relationships. Cruise tourism at best produces a few pennies for a few people; at worst a negative impression born of an impersonal encounter that puts us in the same category along with a dozen other forgettable destinations characterized by the slogan "been there, done that, got the t-shirt".

At this point you might agree that OK, it's obvious that big predatory companies exploit small poor countries. That is hardly major news. You might also admit that locals don't have much to gain from cruise tourism beyond some chump change. But hell, chump change is still change and even the shilling the guy in the Escalade flips to the crack head is still a shilling more than he had before. So what's the harm?

The real harm is not in what we see but in what we don't see. It's the cruise tourist who spends an hour walking around the Tourist Village in Belize City and thinks he has seen Belize. Having paid \$279 for a five day cruise to the Western Caribbean he is now on a statistical par with the overnight tourist who spent ten days in the rainforest and cayes and left \$5,000 in the hands of local hoteliers, restaurants tour guides and transportation companies. Both of these visitors go home saying that they have seen Belize. The overnight tourist probably had a great experience and could quite possibly come back and repeat the process or at least will tell his friends good things about his Belize Adventure. The cruise tourist, however, has now checked Belize off his "places to visit before I die" list and will not return. Multiply this fellow by 600,000 cruise visitors a year and pretty soon you wind up with a hell of a lot of people who are not coming back to Belize. And what of the overnight visitor to Cayo who makes the mistake of visiting Xunantunich on a cruise day? Chances are, she's not coming back either.

What this boils down to is that by embracing cruise tourism we are selling Belize cheap. Way too cheap. If you want to hear the local band in Placencia chances are you can head down to Barefoot Bar, have a drink and dance the night away for free. But if you want to experience a performance by the Black Eyed Peas in a New York City club you might pay \$200—if you could get in. Different attractions, different prices. So, is Belize the local house band or the Black eyed Peas? For me it's a no brainer. Having had the good fortune to travel to almost every tourism destination in the Caribbean (business, not pleasure) I can objectively report that there is no place I have ever been that even comes close to having the combined world class attractions that Belize has. Sure, on an individual basis the white sand beaches of Anguilla are nicer than Placencia, diving in Bonaire may be slightly better than San Pedro, Tikal may be a bit more awe-inspiring than Caracol, the bonefish six ounces bigger in Key West and Mount Kilimanjaro may tower over Victoria Peak. But I defy you to find ANY PLACE ON EARTH where you can catch a permit, tarpon or bonefish before breakfast, dive a barrier reef before lunch, climb a jungle covered mountain in the afternoon and kayak down a rushing river in time to watch a sunset from the top of a two thousand year old Mayan Temple... ALL IN ONE DAY. And with the new Placencia road you can do it in comfort and safety.

The fact is that in the world of great places to visit, Belize is Bob Marley, Frank Sinatra, Tina Turner and the Beatles all rolled into one unequalled show. So why do we let so many people enjoy the concert for free? It's because as a nation we suffer from what psy-

Miss Wilma Leslie "Yes, Miss Wilma Can!"

Since the Placencia Fishermen's Cooperative opened in 1962, it has played an historic and crucial role in the life of Placencia Peninsula. It is a place where fishermen and women from Placencia, Seine Bight, Punta Gorda and Monkey River sell their catch from the Sea. For years before refrigeration (and still), the ice house cranked out ice, and the Coop's generator provided electricity to Placencia long before BEL. For a year and a half in the mid 1990's, it even served as Placencia's post office.

Miss Wilma Leslie saw it all: she even watched as the local men built the Coop with their own hands and without government help.

Where once lobster was stored, is Miss Wilma's office. Miss Wilma is literally surrounded by mounds of voucher books, invoice books, big official looking accounting books. It is her job to keep track of every financial Coop transaction. And this job she does with efficiency and pride.

Born in Bakader in Placencia, she attended St. John's Primary School. Her father died and her young mother of five children moved the family to Independence for employment. Miss Wilma graduated from primary school in Independence and found a job working in a shop there.

In 1962, Miss Wilma returned to Placencia to work at the Fishermen's Co-op.

"I was one of fifteen or sixteen women cleaning fish. We worked long hours and we were on our feet all day. We were paid 25 cents per hour, but back then everything was so cheap and that was good pay. Women from Belize City even came down here to Placencia to work in the Coop. We ladies sang and told stories to keep ourselves lively. Boats from Jamaica would come in and buy snapper and grouper fillet and lobster. I did this job for ten years."

Then one day her life changed.

"Mr. Sidney Lino, my boss, came downstairs and told me he wanted me to invoice the fishermen as they brought in their catch. I told Mr. Lino I had only graduated from primary school, and could not possibly do this job. But Mr. Lino saw something in me that I did not see in myself. He had more confidence in me than I had in myself. He kept telling me, "Yes, you can do it, Wilma, you can do it."

Miss Wilma, over time and with the constant encouragement of Mr. Lino and Miss Jean Reed, the Coop's bookkeeper, assumed full responsibilities of the Coop's financial dealings.

As I looked around Miss Wilma's office, I was truly

chologists would call a case of low self esteem. We are the beautiful intelligent loving woman whose abusive boyfriend has her convinced she is worthless. It's a common affliction but in our individual lives there are professionals who help us overcome such obstacles. Fortunately in national life there are also professionals who can help us understand and overcome these problems but despite their repeated advice our leaders do not always listen. Expert after expert has told us that Belize's future lies in eco and high end tourism. We know that cruise tourism is the opposite of high end ecotourism. So why is our government trying to foist the curse of cruise tourism on us?

For Belize City it's probably too late. The ships are already too entrenched in that struggling economy. The various players now at war will make their peace and muddle through as best they can. But as a resident of the Placencia Peninsula who has invested heavily in overnight tourism I can only plead with the Ministry of Tourism, the Prime Minister and Cabinet to look at the facts, think long term, stop selling the country short and realize that by promoting cruise tourism in the South they are—like our friend the crack head—grabbing the shilling and thinking it's a bag of gold.

Respectfully Submitted,

Stewart Krohn
Cocoplum
Seine Bight Village



Miss Wilma, Placencia Fishermen's Co-op

overwhelmed by all the official looking ledgers and financial books. But as Miss Wilma explained to me, "So many years I have done this job. I know what needs to be done. You see all these little vouchers and invoices? I keep track of everything, and then I transfer all this information into the larger book. Sometimes I cannot go home at night. I stay late to work the books."

"Every month I have to prepare the report for the Fisheries Department, and twice a month, the national auditor comes to check our books. The auditor is always impressed at not only the accuracy of the accounts, but how neat and readable they are."

When asked about the changes she has seen in Placencia, Miss Wilma commented on the decline of active fisherfolk. "When the Coop opened, there were maybe 200 members. Now we are down to around ten active members. Most fishermen are now tour guides. And where once we were a small village, there are now so many people."

Miss Wilma thinks about retiring and spending more time near the water—the sea, a river, any body of water, because Miss Wilma loves the water. Before heading off to her work at the Coop in the morning, most days she still swims in the Sea.

Next time you stop in Placencia Fishermen's Coop, make sure and give Miss Wilma a big shout and get yourself a crash course in Placencia's history.