

Position of the Association of Protected Areas Management Organizations (APAMO) on the proposed cruise tourism in Placencia

The Association of Protected Areas Management Organizations (APAMO) considers that cruise tourism for Placencia is neither an environmentally or economically viable strategy for Belize.

Our tourism industry is of significant importance to the economy and to the development of the country. Belize is internationally recognized as an “eco-tourism” destination, catering for small-scale, nature and culture stay-over tourism due to its rich natural and cultural heritage.

Expanding cruise tourism, in the southern part of the country, one of the most ecologically rich areas, can have detrimental and irreversible impacts on the ecosystems and biodiversity of the marine protected areas and other sensitive areas in that region. The migratory patterns of many marine aqua fauna can be seriously affected, e.g. the prestigious whale shark which comes in to feed in this general region at the Gladden Split, located within the Gladden Spit and Silk Cayes Marine Reserve, generating millions of tourism dollars every year. The many mangrove islands and sea beds, ecologically vital to nesting and migratory birds and nursery for many fish populations that support the fishing industry can be seriously impacted. The Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System, including its atolls is invaluable to the tourism and fisheries sectors and for the protection of coastal communities. Declared a world heritage site in 1996, it is presently at risk of losing this status due to the current threats it faces. Cruise tourism will only increase the pressure to this system from the waste produced by the cruise industry.

In addition, APAMO does not consider that cruise tourism will benefit the majority of Belizeans in the long term but rather only a very few in the short term. An INCAE/BTB/PACT November 2006 study found that on average a cruise passenger spends \$44 for the 1 day he/she docks in Belize while the average stay-over visitor spends \$96 per day and on average stays 6.8days representing \$653, almost 15 times more than what a cruise ship passenger spends. In 2005 prior to the global economic recession, BTB reported 800,331 cruise passenger arrivals compared to 236,573 stay-over arrivals, using the average that each spends, the stay-over visitors still spent 4.4 times more than the cruise passengers. We would need to attract 3.5 million cruise visitors a year to obtain the same revenues. Imagine what 3.5 million visitors a year would do to our natural resources. The study also indicated that cruise tourism contributes to only 1 of every 10 jobs while stay over tourism contributes to 9 of every 10 jobs. Stay-over visitors usually decide on their destination for the “experience”. Expanding cruise tourism, may result in these stay-over visitors changing their destination to avoid the massive numbers of cruise passengers resulting in the successful branding of Belize as "Mother Nature's Best Kept Secret" being tarnished and significant revenues to the local economy lost. The so-called benefits to the local communities is miniscule to what the cruise lines make, studies show that world cruise lines make over 70% of their profits in the Caribbean, and that they purchase virtually nothing from the region. The same applies to Belize. While cruise lines can change course on a whim leaving behind only a trail of economic disaster, stay-over tourism provides for a more long term sustainability of our natural resources and stability of our economy, provided that the very core of what draws them to Belize is not put at risk.

The environmental, social and economic cost of cruise tourism is too high and the benefits too little. Rather than investing in expanding the cruise sector, APAMO, calls on the government to invest these funds in building the stay-over tourism sector. APAMO therefore express its solidarity with BTIA Placencia and the Placencia Community and does not support any activity that would compromise the protected areas and the ability of our natural systems to maintain a healthy environment that is critical to sustaining the population and economy of Belize.