

BELIZE CRUISE TOURISM POLICY

I. INTRODUCTION

The cruise tourism industry is one of the most dynamic and fastest growing components of the leisure industry. Since the early eighties, the industry has had an average annual growth rate of 7.9% per year throughout the Caribbean. Similarly, over the last few years Belize has seen port calls skyrocketed by more than 100%. This growth rate should see a dramatic increase as we continue to attract lines to Belize.

This boom in port calls is great for Belize; however, the environmental as well as the social factors must be taken into consideration when developing any guidelines that will facilitate the growth of the Cruise Tourism Sector. The goal is to maximize the benefits from the cruise industry and at the same time sustaining the natural resources of Belize.

Belize City is a major focal area, hosting over 40% of all Cruise Passengers that come ashore. The Belize Tourism Board, the Belize City Council, the Cruise Ship Industry Association and the Ministry of National Security together with all other organizations/institutions interested in the tourism product will collaborate with each other to provide a safe and entertaining environment for all cruise passengers.

II. BACKGROUND

Following a period of sharp decline in cruise ship calls middle of the 90's, largely as result of relatively high taxes, limited infrastructural facilities and services, cruise ship traffic began to revive in the late 90's and has since continued to record phenomenal and consistent growth. At the same time, cruise tourism was met with mixed feelings by both the public and private sectors of the industry as an intrusive and incompatible sub-sector of Belize's tourism industry. With this in mind, little or no effort was made to provide the necessary conditions for its growth and development.

Against this background and in view of its positive growth as well as future growth, there is a need for a policy on cruise tourism in Belize. This policy is geared towards addressing this need and has been formulated in consultation with all the stakeholders and organizations in the industry.

III. POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Government considers cruise tourism to be a component of the country's overall tourism sector, complementary to the stay-over tourism sector, with which it can share important synergies. As such, the management of its development and promotion will be guided by the overall national tourism policy. The goal of this policy is to ensure that the cruise tourism sector becomes competitive with other destinations and contributes to the attainment of the general tourism development objectives of Belize; namely, the generation of foreign exchange, income, employment and business opportunities, which are conducive to its proper growth and development.

The Ministry of Tourism and the Belize Tourism Board, under the Hotels and Tourism Accommodation Act of 1997 are the competent government departments responsible for the establishment, management and implementation of the Cruise Tourism Policies and Guidelines.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

In formulating and implementing the Cruise Tourism Policy, the government is cognizant of the environmental issues concerning cruise tourism operations in Belizean territorial waters. These include:

- Anchoring of cruise vessels
- Off-ship recreational activities of cruise passengers
- Operation and maintenance activities on board vessels
- Waste management and disposal
- Cumulative impacts of all ships licensed to operate in Belize

Government will, therefore, specify the conditions to provide for the compliance monitoring of the cruise tourism industry, ensuring that the eco-cultural tourism product Belize is promoting is strengthened and its image as a multi-attraction destination is enhanced.

V. THE POLICY

A. STATEMENT

The cruise tourism policy of the Government of Belize aims to make cruise tourism a component of the tourism industry by providing support for its growth and development within the framework of its environmental policy.

B. PURPOSE

The cruise tourism sub-sector is expected to assist in the development of tourism in Belize, and to optimize its contribution to the Belizean economy, while ensuring that growth is environmentally and socio-culturally sustainable.

C. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the cruise tourism policy are:

- To increase the number of cruise ship calls and passenger arrivals in a sustainable manner
- To optimize the revenue's generated from cruise passenger's expenditure.
- To increase the overall benefits from cruise tourism by creating and strengthening inter-sectoral linkages, whereby cruise lines source needed supplies of goods and services from local Belize suppliers
- To expand the absorptive capacity of the country by developing existing and new visitor attractions, including event attractions in line with Belize's efforts to improve the tourism product
- To explore other ports and suitable anchoring sites on the coast of Belize with a view to making additional cruise ship calls to other areas of the country, e.g. Big Creek, Placencia, etc.
- To develop and implement appropriate promotional programs that effectively convert cruise passengers to long stay visitors.

D. GUIDING PRINCIPLE

The growth rate and weekly distribution will have to respect the integrity of eco-tourism in Belize. In practice, this means that the carrying capacity established by the industry and by individual sites will be respected and adhered to.

E. COMPLIANCE MONITORING

A Compliance and Monitoring Plan herein attached as Appendix 1, as revised in January 1999, is an integral part of the Cruise Tourism Policy. It is a requirement that it be signed and adhered to by Port Agents wishing to license a cruise ship to operate in Belizean territorial waters.

F. ANCHORING AND PILOTAGE

- a) Anchoring of all cruise ships will be done in consultation with the designated local authorities (Belize Port Authority and Fisheries Department).
- b) Pilotage services are available from English Caye to Belize City and other ports south of Belize City.

G. CRUISE TOURISM PASSENGER ACTIVITIES

As part of the licensing procedures to be implemented by the Belize Tourism Board, all cruise ships will be required to offer passenger's inland and small island excursions run by Belizean tour operators and conducted by licensed tour guides. The port agents and the tour operators will be responsible for ensuring that all manner of services for excursions, including but not limited to transportation, food and beverage, handicraft sales, guide services, etc are sourced in the country, and that all laws are adhered to.

These requirements are non-negotiable and must be agreed in writing upon by the port agent, tour operator and cruise line prior to the granting of a license.

H. VESSELS

For the purpose of this policy, and to ensure proper management of visitors and Belize's natural resources, no more than three thousand passengers will be allowed to disembark in Belize City on any given day. The number of cruise ship calls to be authorized will be determined by the Belize Tourism Board after consultation with industry members and other interested parties. Under special and exceptional circumstances, the limit may be exceeded on a case-by-case basis with the written authority of the Board through the Registrar of Hotels.

I. LIABILITY

The port agent is responsible for all matters relating to the cruise ship operations in Belize, and will also be responsible for all licensing requirements. However, the cruise lines shall be liable for any damage or degradation to the environment resulting from the operation of cruise ships.

Full recognition will be given to the local shipping agents as the sole representatives of the cruise lines in Belize with full responsibility to ensure total compliance with all requirements stipulated by this policy and any related administrative guidelines.

J. APPLICATION PROCESS AND REQUIREMENTS

The Tourism Board will process licenses on a first-come first-serve basis, within a period of not more than two weeks of receipt. Applicant's requesting multiple visits over an extended period of time will be given priority over those requesting day visits. If an application is rejected, specific reasons for the rejection must be given.

VI. FORUM FOR DISCUSSION

Recognizing the need for ongoing consultation and co-ordination between the cruise lines, the local private sector and the Government of Belize, a consultative forum will be established, herein called the Cruise Tourism Advisory Committee. The Deputy Director of Product Development, Belize Tourism Board, will chair the committee with representation from a cross section of the cruise tourism industry and related government ministries and agencies. The aim of this committee is to monitor the development of the industry within the framework of this policy and to advise the Ministry of Tourism and the Belize Tourism Board accordingly.

GUIDELINES FOR CRUISE SHIP VISITATION IN BELIZE

VII. KEY OBJECTIVES OF GUIDELINES

The objective of this document is to provide a comprehensive set of guidelines for the management and development of cruise visitation in Belize with a view to provide maximum satisfaction in the experience of visitors. The expected results of such objectives are as follows:

- To raise the level of organization throughout the cruise tourism industry
- To improve the quality of visitor experiences to Belize
- To improve the level of security for visitors
- To maximize the foreign revenues of all key stakeholders within the industry
- To protect and develop the major sites and attractions
- To increase the number of destinations visited
- To ensure the equitable distribution of economic benefits to all stakeholders
- To create manageable tours at the major attractions
- To minimize the stress on sites and attractions

VIII. KEY CONSIDERATIONS

1. SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS

The security of each visitor is of great importance and the necessary safeguards must be put in place to control and eliminate any negative influences that may interfere with the quality of the visitor experience.

Measures need to be implemented to sustain the positive growth that has been evident in the local cruise ship industry.

Such measures may include:

- Deployment of special tourism police at strategic locations throughout Belize City and other key areas including:
 - Fort Area
 - Albert Street
 - Regent Street
 - Queen Street
 - North Front Street
 - The Princess Area
- Have a central location in the Fort Point Area for the tourist police where a complaint can be made.
- There should be ongoing communications between the Tourism Police Unit and the regular police force.
- Tourism Police accompanying tour buses going out of Belize City
- Visitors who are not interested in joining a group tour should be advised on some basic safety precautions to take while on their own.

VIII. TOUR MANAGEMENT

Tour Operators, port agents and all cruise tourism organizers should ensure that the carrying capacity levels herein described would be adhered to. (See addendum)

For safety, enhanced visitor experience and sustainability of the resources, the following guidelines should be maintained:

1. Dispersion of tours to a variety of sites and locations. Priority will be granted to those parks and attractions where management is present.
2. Central parking location for all tour buses and taxi's in Belize City
3. Central locations will be set aside for parking at each site/attraction. Buses and other means of transportation will only be accepted at the entrance of the site when boarding passengers.
4. There should be an adequate number of tour guide(s) on any given tour to comply with the maximum limit of visitation requirements herein described or those recommended by the site managers.

5. Adequate information supplied about sites and attractions
6. Ongoing communications between tour operators and management of the site to prevent overcrowding.
7. Should include stops in towns and villages that are on route or are in a surrounding area of the site and attractions visited.

X. CARRYING CAPACITY

Belize has embarked on a campaign that promotes eco-cultural tourism as a vital component of its tourism industry. This is an important medium through which the sustainable use of our resources can be accomplished.

The maximum level of visitation set at each site/attraction is intended to develop a guideline for monitoring purposes and may be modified by the managers at the request of a group of tour operators or guides. The proposed amount of visitors to a guide is to ensure that the resources are protected and that a visitor receives maximum attention and quality service. The visitation levels will be monitored overtime, however, are subject to change as the management at the sites is improved.

In arriving at the maximum levels of visitation for Belize's sites and attractions, the following were considered important:

Environmental Factors

- Sensitivity towards the environment
- Flora and fauna
- Topography and vegetation covered

Social Factors

- Perception of locals
- Effects/Impact on the local community
- Shared benefits
- Cultural expressions

Physical Factors

- Land mass to be used
- Availability of facilities
- Level of development at the site
- Recreation facilities and beautification

XI. TOUR GUIDE REQUIREMENTS

Visitors to any destination usually rely on the experience and knowledge of local guides to help them interpret and process their experience. Tour guides need to be trained to transfer their knowledge to visitors in a manner that is both entertaining and educational.

The number of visitors per tour guide also needs to be clearly articulated. This is crucial from a management perspective. The ratio of visitors to tour guides would generally depend on the following criteria:

- Number of visitors
- Type of tour being undertaken
- Mode of transportation used for tour
- Complexity of the tour being undertaken
- Experience and competence of the tour guide

Standards need to be established in the area of tour guiding in Belize. Persons interested in being tour guides should satisfy these basic criteria.

- Satisfy the requirements of a certified tour guiding program
- Knowledge of all facets of life in Belize
- Effective Communicator (both written and oral)
- Good judgement and analytical skills
- Bilingual or Multi-lingual

As mentioned earlier, the ratio of tour guide to visitors depends on numerous factors. Visitor safety should always be the primary consideration.

Tours in Belize are conducted in both terrestrial and marine environments. Here are some suggested ratios for visits to both of these environments.

NO. OF VISITORS	NO. OF TOUR GUIDES	ENVIRONMENT TYPE
FIFTEEN (15)	ONE (1)	TERRESTRIAL
EIGHT (8)	ONE (1)	MARINE

XII. EMERGENCY PRECAUTIONS

Standard operational procedures need to be developed whenever a cruise ship enters the territorial waters of Belize. Standard procedures would in essence make individuals and organizations accountable for cruise ships visiting Belize. The Registrar of Hotels will notify the following departments:

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| ▪ Fire Department | Immigration Department |
| ▪ Police Department | Customs Department |
| ▪ Belize Defense Force | Fisheries Department |
| ▪ Ministry of Health | Belize Port Authority |

A schedule of ship arrivals will be provided to all agencies that are vital to the development of the industry.

XIII. LICENSING

Revenue could be generated by issuing licenses to various individuals and institutions that are interested in business opportunities associated with the cruise industry. All food suppliers should be in possession of a food handler's license. This would help to safeguard the health of visitors to the country as well as residents.

XIII. TRANSPORTATION

All forms of transportation used by visitors must satisfy fitness standards. Regular checks will be made to ensure that all forms of transportation are well maintained and do not compromise the safety of users. To compliment this effort, a Taxi Tourism Program will be instituted to ensure that all aspects of the transportation sector meets acceptable standards outlining the type of assistance each property owner wanted.

The use of ground transportation in particular needs to be controlled and managed by the port agents. Better management of various modes of transportation can be achieved by implementing the following measures:

- Designating special parking areas
- Issuing licenses to vehicle operators
- Establishing a fixed fare structure
- Vehicles should be clearly marked
- Vehicles should carry First Aid supplies in event of accidents
- Enforcing the carrying capacity of all forms of transport
- Establishing punitive measures for defaulting operators

XV. ENTERTAINMENT

Visitors to the country generally expect a high level of entertainment. Attempts should be made to promote and showcase the various cultural, social and historical aspects of the country to cruise passengers. Care should be taken to promote cultural forms that are unique to Belize.

The type of entertainment should be:

- Respectful of local customs and values
- Educational
- Unique to Belize

XVI. CRUISE SHIP OPERATORS

The effectiveness of these guidelines would be dependent on the operators of cruise ships arriving in Belize. Operators would ultimately be searching for ways to maximize their revenue collections and may be reluctant to adhere to the guidelines presented.

Once operators are genuinely interested in the development of legitimate grassroots enterprises and other institutions that help to generate revenue for them, then they are likely to be receptive to the following guiding principles.

- Suspend all forms of entertainment activities on board, while in port, to encourage shore visitation by passengers
- Promote overnight stays and multiple destination visits to encourage and maximize visitor satisfaction
- Utilize the services of a wide cross section of individuals and businesses across the country to prevent the creation and growth of monopolies.
- Prepare and present an emergency action plan that will adequately address any life threatening situations that may compromise the safety of passengers.
- Encourage the creation of unique local activities that will enrich the visitor experience.

Appendix 1

In accordance with Part 2, Section 11 of the Agreement for Operating a Live-aboard Passenger Vessel (Class 3) signed between the Belize Tourist and _____ dated _____ This is Appendix 1.

**ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE PLAN
FOR
LIVEABOARD PASSENGER VESSELS
(CLASS III: Cruise Ships Visiting Belize Harbour)**

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Prepared by:

The Department of the Environment

**In conjunction with:
Fisheries Department
Belize Tourism Board**

1999

Items to be attached to this Environmental Compliance Plan at the time of Signing:

1. Schedule of sites to be visited during the period of this license and list of intended passenger activities to be carried out during the period of this license.
2. Estimated number of passengers to be carried, per trip and in total, during the period of this license.
3. Names of all tour operators contracted during the period of this license.
4. A Copy of the plans of discharge outlets for the ship.

INTRODUCTION

It is the policy of the Government of Belize to pursue a course of sustainability in the various development sectors of the nation. The Government of Belize has placed high priority on tourism as a preferential development option. The Government believes that the industry can and should be advantageous to all of the people of Belize and recognizes that the survival of the industry can only be accomplished through the careful management and prudent utilization of the resource on which the industry relies. In pursuit of a sustainable tourism product, it is the Government's policy that an eco-cultural product will be the main focus of its developmental and marketing efforts in the tourism industry of Belize.

The Government of Belize further recognizes that mitigatory measures must be clearly defined so that stake holders in the industry can be assured that efforts are being made to ensure the sustainability of the industry as a whole.

The Cruise Ship sector of the Belize tourism industry has recently experienced significant growth and indications are that this will continue. The purposes of this document is to stipulate measures that would prevent, control and mitigate the environmental degradation that could arise from the growth and development of the cruise ship sector of the tourism industry.

The Port agent on behalf of himself, the owner and master of the ship agree to adhere and abide by this Environmental Compliance Plan upon the entry of his vessel into Belizean territorial waters and at all times while the vessel is in Belizean waters. Violation of this Environmental Compliance Plan will result in the license to operate being revoked.

I. ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION PLAN

Recognizing that the proposed activities could have significant negative environmental impacts, the master, owner and agent agree to take the necessary measures described in the following actions, to mitigate these impacts.

II. ANCHORING OF CRUISE SHIPS

1. Cruise ships will only be allowed to anchor at sites or harbor's designated by the Port Authority of Belize. Other motor vessels associated with the operations of the cruise ship will not be allowed to drop anchor where harm to the Belize Barrier Reef or any part the reef could be done by the anchor chain, ship or anchor itself.

III. RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

2. An orientation program is to be prepared by the cruise ship company to inform their visitors to Belize about the natural resources and environment of Belize and of the legislation that exists to protect them. For its part, the Belize Tourism Board will make tourist information available to the cruise ship in Belize in sufficient quantities for all passengers. Before any activity is undertaken cruise ship operators will remind passengers, tour operators and their agent's of the rules and guidelines associated with each type of activity.
3. A schedule of the sites intended to be visited, and a list of intended activities will be submitted to the Belize Tourism Board at the time of licensing. Any change to this information will require prior approval by the Belize Tourism Board, the Fisheries and the Department of Environment. The exact number of persons that visit each site must be submitted to the Belize Tourism Board on the day of arrival.
4. A list of destinations, with there corresponding maximum number of visitors allowable, will be developed by the Belize Tourism Board, the Fisheries Department and the Department of the Environment; and it will be incorporated into this Environmental Compliance Plan. Sites visited may be rotated so as to reduce the pressure on any one site.

IV. DIVING AND SNORKELING ACTIVITIES

1. No diver, snorkeler, or person will be allowed to touch, stand on or damage any coral or reef formation. To assist in this endeavor divers will not be allowed to wear gloves, unless for very special reasons.
2. No person shall disturb, remove or collect from the sea any species of flora or fauna, including rocks, dead coral, shells or sand.

3. No snorkeling or any other recreational activity will be allowed in sandy, shallow areas near the reef where harm could be caused to corals due to the water column being loaded with sediment.
4. No more than twenty (20) divers or snorkeler's will be allowed to be present at the same time in an area of one hundred (100) square yards.
5. Only eight (8) divers or snorkeler's shall accompany a guide. This is in order to guarantee proper supervision of the visitors, should any assistance be needed.

V. ACTIVITIES ON BOARD VESSELS

1. No out-of-season marine product will be served on board in respect of Belize's closed season for marine products.
2. No hazardous chemicals will be used for cleaning decks. Phosphate free detergents will be used for this purpose.

VI. WASTE DISPOSAL

In an effort to reduce and prevent the environmental impacts associated with waste generation and its disposal, the cruise ship operator and the port agent agree to take the following measures:

1. No waste (sewage waste, solid waste, waste/contaminated water or used oil) will be released or dumped into the sea or on cayes during the cruise ship tour in Belizean waters.
2. Any boat or smaller vessel taking tourists to an island or caye destination in Belize will ensure that no litter or waste is thrown over-board or left littering the island or caye. All waste originating from the mother ship will be placed into a container and returned to the mother ship or deposited at mainland sites in respect of which prior written consent has been obtained from the Department of the Environment.
3. Where day excursions to mainland destinations are offered to cruise ship passengers, all associated services shall, where possible, be provided by Belizean companies. Services to be provided include food, beverage and transportation.

4. No oily or contaminated bilge water will be released in Belizean territorial waters except in emergency situations where the vessel is taking on water to the extent that the safety of the vessel or those aboard will be threatened.

5. The cruise ship operator and its port agent will comply with all requirements of MARPOL and its annexes.

VII. IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION PLAN

The implementation of this environmental compliance plan shall be the direct responsibility of the owner, master and port agent of the cruise ship. Monitoring will be carried out by the Department of the Environment, the Fisheries Department and other responsible agencies, to ensure this document is being adhered to.

As the cruise ship industry proceeds, measures taken to mitigate negative environmental impacts will be reviewed and assessed and perhaps revised to ensure its effectiveness in accomplishing the intentions of the plan.