

ABSTRACT

An Investigation of the extent to which Cruise Tourism and its activities has threatened the Physical-Ecological Tourism Carrying Capacity Level in the Marine Environment: A Pilot Study of St. Lucia

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Globally, cruising is growing at a rate of 7.5% annually. In St. Lucia, approximately 640,000 cruise passengers and 386 cruise ships arrived on the island during the 2014/2015 cruise season. Consequently, St. Lucia has expanded its berths to accommodate up to 6 large cruise ships. This level of growth results in frequent and severe impacts to the fragile ecosystems of Caribbean islands. According to Wilkinson (2006), the tourism carrying capacity (TCC) of islands for this specific activity should be determined.

This research used indicators to signal changes observed in the marine environment and the consequent threat posed to the physical-ecological TCC and also examined management strategies for minimizing these threats. The methodology employed concurrent triangulation mixed method in which both quantitative (284 questionnaires) and qualitative (2 focus groups and 8 semi-structured interviews) data were collected concurrently and compared.

The results indicated that significant changes in the marine environment (depletion of fish populations, coral damage, pollution of the Castries harbor, oil slicks on the water surface near reefs and an increase in solid waste on beaches and at the reef) have been observed over time and pose a threat to the physical-ecological TCC. The main driver for these changes may be the unregulated increase in activity in the marine environment by vessels including cruise ships. Enforcement of existing regulations and environmental education were identified as the most effective mitigation strategies.

Keywords: Myrna Cheryl-Anne Ellis; sustainable development; sustainable tourism; carrying capacity; cruise tourism; marine environment.