

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR RESPONSIBLE TOURISM - BELIZE

# Tourism Strategy for Coastal Communities Southern Belize

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Punta Gorda, Monkey River and Punta Negra

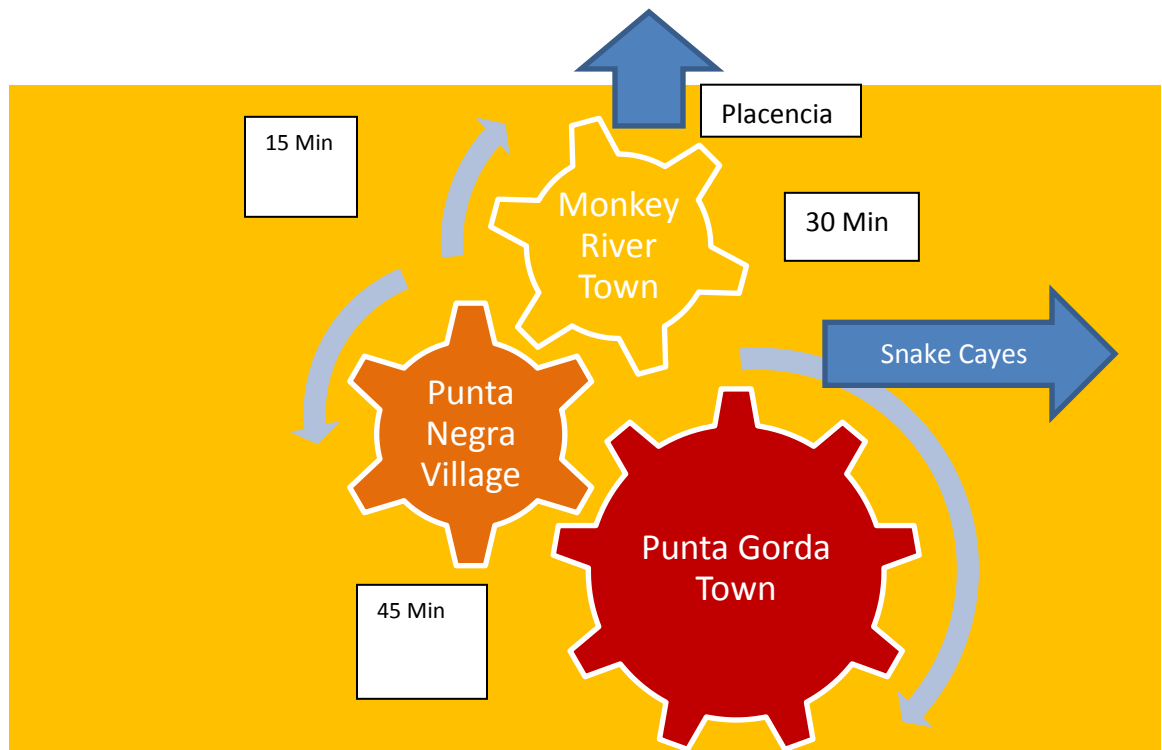
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ICRT BELIZE



### 1. Executive Summary:

The findings of this report highlight the uniqueness of Belize's Southern coastal communities and suggest an individually tailored strategy for sustainable tourism development in each. Despite this individual approach to tourism planning, the reality is that none of these individual communities is an enclave and all are reliant in one way or another on external factors for survival. The strategy is indeed an intricate cluster of tourism products some direct and some indirect all aimed at improving tourism experienced and improving livelihoods within these communities. The image below outlines tourism flows and the relationships that the communities share with each other.



The long-term sustainability and success of this strategy is highly dependent on collaborative planning and business networking to ensure that communities are; a.) Sufficiently organized, b.) Properly Trained, c.) Are incentivized through economic activity and d.) Equitably involved in all process of implementation. A key element of success is communal ownership of the strategies, cultural preservation and environmental protection must also be at the heart of any tourism development within these areas.

## 2. Overview

Belize's has long based the core of its tourism product on a combination of eco and adventure based tourism activities making it a coveted destination for naturalists, adventurers and explorers looking to explore Belize's unbeaten path. The reality however, is that tourism is an essential component to rural development in Belize.

The Tourism Industry is Belize's largest economic sector, generating approximately 31.7% of the GDP and employing approximately two fifths of the population, its importance to the national economy as well as local livelihoods' is indelible. Most traditional tourism activity is focused in the main tourism destinations: San Pedro & Caye Caulker, San Ignacio and Placencia, this is reiterated in the concentrations of tour companies, restaurants, hotels, service providers and other infrastructure in these areas.

A rapidly growing sub-sector is the cruise tourism market which currently stems out of the Fort Street Tourism Village in Belize City and allows for tourism activity within a 2 hour transfer window of the Cruise village in order to facilitate tours.

Important to note for this document is that:

- A. In 2013 the Government of Belize signed an Agreement with Norwegian Cruise Lines to develop a cruise port in Harvest Caye, Southern Belize.
- B. Plans are also under way to build a second international airport in Riversdale. (Approximately 25 minutes outside Placencia Village)
- C. The Jalacte Road connecting Punta Gorda Town to Guatemala is nearing completion.

These projects are estimated to increase visitor flow to the southern Belize by "six times" the current capacity by 2030.

In order to make accommodations for this huge increase in tourism usage, various local and national commitments towards tourism development were amalgamated in the National Sustainable Tourism Master Plan. The Plan outlines projected growth and management in a destination specific manner, Identifying 'Southern Belize' as one of the 7 highlighted development destinations with Punta Negra at the heart of this plan as a luxury Sun and Beach destination. However most of the immediate work still focuses on developing the traditional tourism destinations such as San Pedro, San Ignacio and Placencia with a later focus on southern development starting in 2020.

## 3. Project Background:

The CCAD (Central American Commission for Environment and Development) signed the intergovernmental financial cooperation agreement with the Federal Republic of Germany, to support development of a Project entitled "Conservation of Marine Resources in Central America" to be implemented by the Fund for the Mesoamerican Reef System (MAR Fund).

The area of the Project is delimited by the Mesoamerican Reef System, shared by Mexico, Belize, Guatemala and Honduras. The following priority Marine-Coastal Protected Areas (MCPAs) are the focus of the main Project investments:

To this end, the Toledo Institute for Development and Environment, a Belizean NGO operating in southern Belize and directly impacting the Port Honduras Marine reserve, Belize, sought consultants to formulate the development of a Tourism Development Strategy for Coastal Communities of Southern Belize.

The Tourism Development Strategy (TDS) will serve as the blueprint for rationale and sustainable tourism development and integration into culturally sensitive and ecologically rich communities in Southern Belize. The focus of the TDS will be to develop tourism plans for the communities of Punta Negra Village, Monkey River Village and Punta Gorda Town.

This Strategy will provide a framework and strategic directions for tourism development in these communities focusing on tourism planning, new and existing product development, identifying investment priorities and areas for human resources development and develop customized tourism development plans for these communities that will make tourism a catalyst and engine in cultural preservation, protecting the environment, increase awareness on climate change adaptation, preservation of culture and heritage, local economic development, and poverty alleviation through local enterprise development and employment.

## 2.1 Introduction

The Caribbean is regarded as the World's premier tourism region made famous for selling exquisite escapes to "Paradise"; a world of Sea, Sand and Sun for as long as tourism has been marketed and sold in the region. More importantly however, is the role that tourism plays in developing and sustaining these fragile "third world" economies. In this respect, Belize is no different; despite developing a unique eco-tourism product based on the diverse culture and abundant natural resources sea, sand and sun (3s's) makes up over 60% of all tourism revenues to the country.<sup>1</sup> This is visually evident in the disparity of tourism development along the coast versus inland destinations.

Unlike the Caribbean islands however, Belize has a relatively low coastline with very few natural beaches and is scattered with numerous rivers making for a less than "postcard perfect coastline. Belize's coastal communities have been successful at merging a combination of Coast, Culture, and marine activities into its tourism product.

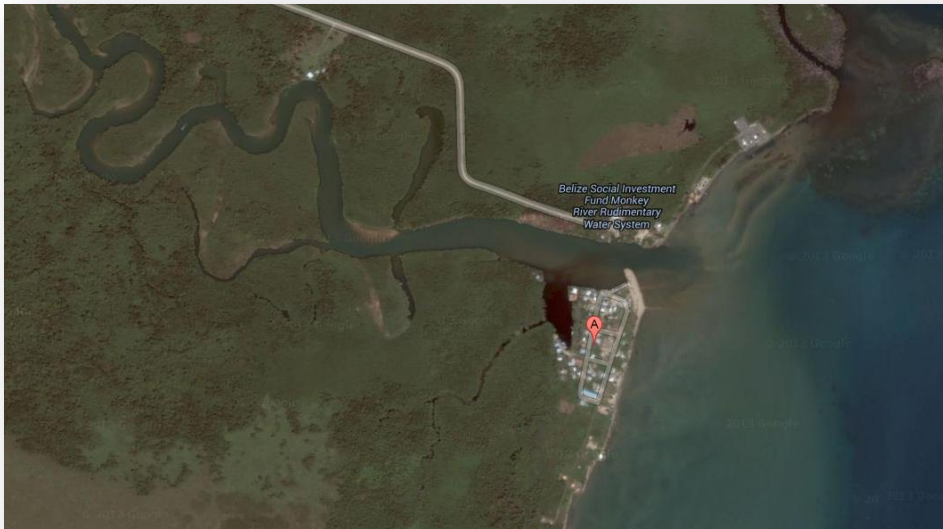
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<sup>1</sup> Belize Tourism Board

The 3s's are attributable to the coastal and marine environment and as a result of this; tourism is also significantly associated with the coastal environment. It has been established that tourism is environmentally dependent. Indeed, the unique character of coastal environment gives to various types of tourism development. While tourism is a component of integrated approaches towards coastal and marine management, the natural environment and tourism are inextricably linked.

With that in mind and given the significance of coastal areas and the opportunities that they provide, their continuous use will hinge upon sustainable use as many coastal communities depend on healthy coastal ecosystems for sustenance, livelihood and quality of life. This Tourism Development Strategy for Coastal Communities in Southern Belize seeks to firstly identify the issues facing the three listed communities as it relates to hindering their access to a larger share of the tourism pie and will seek to also formulate a way forward using a full incorporation of community support, technology, and local know-how and monitoring.

#### 4. Tourism Profile of Monkey River Village:



#### MONKEY RIVER VILLAGE

Monkey River Village is the northernmost village in the Toledo District. It is a small creole village of approximately 200 people and sits on the southern bank of the mouth of the Monkey River for which it's named.

The village has no direct road access except via a poorly maintained farm road which ends on the north bank of the Monkey River. Houses are mainly wooden, few concrete with a dilapidated police station, village centre and tour guide association/women's group office which are rarely used at best. Within the community there is one school, one church, two shops, two hotels, and two restaurants and bars. A

small boardwalk borders the inlet at the back where fishermen dock their boats. and a broken dock lines the entrance to the community. Wide sandy beaches stretch out along the mouth of the river and the east side of the village however the village suffers from some severe beach erosion totalling a loss of some 100 feet in some locations.

Established in the hay day of the banana industry, Monkey River was initially a town in 1891 with a bustling population of about 2500 people, and the main source of income was the banana industry, logging, and export of rice. The decline of the banana industry forced a majority of the population to relocate in search of other jobs. The town was officially declassified to a village in 1981 and most resident sustained their livelihood as fishermen.

Many still earn a living from fishing and selling their catch to one of two packing companies for export. Many others have adapted to the fast growing tourism demand in nearby Placencia Village, just 30 min north of Monkey River Village, and have become tour guides either providing tours of the River and famous Monkey Trail or as sports fisher guides in the southern flats. Others take day tours to the Snake Cayes approximately 45 minutes away by boat for swimming, snorkelling, diving, and picnicking.

**4.1 SWOT Analysis Monkey River Village**

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Location @ the river mouth is perfect tours up river</b></li> <li>• <b>Monkey River Tour already exists and is marketed</b></li> <li>• <b>Some infrastructure already exists for offices, docks etc.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Poor management of the tour is minimizing benefits to the village</b></li> <li>• <b>Lack of maintenance of Infrastructure for offices, docks and trail.</b></li> <li>• <b>Previous community cooperative projects have failed</b></li> <li>• </li> </ul>
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Build and develop a managed tour and tour site</b></li> <li>• <b>Build on existing restaurants and hotels in the community</b></li> <li>• <b>Hibiscus Women’s group already exists and can be fortified for future works.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Beach erosion</b></li> <li>• <b>Fishing earnings can exceed tourism earnings and draw efforts away from tourism.</b></li> <li>• <b>Outside guides or Cruise Tourism can bypass the village completely and result in loss of revenue for the community</b></li> <li>• <b>Land Tenure issues for community infrastructure.</b></li> </ul>

#### 4.2 Tourism Development Strategy, Monkey River Village

Tourism in Monkey River Village exists as a direct extension of the Placencia and more recently Hopkins markets with an estimated mere 5% stemming from Punta Gorda Town. However, the growing popularity for sport fishing in the area as well as impending demand from the developing cruise tourism sector will surely have a high impact on the livelihoods of the Monkey River Community.

Web based research revealed that the Monkey River product is well marketed by hotels and resorts from destinations such as Placencia and Hopkins, however local consultations revealed that very little marketing is being done from within the community to add either diversity or value to the community. As a result very little interest is given by the village to maintain and upkeep public infrastructure such as docks, offices etc. within the community.

1. Extensive Product Development must be placed on the management of the “Monkey River Trail Tour” Including the development of a park management like system for the sale of tickets and the collections of fees, maintenance scheduling for building and maintaining a village dock, office, trail dock and restroom facilities.
2. Institutional strengthening and human capacity building is also required to provide training for Local guides and tour operators to manage themselves through association and develop a community role as the caretakers and natural resource managers of the trail.

Monkey River Village also suffers from an increasing erosion problem, and although evidence to the cause is lacking a lot of signs indicate to the susceptibility of coastal communities to the impacts of climate change. It is therefore recommended that another key component to the livelihood of the village is the prevention of the erosion of the beach. Previous attempts to build a sea break out of used car tires have proven unsuccessful and now only mar the coastline overstressing how much coast has already been lost.

1. Recommendations stemming from previous reports indicate an interest from villagers to explore sea grass and sea cucumber projects for local employment. However as direct employment option as well as counter balance for the beach erosion due to climate change it is recommended that a climate change mangrove reforestation program be established utilizing labour from the two Village Women’s Groups to propagate and replant mangroves along the receding coastline. Support is available from the Caribbean Centre for Climate Change in Belmopan and financial assistance for similar projects has been sought from the European Union.
2. The creation of a mangrove tour is also recommended as a component of Tourism development. Given use of the Women’s centre as the main office of the programme, tours can be carried out



along the coastline identifying mangroves and the fauna and marine life that live in these ecosystems. (Please see Annex 1 CRMI PROPOSAL)

#### Recommended Inputs:

1. Management of the Monkey Trail
2. MR Welcome Centre
3. Mangrove Restoration (nursery) and Mangrove Tour (Hibiscus Women’s Group)
4. Training on improvement of Tourism Services (accommodation, restaurant & Tour Guiding)
5. Community Signage development
6. MARKETIING

#### Requirements:

Infrastructure development (Welcome Centre, docks, bathrooms)

New Product development (Mangrove Tour)

Management structure and plan (ticketed access to trail)

Management committee

Training (Women’s Group, mangrove tour) (Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change)

Marketing of assets

#### 4.3 Action Plan

#### MONKEY RIVER – “Natural flora and fauna experience”

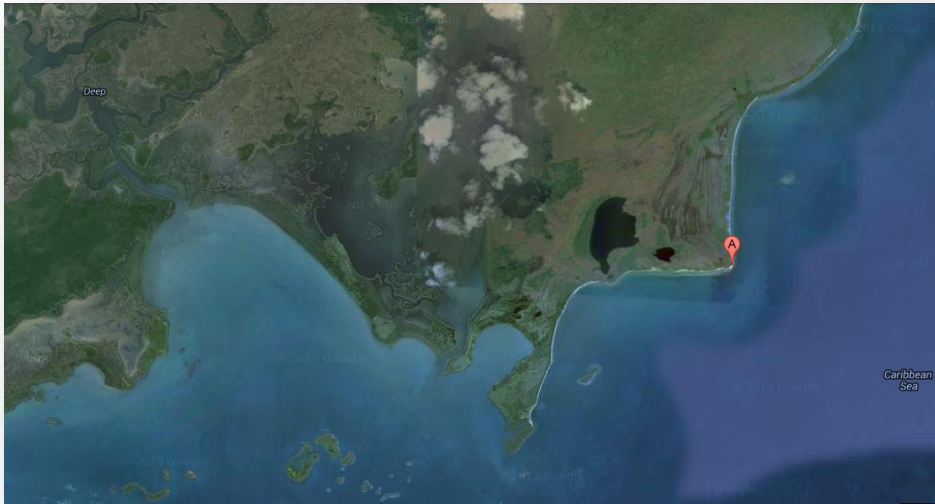
Phase 1	Marketing Mix	Responsible Agent	Requirements
1. Monkey River Tour	<p><b>Product</b></p> <p>Enhanced Monkey River tour</p>	<p>Tour Guide Assn.</p> <p>Village Council</p> <p>Women’s Groups</p> <p>Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of management system for trails and tours</li> <li>• Improve existing infrastructure (docks)</li> <li>• Develop necessary facilities (bathrooms and visitor centre)</li> <li>• Signage</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Price</b></p> <p>Will be determined with contributions from stakeholders, taking into</p>	<p>Tour Guide Assn.</p> <p>Village Council</p> <p>Women’s Group</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market analysis to establish competitive pricing also taking into account maintenance and</li> </ul>



	<p>account internal and external factors.</p> <p><b><u>Promotion</u></b></p> <p>Initial word of mouth via operators and partners of the community; social media and eventually on the website.</p> <p><b><u>Place</u></b></p> <p>Initially it will be sold to neighbouring resorts/ hotels in PN, MR and PG.</p>	<p>TIDE</p> <p>Tour Guide Assn.</p> <p>Village Council</p> <p>TIDE</p>	<p>use of facilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capitalize on partnerships/ relations with resorts/ hotels/ tour operators to continue marketing their products.</li> <li>• Continue building a comprehensive web and online “e” presence, promotional and marketing capabilities; interactivity and on line booking capacities, and develop and implement web optimization strategy.</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 2</b>	<b>Marketing Mix</b>	<b>Responsible Agent</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
2. Mangrove Tour	<p><b><u>Product</u></b></p> <p>Mangrove tours and Mangrove</p>	Women’s Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare brochure, undertake promotional campaigns,</li> </ul>

	<p>Nursery/Replanting Program</p> <p><b><u>Price</u></b></p> <p>\$ 20 USD</p> <p><b><u>Promotion</u></b></p> <p>Initial word of mouth via operators and partners of the community; social media and eventually on the website.</p> <p><b><u>Place</u></b></p> <p>Initially it will be sold to neighbouring resorts/ hotels in PN, MR and PG.</p>	<p>Tour Guide Assn.</p> <p>Village Council</p> <p>Women’s Group</p> <p>TIDE</p> <p>Partners ( BTB, BTIA)</p>	<p>prepare media kits, publicity, advertising and editorial coverage, collaborative and individual trade visits, sales missions, in all core and secondary markets</p>
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## 5. Tourism Profile of Punta Negra Village:



### PUNTA NEGRA VILLAGE

The village of Punta Negra comprises of a total of 9 families, approximately 40 people. Most of who are women and young children. The village is located approximately 30 minutes south of Monkey River Village and accessible only by boat. Punta Negra shares a similar history to that of Monkey River and with a lack of employment in the immediate vicinity of the village most residents have migrated elsewhere to make a living.

The village is far removed from any other towns and large villages and sits on approximately 9 -14 miles of pristine natural Beach. However lacks any public infrastructural amenities such as electricity or potable water.

Some residents make a living working for the nearby Sabal Beach Resort, others by providing cooking services for tour guides going on fishing trips to the Sapodilla Cayes. At best most employment is unpredictable basis; most residents make do either by subsistence fishing or rearing poultry and other produce for local consumption.

#### 5.1 SWOT Analysis Punta Negra Village

STREGNTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PN Lagoon</li> <li>• 9 – 14 miles of Beach</li> <li>• Botanical garden</li> <li>• SEA Breeze Women’s Group have been trained in food Prep by previous</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No electricity</li> <li>• No water (Poor Sanitation)</li> <li>• No waste control</li> <li>• Sparsely knit community</li> <li>• No community centre</li> </ul>

Projects	
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supply Goods/Svcs to SABAL Beach Resort</li> <li>• Lagoon for fishing &amp; Bird Watching</li> <li>• Numerous fruit trees exist in the village</li> <li>• Great Potential for gender equality and empowerment of women</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beach erosion</li> <li>• Limited cooperative success of previous projects in the community</li> <li>• Competition amongst villagers to provide the same entity</li> <li>• Property Rights issues within the village</li> </ul>

## 5.2 Tourism Development Strategy, Punta Negra Village

Because tourism development in Punta Negra Village is challenged by access, as well as lack of utilities it is not recommended for high scale development at this time. However the National Tourism Master Plan does specifically highlight Punta Negra as the destination for High End resort development by early 2021.

1. Punta Negra however, does work well in its current capacity as a general outpost for fishing tours headed to the cayes and has the potential to further develop a formal tour of its lagoons for fly fishing and nature tours. It is recommended that similarly to the Monkey River Tour Management structure that one be created for the Punta Negra lakes as well enabling the local community to manage, sell tickets and collect a fee for usage.

Many Punta Negran's have benefited from previous project training in food preparation and handling which has resulted in a couple being employed by the nearby Sabal Beach Resort. Previous studies also indicate an interest in establishing a restaurant in the community for tour guides to frequent with guests. Challenges will have to be overcome in the provision of potable water for sanitation and other requirements as well as the current staggered visitation.

2. It is recommended that designs to establish a restaurant in the community be phased in providing time for public infrastructure to be developed as defined in the National Tourism Master Plan by 2021. It is recommended that considerations be made for light food processing of existing fruits, coconuts peppers etc. for distribution within nearby tourism hubs such as Hopkins, Placencia and Punta Gorda.
3. Building on the skill set of the trained persons in the community, PUNTA NEGRA Products can be marketed under a specific label identifying Punta Negra and the consumer's role to community development through purchase of the product much like the products produced by Tumul Kin.

This phased in approach does not mean that visits to Punta Negra will be excluded from the current plan. Visits, homestays, cookouts and cultural/culinary experiences are to be encouraged enabling development of the community.

- Community development also includes the proper establishment of the Punta Negra Botanical Garden for growing fruit trees, medicinal plants, herbs and spices for use by the community in agro-processing. Tours and projects can also be attached once this is established

#### Recommended inputs:

- Food Processing (Pepper, Preserves, confectionary)
- Punta Negra Outpost (living cultural & culinary experience) (Fish Fry)
- Punta Negra Lagoon (Management exercise for sport fishing and bird watching)
- Develop the Botanical Garden
- Beach Services (as defined in the master plan and required by cruise traffic)

#### Requirements:

Light food processing Infrastructure Development:

Training

Inputs for bottling preserves etc.

Marketing

### 5.3 Action Plan

#### PUNTA NEGRA - “Made in Punta Negra”

All labels will be marketed with a “made in Punta Negra” dimension.

Phase 1	Marketing Mix	Responsible Agent	Requirements
1. Small scale Agro-processing	<p><b>Product</b> Production of processed goods that require minimal storage (peppers coconut oil etc.) Product Variety Brand name Packaging Sizes</p> <p><b>Price</b></p>	<p>Sea Breeze Women’s Group TIDE BEST</p> <p>Sea Breeze</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Depending on the product, a variety of containers may be needed (glass/plastic bottles, jars etc.)</li> <li>Development of a logo for the “Made in PN” brand</li> <li>Finalize the packaging for each product</li> <li>Skills in storeroom management and processing to keep wastage levels low.</li> </ul>

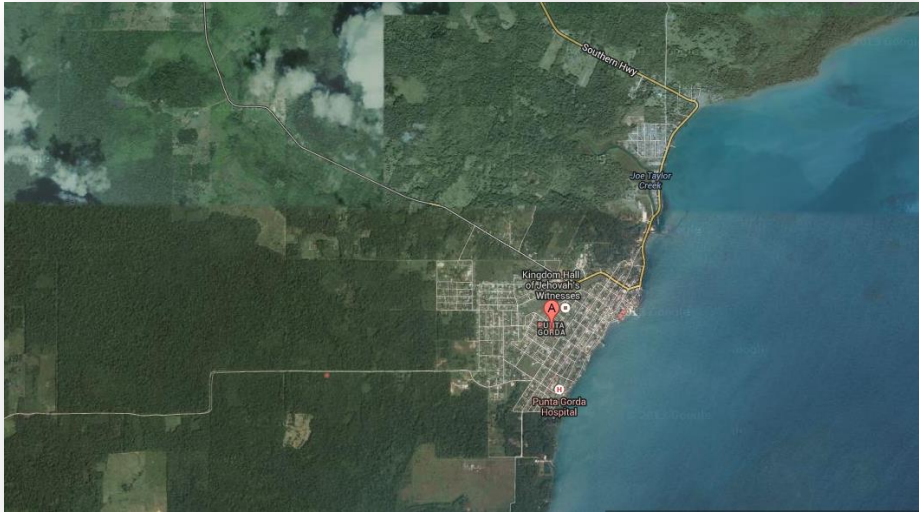
<p>2. Preparation of land/ soil in botanical garden for planting of fruit varieties that will be developed in (Phase 4) and used as raw materials in agro processing</p>	<p>Should take into consideration the cost of raw materials either home grown or provided by suppliers. Cost analysis required</p> <p><b>Promotion</b> Initial word of mouth via operators and partners of the community; social media and eventually on the website.</p> <p><b>Place</b> Initially it will be sold to neighbouring resorts/ hotels in PN, MR and PG. Eventually, to BTIA memberships to be sold in their gift shops.</p>	<p>Women's Group TIDE</p> <p>Sea Breeze Women's Group TIDE Tour guide associations BTIA Placencia BHA &amp; BTB</p> <p>Sea Breeze Women's Group TIDE Tour guide associations BTIA Placencia</p> <p>Sea Breeze Women's Group TIDE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training in cost analysis and setting prices; break even</li> <li>• Capitalize on partnerships/ relations with resorts/ hotels/ tour operators to begin marketing their products.</li> <li>• Identification of land for botanical garden</li> <li>• Identification of variety of species of plants for botanical garden</li> <li>• Design of the botanical Garden</li> </ul>
<p><b>Phase 2</b></p>	<p><b>Marketing Mix</b></p>	<p><b>Responsible Agent</b></p>	<p><b>Requirements</b></p>
<p>3. <b>Punta Negra Outpost</b></p>	<p><b>Product</b> Tourism living experience focused on food and culture</p>	<p>Sea Breeze Women's Group</p>	<p><b>Food</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depending on the product, labels, gift</li> </ul>

	<p>(e.g. preparation of tableta; how coconut is husked and prepared; process of preparation)</p> <p>Product Variety Brand name Packaging Sizes</p> <p>Standardization of features for the experience</p> <p><b><u>Promotion</u></b></p> <p>Sales Promotion Direct Marketing through tour operators Internet ( website and social media)</p> <p><b><u>Place</u></b> Initially it will be sold to neighbouring resorts/ hotels in PN, MR and PG.</p>	<p>Sea Breeze Women’s Group TIDE NICH Tour operators Partners (BTB/Frommers/Trip Advisor)</p>	<p>boxes/gift bags etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Depending on the product, a variety of containers may be needed (glass/plastic bottles, jars etc.)</li> <li>Use of the logo developed for the “Made in PN” brand</li> <li>Skills in storeroom management and processing to keep wastage levels low.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Living Experience</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standardized facilities and amenities for exhibition on the preparation of cultural foods.</li> <li>Develop and produce promotional collateral support materials including niche product / niche market brochures</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 3</b>	<b>Marketing Mix</b>	<b>Responsible Agent</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
<b>4. Development of Punta Negra Lagoon</b>	<p><b><u>Product</u></b></p> <p>Bird watching</p> <p>Sport fishing</p>	<p>Sea Breeze Women’s Group TIDE NICH Tour operators Partners (BTB/Frommers/Trip Advisor)</p> <p>Sea Breeze Women’s Group TIDE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Renovation of Boardwalk</li> <li>Training to acquire skills in identifying flora and fauna specific to the area for guided tours</li> <li>Fee structure to be established with a management system of lagoon</li> <li>Can be built into cost of tours; charges will be</li> </ul>



	<p><b>Promotion</b> Sales Promotion Direct Marketing through tour operators</p> <p><b>Place</b> Initially it will be sold to neighbouring resorts/ hotels in PN, MR and PG. Eventually, to BTIA memberships to be sold in their gift shops.</p>	<p>Sea Breeze Women's Group TIDE NICH Tour operators Partners (BTB/Frommers/Trip Advisor)</p>	<p>specifically for the upkeep of facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capitalize on partnerships/ relations with resorts/ hotels/ tour operators to begin marketing their products</li> <li>• Prepare brochure, undertake promotional campaigns, and prepare media kits, publicity, advertising and editorial coverage, collaborative and individual trade visits, and sales missions, in all core and secondary markets.</li> </ul>
<b>Phase 4</b>	<b>Marketing Mix</b>	<b>Responsible Agent</b>	<b>Requirements</b>
<b>5.Botanical Garden</b>	<p><b>Product</b> Tour of the botanical garden</p> <p><b>Price</b> Will be developed with contribution from the stakeholders taking into account internal and external factors. Cost analysis required.</p> <p><b>Promotion</b> Initial word of mouth via operators and partners of the community; direct Marketing through tour operators, social media and eventually on the website.</p> <p><b>Place</b> Initially it will be sold to neighbouring resorts/ hotels in PN, MR and PG. Eventually, to BTIA Placencia, thereafter nationally.</p>	<p>Sea Breeze Women's Group TIDE</p> <p>Sea Breeze Women's Group TIDE</p> <p>Sea Breeze Women's Group TIDE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signage</li> <li>• Walkways and its infrastructures (rest areas etc.)</li> <li>• Sanitation facilities</li> <li>• Refresher training in fauna and flora for guided tours</li> <li>• Management system for accountability and upkeep/maintenance</li> <li>• Develop a user pay system</li> <li>• Develop and implement other niche market segment marketing and promotion strategies and campaigns.</li> </ul>

## 6. Tourism Profile of Punta Gorda Town:



### PUNTA GORDA TOWN

Punta Gorda Town, (PG) is the southernmost town in Belize positioned appropriately on the shores overlooking the bay of Honduras and the capital of the Toledo District. The population is just under 6000 people, PG is a mixture of Mopan and Kekchi Maya, Garifuna, Creoles, East Indian cultures.

Punta Gorda serves as the gateway to Belize for marine vessels crossing from nearby Livingston or Puerto Barrios, Guatemala and Puerto Cortez Honduras. Punta Gorda is the natural travel hub for southern Belize with not only a marine terminal but also the southernmost bus terminal and domestic airstrip providing 12 flights daily to other destinations in Belize.

Most of the town is build surrounding three main streets, the town has one hospital, a police station, two banks, and a number of churches and schools, and various grocery stores, hotels, restaurants, bars and a very vibrant seaside local Market.

Punta Gorda is a perfect base for tourists to explore southern Belize. The product is a mixture of nature and culture based tourism with a district appeal to Eco-Tourists and provides for a wide array of budgets and proclivities. Many tour guides work from the town and can help you choose from a wide range of full or half day activities including fishing, kayaking, river touring, and snorkelling as well as trips further inland to an array of Maya temples and caves.

**6.1 SWOT Analysis Punta Gorda Town:**

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural Tourism HUB</li> <li>• Existing Hotels and Tour Ops</li> <li>• Sea port, airstrip &amp; bus terminal</li> <li>• Good marketing for travel &amp; Tours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Room Stock</li> <li>• Fragmented marketing</li> <li>• Poor infrastructure</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paved Jalacte Road (soon)</li> <li>• Use of the PH Marine Reserve</li> <li>• Tourism Sensitized Community</li> <li>• Excellent communications services, telephone, internet etc.</li> <li>• Numerous services available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of public infrastructure</li> <li>• Cost of transportation</li> <li>• Internal competition</li> </ul>

**6.2 Tourism Development Strategy, Punta Gorda Town**

Punta Gorda's tourism product consists of a blend of low end eco travelers, local tourism as well as a handful of high end resorts located on the outskirts of the town and its surrounding villages. The wavy ebb and flow of tourists creates a unique environment where one can generate a very personalized attachment to the Town. Punta Gorda has over a dozen small hotels (Less than 20 rooms) and over 32 licensed tour guides.

Most travellers to the PG rely on travel guides such as rough guides and lonely planet to provide guidance on the selection of restaurants, hotels and tours to select from. The rest of the marketing is based on quaint flyers placed strategically on shop doors, restaurant windows and hotel waiting areas. A great majority of these promote archaeological tours to Mayan Temples, soft adventure based activities or cultural trips to nearby villages, and very few identify coastal tourism as a product of Punta Gorda.

The findings of this report conclude that although Punta Gorda's occupancy rates are lower than other tourism destinations in the country, capacity exists for increased numbers and longer stays in Punta Gorda. A collective Marketing Matrix is needed to improve the brand identity of Punta Gorda and expand on existing tourism potential in the town and district as a whole

1. The town needs development of an identity tour (10 things to see in Punta Gorda)
2. Expansion of existing festivity based marketing
3. Improved Infrastructure (Sea Side Entrance, parks, markets, bridges etc.)
4. Tourism signage from the Port, Airstrip and Bus stop) as well as the entrance

5. Development of better social media marketing
6. Development of a Town and Countryside APP that can be distributed on both android and appstore platforms; providing maps of Punta Gorda, Weather information, annual festivities, a fishing calendar, identifying hotels, restaurants and tour guides as well as providing a portal for guest to post to social media sites such as face book and twitter. This app can be marketed locally and be made downloadable for a small fee as well as sell space for tourism businesses to advertise.

#### Recommended Inputs:

1. Update marketing media to more current modes of social media and relevant technology
2. Create routes for greater variety (based on access)
3. Develop a DMO approach to the District hence enhancing the sites & attractions.
4. Classify main tourism packages as:
  - i. Coastal/marine
  - ii. Archaeological
  - iii. Cultural/culinary
  - iv. Nature-based

#### Requirements:

1. Develop a Toledo Centred marketing and branding exercise:
2. Provide opportunities of for private marketing within the portal and for promotion of events
3. Hub Tourism activities out of PG engaging clusters and trails.

Designate body to manage, update and sell this matrix as a: (“Authentic Toledo experience”)

#### 6.3 Action Plan

##### PUNTA GORDA - (“Authentic Toledo experience”)

Phase 1	Marketing Mix	Agent Responsible	Requirements
1. Marketing	<p><b>Product</b> PG will serve as a HUB for Coastal/marine, Archaeological, Cultural/culinary and Nature-based tourism activities in Southern Belize.</p> <p><b>Price</b> Will be developed</p>	<p>Tour Guide Assn.</p> <p>Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE)</p> <p>Tour Guide Assn. TIDE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adequate arrival and departure facilities for customs, immigration and docking station.</li> <li>• Provide all the necessary amenities to receive visitors</li> <li>• Develop Hub Tourism activities through the creation of routes/circuits and clusters for greater variety based on access.</li> </ul>

	<p>taking into account contribution from the relevant stakeholders</p> <p><b>Promotion</b> Internet ( website and social media)</p> <p>Direct Marketing through tour operators</p>	<p>Tour Guide Assn. TIDE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepare brochures, undertake promotional campaigns, and prepare media and display kits, publicity, advertising collaborative and individual trade visits, sales missions, in all core and secondary markets.</li> <li>• Using the internet and social media to promote tours and packages.</li> <li>• Develop a Toledo Centred marketing and branding exercise that will provide opportunities for private marketing within the portal and for promotion of events</li> <li>• Designate body to manage, update and sell this matrix as a: (“Totally Toledo experience”)</li> <li>• Continuous update of a comprehensive web and online “e” presence, promotional and marketing capabilities that will facilitate interactivity and on line booking capacities.</li> <li>• Develop and implement web optimization strategy.</li> </ul>
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**ANNEX 1**

Southern Belize's Mangrove Coastal Resource Management and Climate Change Initiative 2013 (CRMI)

By: International Centre for Responsible Tourism-Belize

ICRT-Belize

**Introduction:**

Like many coastal countries in the Caribbean, Belize is vulnerable to increased coastal erosion as a result of climate change. Any initiative to restore and plant new mangrove forests can easily prove to be an interesting way of contributing to carbon sequestration through reforestation and forest preservation. It also supports adaptation to climate change through the strengthening of natural sea defenses and support for coastal zone biodiversity. Southern Belize and its highly visited areas or areas with the potential for high visitation such as Monkey River, Punta Negra and other villages along the Southern Coast can play a pivotal role in the reforestation, conservation and education of stakeholders and visitors about mangroves, their uses and the important role they play in the overall ecosystem and biodiversity of Belize.

This paper will seek to elaborate on the need for a comprehensive plan of management, replanting and conservation of mangroves while showcasing the exact framework of how the mangrove forests are been maintained for future generations to visitors with a mind towards using proceeds gained showcasing this experience to visitors to subsidize the income of stakeholders and at the same time garner money, support and knowhow to protect and preserve the natural ecosystem of the surrounding mangrove forest.

**Overall objective:**

Mitigate climate change (carbon sequestration through mangrove reforestation and forest preservation) and adapt to its effects (sea defense, biodiversity) while showcasing the work done to preserve mangrove forest to visitors for a fee and to manage that fee for the future growth of the initiative, create income for stakeholders and create a long lasting impact on future generations within the immediate area of the importance of preserving the mangrove forests in the area for future generations.

**Mangroves in Belize:**

Belize is home to 4 different species of mangrove:

- the red mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*); most often found along the water on cayes and waterways and is easily identified by the long prop roots that support the plant
- the black mangrove (*Avicennia germinans*); usually found farther away from the water's edge and can be recognized by the small protrusions called pneumatophores that encircle the base of the tree on the ground.
- the white mangrove (*Laguncularia racemosa*);
- the buttonwood (*Conocarpus erectus*); white mangrove and buttonwood species are generally located even further away from the edge of the water.

Mangroves act as feeding and nursery grounds for approximately 74 species of fish and 178 bird species. They also provide habitat for many species of amphibians, reptiles, and mammals in Belize.

Mangroves are common for their ability to adapt quickly since they are composed of an ultra-filtration system that aids them in keeping much of the salt out and the complex root system that mangroves have allow it to survive in the intertidal zone.

Mangroves are further composed of an additional snorkel-like root system called pneumatophores that stick out of the mud which aid in breathing. The seeds of mangroves are uncommon since they germinate while still on the tree and they plant themselves in the mud as they fall.

Mangroves may not seem important, yet; they play a very significant role in the environment from sheltering tiny creatures to saving human life, nevertheless; they are threatened everyday worldwide. The roots of mangroves prevent the sediments from coursing out to the sea.

In addition the intertwinement of mangrove roots diminishes the flow of water which in turn produces a quiet suitable marine environment for young organisms thus, producing a breeding habitat for species such as fish, so vital to all coastal communities in Southern Belize.

Furthermore; mangrove forests shelter many animals which include birds, frogs, snakes and crocodiles as well as burrowing crabs, mud lobsters, snails and shrimp that use the muddy bottom as their home.



Due to the root system that mangroves have and the location they inhabit, they serve as a great barrier of protection to human life as well as animal life. Mangroves help to prevent soil erosion along the coast and also serve as a barrier of protection to natural disasters such as hurricanes since they help to reduce the hurricane force and speed.

Despite their significant importance, mangroves are threatened every day by human activities as well as by natural disasters. Human activity is perhaps the biggest threat to mangroves since the population expands every day, causing an increase demand that must be supplied in some way or another hence, placing our natural resources such as mangroves at risk.

Dredging for economic development and recreational facilities such as hotels, golf courses, port facilities, resorts and building of roads are major human activities that threaten our mangrove forests especially in Belize, where the economy relies heavily on the tourism industry. These threats are very real in Southern Belize and the communities where mangroves use to thrive so well not so many years ago.

Besides; mangrove forests are cleared and replaced by industries such as shrimp farms and aquaculture ponds that sometimes only last for three to five years. This can be seen in many failed projects in Southern Belize that have destroyed mangrove forest for short term gains in the aquaculture industry.

Due to its importance in the environment, restoration and conservation efforts such as the one proposed in this paper are to help to protect mangroves from being disturbed, destroyed and forever lost.

There is a high demand for development in Southern Belize and any effort to mitigate against mangrove forest lost and/or increasing reforestation efforts, while appealing to the ever increasing demands of visiting tourists for authentic visitor's experiences should be readily accepted by all interested entities involved in tourism and/or conservation efforts.

The tourism industry for example, has a great demand in order to attract tourist to come to Belize. Additionally; it allocates a great portion to the economic growth of Belize. Considering that Belize has the second world's largest Barrier Reef and the importance that mangroves play in maintaining marine ecosystems, mangroves should continue to be protected, replanted and greater education and sensitization of locals and foreigners should occur.

Losing the vast mangrove it would cause vast disruptions in the ecosystems and would leave the coast more prone to erosion and hurricane destruction. Therefore; it is the responsibility of every Belizean and tourists to work hand in hand so as to protect these beautiful and important plants as well as all the other resources.

### **Suggested Plan of Action**

Funding must be sought to facilitate Monkey River Village and interested stakeholders such as Tide Tours, the Tour Guide Association, the local Women's Group, the local Village Council to be able to start, receive training and monitoring and to properly execute and market a Mangrove Reforestation Project in their Village.

Such a project has climate change implications and should be able to easily attract some start-up funding to establish or facilitate the following:

- a small office with all necessary equipment to carry out the project
- startup capital to purchase needed equipment for field work, replanting and plant extraction
- capital to train specialized personnel in the specifics of mangroves and their ecosystem
- capital to build a board walk through a portion of the mangrove forest in the area
- training in accounting, guest services, climate change and ecosystems for all interested parties
- kayaks for the marine side of tours in mangrove forests in the area
- capital to pay for proper signage throughout the mangrove forests
- capital to build and maintain a proper website for the project with marketing training
- marketing budget to sell the idea of the project to nearby stakeholders in tourism
- capital to fund a study with international expert assistance of the viability of the project and to make suggestions towards implementation and management of same

Monkey River Village and all interested stakeholders should serve as the location of the following:

- Information Hub and Resource Centre for the intended mangrove reforestation efforts
- Starting point for planned mangrove tour and tour of mangrove reforestation facilities
- Established board walk along a section of the mangrove forest complete with signage
- Trained tour guides with specific knowledge to the mangrove reforestation efforts

### **Capacity Building**

In an effort to build capacity, empower women and provide training towards the successful implementation of the project, the Belize Tourism Board, PACT and the Belize Coastal Zone Authority should be contacted to organize training for the interested women of the village in the areas of:

- Belizean History - specific to the Southern part of Belize
- Natural History, Ecosystems and Biodiversity – specific to animals of the mangrove forest and surrounding areas
- Guest Services and Guest Needs Analysis
- Basic ornithology – birds specific to mangrove forest and immediate area of Southern Belize

Several stakeholders already exist in Monkey River and its surrounding areas that can be tapped into to properly manage the project. They are as follows:

Tide Tours / Tour Guides / Women's Groups / Village Council / Other Interested Persons

### **Specifics for Implementation**

- Community Infrastructure must be improved such as proper toilets, landing docks, garbage bins, signage and trail clearance.

- A highly interactive Coastal Resource Management Initiative (CRMI) website needs to be developed. It needs to be linked to all relevant tourist and travel sites for the south as well as to the websites of Hotels that will partake in sending tourists to visit the efforts.
- A social media presence must be established as well for the Initiative.
- A Mangrove Visitor Centre must be established which will act also as a mini gift shop to sell the products of the Mangrove Reserve Women Producers Group as well as T-shirts and any other locally produced items from the area.
- A Mangrove Action Plan has to be developed with the input of all relevant stakeholders. It must include the input of the Government agencies and other NGO's along with the proposed management team for the project
- A mangrove monitoring plan and mangrove monitoring protocols have to be produced and developed along international guidelines and procedures with proper record keeping to attract international researchers that might be interested in partaking in future work with the project.
- A mangrove inventory of the entire coastline has to be prepared. A GIS monitoring system must be developed to manage field data and remote sensing images/aerial photos of the relevant coastline. Training in GIS and GPS must be provided to project staff.
- Surveys of project sites must be completed beforehand. Restoration efforts must be documented for the future.
- Mangrove awareness and protection must be encouraged at the community level complete with an outreach arm to nearby schools and interested groups in the area.
- A Mangrove Reserve Women Producers Group should be established to promote alternative livelihoods in communities along the coast in ways such as agro-food processing and other cottage industry such as bee keeping and arts and craft.
- A children's and adult's song competition should be undertake to find a "Mangrove Song" that will be used in public media campaigns and advertisements.
- A first year documentary needs to be gathered and shown at the first year's celebration of the undertakings, the efforts and the success of the Initiative.
- A teacher's resource manual needs to be developed for sharing with teachers throughout the country. The Curriculum Develop Unit of the Ministry of Education needs to be approached to emphasize the importance of mangroves and climate change in the school curriculum in the future.
- Invitation to researchers, external Universities and Groups must be actualized for them to come to undertake work such as research papers and volunteer work at the Mangrove Initiative during the slow part of the tourist year. The income, exposure and knowledge gained from this support can be far reaching and beneficial to all concerned in the areas of boarding and lodging, validation of work done thus far and general outlook for future funding.
- Yearly forum with the participation of international researchers should be encouraged to raise the profile of the work done, its importance and to attract funders and more researchers to the Initiative in Southern Belize

### Extenuating Concerns

Other concerns that might need to be addressed prior to the start-up of the project are:

1. All effort must be made to firstly identify the cause or causes for the death or disappearance of mangroves from the area of interest. If a chronic stressor is still present (i.e. extended flooding), it may

prevent successful restoration. It is generally a waste of time and money just to attempt to replant mangroves without understanding why they died or why they have not re-colonized on their own.

2. Make sure that any chronic stressors to the growth of mangroves in the area of interest are removed. Reconnection to tidal waters is essential before restoration can proceed.

3. An important component in mangrove forest restoration is the design and placement of tidal creeks and channels. Tidal streams provide access for fish and other mobile mangrove fauna, and allow for drainage of flood waters.

## **Conclusion**

The ramifications of a depleted coastline due to mangrove eradication and destruction are far reaching and detrimental to the fledging tourism industry and all other industries in Southern Belize; not to mention the shoreline of the many rivers, streams sea coastline and water inlets in the entire area.

Despite the mounting evidence for the critical ecological importance of the mangrove community, many people still view them as mud filled swamps, which are better off being filled and developed. Housing, tourism and industrial developments have all had a significant impact on coastal mangroves in Belize since the onset of the accelerated economic growth of the mid 1980's. Much of this development is due to ignorance of the importance of mangrove to the environmental health of the nation. Mangrove trees contribute significantly to sea defence by protecting the coastal banks and breaking the force of the wave action. The versatile tree also provides juvenile nesting for shrimp and can increase catches of fish. Mangrove trees are also natural habitat for birds.

The depletion of mangrove forest saddled with the need of small communities such as Monkey River to find viable options for inclusion in the tourism pie and to protect the very environment that tourists come to see has made a project such as this viable, necessary and appreciated by all parties involved. There is a need to source funding, gather interested parties in the work and planning ahead and to market the initiative to stakeholders. If properly planned and executed, the Mangrove Initiative should render well in doing several important aspects of sustainability and income generation in that it will protect what natural resource is available, it will generate income for stakeholders, it will lead to the generation of other spin-off industries, it will offset and mitigate the impacts of forest depletion and it will assist in lowering the impact of the climate change phenomenon that the entire world presently incurs.