



# Cruise ship tourism in Belize: The implications of developing cruise ship tourism in an ecotourism destination

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## 1. Introduction

An internet search on Belize will quickly reveal that the country markets its tourism product largely on the basis of the natural and cultural attractions it has to offer. Essentially, it is portrayed as an ecotourism destination. In simple terms, ecotourism can be defined as tourism that occurs in natural areas. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) provides a more comprehensive definition, which they associate with a list of guiding principles. TIES defines ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people” [1]. In accordance with this approach, TIES lists the following principles that may be used as guidelines to assess the effectiveness of ecotourism in meeting conservation and development objectives:

- Minimize impact
- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation
- Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people
- Raise sensitivity to host countries’ political, environmental, and social climate
- Support international human rights and labor agreements [1]

Belize, with abundant natural and cultural resources, an adventurous, loyal tourist clientele who is attracted to the plethora of eco-activities, no crowds, a local population that embraces and benefits from tourism development and, until recently, no plans to

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build large all-inclusive resorts, fits in well with a number of these criteria. However, the significant increase in cruise tourism in recent years has resulted in a debate about Belize’s future as an ecotourism destination [2].

Cruise tourism, which has been on the rise in Belize since the late nineties, is a reality that has become increasingly apparent with the plans to build a 50 million US dollars Carnival Cruise Line docking port in the Port Loyola area of Belize City. The unpublicized signing of the contract agreeing to this port by the Belizean Government was leaked to the public in late 2004 and sparked a strong protest from the ecotourism and overnight tourism sectors [3]. These plans are currently on hold due to various alleged land-rights issues but indicate that the government plans to continue to promote cruise tourism in Belize in the future.

The potential rapid increase of cruise tourism resulting from the agreement necessitates immediate and thorough attention to understanding the potential implications from environmental and socio-economic perspectives and also in terms of how it might affect the current overnight tourism market.<sup>1</sup> This scenario has been faced by a number of additional Caribbean destinations such as the Cayman Islands [4], the Bahamas, and Mexico’s Yucatan Peninsula. However, although it receives much attention in the public media, the topic is not frequent in the academic literature [see [5] for a good overview of cruise tourism development in the Caribbean]. The objectives of this paper are two-fold. First, to assess resident’s perceptions of the socio-economic and marine environmental impacts of cruise ship tourism in Belize City and, second, to compare the characteristics of cruise tourists and overnight tourists in Belize, including their motivations for travel, activities, and levels of environmental concern. This analysis is

<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this paper, an overnight tourist is any tourist who arrives by means other than a cruise ship and stays at least one night in a hotel, campsite or other establishment on Belizean soil.

**Table 1**  
Cruise visitor arrivals in Belize and other major cruise ship destinations in the Caribbean from 2001 to 2004.<sup>a</sup>

Country	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	% Change
Belize	48,166	319,690	575,196	851,436	800,331	655,931 <sup>b</sup>	624,128 <sup>b</sup>	597,370 <sup>b</sup>	1140
Bahamas	2,551,673	2802,112	2,970,174	3360,012	3,078,709	3,076,397	2,970,659	2,861,140	12
Cayman Islands	1,214,757	1574,750	1,818,979	1310,960	1,798,999	1,930,136	1,715,666	1,553,053	28
Cozumel	1,595,362	2343,135	2,708,913	2862,036	2,519,179	—	—	2,569,433	61
US Virgin Islands	1,891,389	1738,710	1,773,948	1963,609	1,912,539	1,901,275	1,917,878	1,757,067	-7
Puerto Rico	1,350,317	1203,911	1,234,922	1065,215	1,315,079	1,338,019	1,437,239	1,392,624	3

<sup>a</sup> Source: CTO 2009.

<sup>b</sup> Listed as preliminary figures.

intended to provide information to tourism decision makers in Belize that could help ensure cruise tourism does not threaten the integrity of the nation's ecotourism market and provides maximum benefits to local people. In a broader sense, this research should contribute to widening our understanding of cruise tourism impacts from the perspective of residents and also in relation to the different characteristics of cruise and overnight tourists.

### 1.1. Cruise tourism development in Belize

Belize has been slow to gain recognition as a tourism destination compared with its neighbors. In 1991, Belize received only 86,700 visitors, while Jamaica had 844,600 and Cancun alone had 1,432,400 [6]. However, by 1998, tourism in Belize had more than doubled to 176,100 visitors [6], and it accounted for 17.5% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), approximately 1 in 4 jobs, and 25% of total foreign exchange earnings, establishing it as Belize's largest contributor to economic growth [7]. By 2004, tourism arrivals reached 230,832, contributing to 15.4% of Belize's GDP, and remaining the largest earner of foreign exchange [8].

Although absolute numbers of overnight tourist arrivals are still low in Belize compared with other Central American and Caribbean states, its growth rate was 166% from 1991 to 2004 [6], which is substantial even when compared with some of the most popular destinations. For example, Jamaica's arrivals increased by 68% during the same time period and Cancun's by 63% [6]. The growth in cruise tourism in Belize, however, has been far more substantial. Table 1 shows increases in cruise arrivals in Belize and selected major cruise ship destinations in the Caribbean from 2001 to 2008 [9]. These numbers show a staggering rate of increase in cruise visitors in Belize of 1140% across the 8 years. This far exceeds the growth rates of the other destinations that are listed. In fact, comparing data for cruise visitor arrivals from 20 different destinations in the Caribbean<sup>2</sup> revealed that Cozumel had the second highest growth rate during this time period, which, at 61%, is considerably lower than that of Belize.

The growth rate of cruise visitors to Belize can be largely attributed to the opening of the Belize Tourism Village in early 2002, a terminal in Belize City specifically built to cater to cruise tourists. However, the rate has remained high in recent years at 48% between 2003 and 2004, which is still the highest during this time period in comparison with the 20 nations referenced previously. Although one could argue that the amount of cruise tourism in Belize is less shocking if looked at in absolute terms, if one considers that the number of cruise tourists arriving in the

country outnumbered the local population by nearly 2–1 in 2008,<sup>3</sup> it can not be denied that a growth rate of such extreme proportions, in the absence of well established, fully implemented policies for managing resulting impacts, represents a significant threat to natural and cultural resources and the future of tourism in Belize.

The current Draft Tourism Policy for Belize [8] as well as interviews with local tourism decision makers during this research, suggest that tourism policy began to take shape after the country developed its first national tourism strategy in 1998. This strategy resulted from a study, commissioned by the Ministry of Tourism and the Environment in Belize, and undertaken by the Blackstone Corporation of Toronto, Canada in association with Help for Progress, a Belizean non-governmental organization. The resulting document, commonly referred to as the Blackstone Report, was pivotal in the sense that it brought responsible, ecologically and culturally orientated tourism development to the forefront of national discussions about Belize's future. The Blackstone Report draws the following recommendation:

The fact that Belize is attracting the high-yield, upscale tourist means it does not need to resort to attracting mass tourists, who tend to spend less, are less culturally sensitive and who typically require large, homogenous types of hotel products that place stress on the natural environment, and which often see much of the wealth escaping back to non-resident owners. The type of tourism that Belize has chosen unwaveringly to pursue through its protection of the environment and the adoption of "ecotourism" is a tremendous strength in and of itself [7].

As evidenced by the cruise tourism statistics presented previously, much has changed since this recommendation was made. In light of this, the current Draft Tourism Policy for Belize [8] begins by acknowledging the importance of the Blackstone Report while highlighting the significant changes that have occurred in Belize since its inception. The "extraordinary increase" in cruise tourism and its subsequent impacts on Belize's natural attractions is the first change that is referenced [8]. In fact, the report warns that, because of high visitation rates of cruise tourists to the country's ecotourism sites, Belize is in danger of losing its ecotourism identity altogether and gaining the characteristics of a mass tourism destination.

The Belize Tourism Board (BTB) released the Belize Cruise Tourism Policy in early 2000, recommending a daily national visitation limit of 3000 cruise passengers [11]. This capacity was quickly exceeded and the revised Belize Cruise Tourism Policy adjusted the daily visitation limit to 8000 passengers [11]. Again, this capacity is frequently surpassed, making it critical for Belize to rethink and revise its policy on cruise tourism once again. The policy states that, "Government considers cruise tourism to be

<sup>2</sup> Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, Cozumel, Curacao, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Jamaica, Martinique, Puerto Rico, St. Lucia, St. Martin, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and US Virgin Islands [9].

<sup>3</sup> The population of Belize is estimated at 322,100 in 2008 [10].

a component of the country's overall tourism industry, complementary to the stay-over tourism sector, with which it can share important synergies" and lists respect of the integrity of ecotourism as a one of its guiding principles [11]. This necessitates the proceeding analysis which reflects on whether and how such synergies may be achieved.

### 1.2. Cruise tourism as the epitome as mass tourism

In broad terms, a tourist may be defined as "a temporarily leisured person who voluntarily visits a place away from home for the purpose of change" [12]. However, tourists are not a homogeneous group of people. They vary in many ways including the kinds of experiences they are seeking, the customs of their country of origin, their cultural and environmental values, levels of education, ages, activities and budgets. This variety results in the fact that different types of tourists can have different impacts on tourism destinations.

Anthropologist Erik Cohen's tourism typology [13] was a key article that introduced the concept that different types of tourists will have varied impacts on their destinations of choice. In fact, his typology provides the basis for Butler's [14] definition of the different types of tourists associated the Tourism Areas Life Cycle Model (TALC). The TALC is a potential model for the hypothetical evolution of tourist areas through a series of stages of development (starting with exploration and ending with decline), which manifest increasing levels of tourism impacts (both negative and positive). The TALC suggests that, in the final part of the development stage, a time of rapid, often uncontrolled change, negative impacts will surpass the positive and the destination will start to decline in the tourism market.

Cohen defines the different types of tourists "on the basis of their relationship to both the tourist business establishment and the host country" [[13]: 164]. Based on the notion that the tourism experience combines a degree of novelty with a degree of familiarity "the security of old habits with the excitement of change" [[13]: 167], he presents four tourism types based on a continuum of possible combinations of these factors. These are the organized mass tourist, the individual mass tourist, the explorer and the drifter. The latter two typologies are defined as non-institutionalized tourists and the former two as institutionalized. They are associated with the beginning and the end of the TALC respectively. Non-institutionalized tourists represent the novelty end of the continuum while institutionalized tourists attempt to envelop their traveling experience with familiarity. Specifically, Cohen's definition of an organized mass tourist is:

...the least adventurous and remains largely confined to his "environmental bubble" throughout his trip. The guided tour, conducted in an air-conditioned bus, traveling at high speed through a steaming countryside, represents the prototype of the organized mass tourist. This tourist type buys a package-tour as if it were just another commodity in the modern mass market. The itinerary of his trip is fixed in advance, and all the stops are well prepared and guided; he makes almost no decisions for himself and stays almost exclusively in the microenvironment of his home country [[13]: 167].

This definition has been used as a basis for equating cruise tourism with mass tourism [15]. Jaakson [15] logically contends that the cruise ship represents Cohen's "environmental bubble" [13]. A. Weaver [16] draws similarities between cruise ships and enclave resorts, which typify the overnight mass tourism market in locations such as Cancun, Mexico and Jamaica. This analogy is also drawn by Dowling [17], who refers to cruise ships as 'giant floating resorts' and Wood [18], who reflects that all-inclusive resorts

represent the land-based response to mass tourism demands. A. Weaver [16] specifically applies the McDonaldization thesis, developed by Ritzer [19], to the cruise tourism sector. The McDonaldization thesis uses the widespread McDonald's food chain of the United States as a modern example of how society and institutions are becoming more rationalized. To Ritzer, this rationalization process is typified by increases in, efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control [19].

Essentially, the cruise tourism experience embodies both Cohen's definition of the organized mass tourist [13] and the underlying principles of the McDonaldization thesis [19]. Typical cruise tourists purchase their journey in one package, travel in the safety of the ship surrounded by people, restaurants, shops and amenities no different from what they are used to in their home countries, and have no control over their itineraries. Many popular cruise tourism ports, including the Belize Tourism Village in Belize City, are specially constructed "enclaves" or as A. Weaver [16] calls them "tourist bubbles," designed to accommodate the tourists. These areas often bear more resemblance to a shopping mall in the United States than the host country. Should the tourists choose to leave these areas to go on a tour, the majority travels in large groups on an air-conditioned bus, again, increasing the separation between the tourist and an "authentic" cultural experience. As highlighted by A. Weaver [16], the cruise companies market this tourism experience by mimicking the business approach of fast food chains, ensuring a predictable, efficient and controlled packaged vacation for their clients.

### 1.3. Sustainable cruise ship tourism: an impossible dream?

One of the most obvious reasons why mass tourism has been considered unsustainable is the sheer volume of tourists it entails [20,21]. Cruise tourism in particular tends to result in large groups of people visiting natural and cultural sites. Additional ecological threats from cruise ships include anchor damage to fragile marine ecosystems, illegal dumping of trash and pollutants, and impacts from dredging and building associated with the construction of cruise ship ports [20,21].

Another reason mass tourism and cruise tourism in particular is often considered unsustainable is because of the fact that the majority of economic benefits often do not accrue to local people. Rather, a large amount of the revenue from these tourists is paid to the company selling the package tour or cruise vacation. More often than not, in the Caribbean region in particular, these companies belong to foreign countries. Furthermore, the relatively small portion of tourism revenue that does reach the host population is often concentrated with a few tour operators, shops and restaurants that operate in the vicinity of the cruise ship or in all-inclusive hotels [see [22] for a detailed discussion on cruise tourism expenditures].

Mass tourism also works against the concept of carrying capacity which is inherent to the achievement of sustainable tourism. The importance of establishing a carrying capacity for tourism destinations is exemplified in Butler's TALC [14]. The "decline stage" occurs once the location has reached its carrying capacity and the environmental and cultural characteristics that initially attracted the tourism have deteriorated. As mentioned previously, Butler [14] and subsequent authors have associated different types of tourists with the different stages of the TALC [23–26]. Generally, independent travelers have been associated with the beginning of the cycle and mass tourists with the end. This association embodies the current fear of many tourism decision-makers in Belize that cruise tourism will result in the decline of Belize's success as a tourism destination.

Clarke [27] suggests that the concept of sustainable tourism can be approached from two perspectives – first, in terms of recognizing that certain types and scales of tourism possess the inherent characteristics of sustainability or, second, as a goal that should apply to all types of tourism. With respect to the first perspective, ecotourism that conforms to its principles should be inherently sustainable. Cruise tourism, on the other hand, has often been associated with being unsustainable; particularly in relation to threats to the marine environment [see [20,21]]. This author takes the approach of Clarke's [27] second perspective, recognizing that, if not properly managed, all types of tourism can be unsustainable and vice versa. D. Weaver [28] also supports this notion in his categorization of tourists for his broad context model of destination development scenarios. Essentially, he argues that, with appropriate regulations, mass tourism can be sustainable and that the large corporations (e.g. cruise companies) associated with mass tourism may be better positioned, economically and logistically, than smaller scale companies to engage in activities necessary to achieve sustainability.

Having said all of the above, it is important to bear in mind that cruise tourism, if only because of the sheer numbers it entails, does have a far greater propensity to be unsustainable than other, less intensive types of tourism. Dowling [17] recognizes that, although cruise companies are beginning to take environmental responsibilities more seriously, there are still a number of sustainability issues that require more attention. Dowling [[17]: 13] also reflect that, "for such a small niche, its impacts are disproportionate to its size". Cruise tourism in Belize is not going to disappear. Rather, if plans continue to build the new docking port, it could grow substantially. Also, the overnight tourism market will, invariably, expand as well, so a multi-sectoral approach to managing tourism impacts is necessary.

## 2. Materials and methods

The data presented in this paper are derived from a study to assess local perceptions of socio-economic and environmental impacts of tourism development in Belize, which was conducted from March–November 2005. The study covered 6 coastal communities including Belize City, Placencia, Punta Gorda, San Pedro on Ambergris Caye, Caye Caulker, and Hopkins. Belize City, the nation's only cruise ship port, is primarily a cruise tourism destination, where the other five communities cater to varying levels of overnight tourism. Approximately one month was spent in each community collecting data using a combination of ethnographic methods including participant observation, semi-structured and open-ended interviews with key informants<sup>4</sup>, secondary sources and three survey instruments – one for local people, one for overnight tourists, and one for cruise ship tourists.

### 2.1. Survey instruments and sampling strategies

#### 2.1.1. Local surveys

The lead researcher worked with local research assistants to conduct the household-level survey, which took 20 min to complete and was conducted as a face-to-face interview. Belize City is a relatively large community with an estimated population of 65,200 in 2008 [10]. Tourism is almost entirely concentrated

around the Fort George area, so limiting the local surveys in this area was considered to be the most effective and efficient use of available time and resources. Unlike other touristic communities in Belize, because of its size and the concentration of tourism in a small area, many people in Belize City rarely encounter or interact with tourists. Since targeting individuals who work in tourism was considered important for ascertaining informed perceptions of tourism impacts, surveys were conducted with owners and managers of tourism-related businesses (i.e. restaurants, gift shops, hotels) and with marine tour guides operating within the boundaries of the Fort George Area. In order to be selected, these individuals had to be permanent residents of Belize City who had lived in the community for a minimum of five years.

Businesses were randomly selected from a list of all tourism-related businesses (i.e. gift shops, restaurants, hotels) in the study area using a numbered list and a random number generator.<sup>5</sup> A quota sample of 25, more than 50% of the total businesses, was selected randomly from all the businesses in the study area. This was considered adequate to be representative (alpha level 0.05, 15% relative standard error of the mean<sup>6</sup>, [29–31]). An estimated 55 licensed marine tour guides were active in the area at the time of this research so a quota sample of 29, again more than 50%, was considered adequate representation of this group of individuals. Efforts were made to make the sample as random as possible by approaching tour guides in various locations and times of day. Independent and contracted marine tour guides working both inside and outside of the Tourism Village were represented in the sample.

A random sampling approach was taken to selecting households in the other study communities which are more manageable in size and where tourism is more evenly distributed. Appropriate household sample sizes were determined for these communities set to alpha level 0.05, 15% relative standard error of the mean (ibid.). In smaller communities (from 138 to 197 at the time of the study), households were selected by choosing a random starting point, walking along a pre-determined path that covered the entire community, and picking every *n*th household (based on total households and required sample). In the larger communities (996 and 1114 at the time of the study) residential lots were numbered on local maps households were selected using a random number generator. In the event that a lot or household was found to be uninhabited, the next inhabited house along the path was chosen. In all communities, researchers alternated between households on different sides of the street and between houses adjacent and set back from the road. Efforts were also made to ensure adequate representations of gender and different age groups in the household sample. Heads of households were not favored because the emphasis of the survey was on perceptions representative of the community overall as opposed to obtaining detailed household information. Surveys were conducted at different times of day to ensure working and non-working members of the households had equal chances of being present. Residents had to have resided in the community for a minimum of five years in order to be selected. The response rate was high at 81% of households across the communities agreeing to fill out the survey and 85% completing the entire questionnaire. These rates were comparable across communities.

<sup>4</sup> Key informants were selected on the basis that they were intimately familiar with the topic of the interview (i.e. tourism, environment) through work, education or experience (e.g. long term members of the community, tourism officials etc.), and well respected by other members of their community and/or work environment. In all cases, the selection was based on recommendations from locals.

<sup>5</sup> A total of 45 were counted in the study area at the time this research was conducted. Businesses inside the tourism village were not counted because they only cater to the cruise tourism market and not overnight tourism.

<sup>6</sup> A relatively large standard error was accepted because the objective of the analysis was to detect practically significant differences in the data that were also statistically significant.

**Table 2**  
Sample sizes for Belize city and San Pedro Locals, cruise ship tourists and overnight tourists.

Sample group	Total surveys
Tourists:	
Cruise Ship Tourists	118
Overnight Tourists	182
Locals:	
A. Belize City	
Tourism Businesses	25
Belize City Marine Tour Guides	29
Total Sample Belize City	54
B. San Pedro	
Random Households	51

### 2.1.2. Tourist surveys

The local and tourist surveys were designed to be complementary so many of the questions were similar or identical. Two tourist surveys were used, one for overnight tourists and one for cruise ship tourists. The largest sample possible was obtained for both types of tourists within the constraints of available resources. The sampling procedure described in the methods is the closest approximation to randomness possible given the fieldwork reality. A number of statistical texts discuss the implications of such adaptations to sampling techniques [30,31]. Tourist enter Belize via different routes, travel between different communities and stay in a large variety of accommodations. Cruise tourists don't all disembark, some leave the village and some don't, they go on different tours at different times of day etc. The sampling strategy described tries to capture as much of this variability as possible; cruise tourists were approached at varied times and locations around the Tourism Village and surveys were also distributed by a number of tour guides at the end of their tours. Tourists who had been on tours outside of Belize City generally returned to the Tourism Village with relatively little time to spare before returning to the ship so this was the most effective way to ensure these individuals were included in the sample. Efforts were made to ensure comparable numbers of land and sea tour tourists were selected, and only one survey was distributed per family or travel group. Where possible, surveys were alternated between male and females but no preference was given to particular members of each group. Respondents were told to answer based on their own experiences and opinions and not those of the group. The response rate for cruise tourist was very high at 98%, with 78% completing the entire survey.

Overnight tourist surveys were distributed by approaching tourists in a variety of locations throughout the study communities including the beach, bars, restaurants, shops, on tours and in the street. In some of the more exclusive hotels, where approaching tourists would have been inappropriate, hotel staff assisted with data collection by leaving surveys in the rooms and requesting them to be filled out prior to check out. These locations were varied as much as possible in order to ensure appropriate representation of all types of tourists in each community. First time visitors to Belize were only surveyed if they had been in the country for at least a week or if they were within one day of completing their visit. Repeat visitors were given the survey regardless of the length of their current visit. As with cruise tourists, one willing person per group was selected and asked to answer based on their personal opinions and experience and efforts were made to alternate between men and women. The response rate was high at 79% with 71% filling out the entire survey. Table 2 shows the tourist and local sample groups used for the analysis in this paper.

### 2.2. Data analysis

Data from the surveys were entered into a database and, where appropriate, a series of statistical analyses was conducted to detect trends and significant differences in perceptions among study groups and communities.<sup>7</sup> The results of the analysis are presented in section 3. The majority of the data presented in this paper is derived from the local surveys conducted in Belize City and San Pedro, the cruise tourist surveys conducted in Belize City, and the overnight tourist surveys, which were conducted throughout the study communities. The reason that the majority of comparisons among resident perceptions were conducted between Belize City and San Pedro data is because San Pedro has the highest level of tourism development so locals are expected to have the highest level of exposure to overnight tourism. In a few instances, where a more widespread view of local perceptions is relevant and appropriate, the data are derived from the local surveys across all communities ( $N = 227$ ). Throughout the paper, although not always detailed, qualitative data from participant observation and key informant interviews have been used to substantiate the conclusions and observations related to the quantitative data.

## 3. Results

This analysis begins with comparisons of local perceptions of tourism and associated impacts in Belize City and San Pedro. Unless stated otherwise, values of the random household sample in San Pedro are compared with the total sample in Belize City (see Table 2).<sup>8</sup> In all cases, the values for both the tour guide and business sub-samples in Belize City have been calculated and compared to ensure that the views of the two groups do not differ significantly. They are not reported separately unless they have been observed to be different.

### 3.1. Local perceptions of tourists and tourism impacts

#### 3.1.1. Perceptions of different types of tourists

Local respondents were asked how many of the different types of tourists they would like to attract to their communities. They were asked to state whether they would like to see less, more, or no change in the number of tourists in relation to the quantity currently arriving in the community. Because they are so varied, overnight tourists were classified into different categories, which include backpackers, SCUBA divers, sports fishers, resort tourists, cultural tourists, ecotourists, and boaters. In each survey interview, a brief definition of the main characteristics of each tourist type was provided to ensure consistency (Table 3). The categories were largely based on the different types of tourists observed to be visiting the study communities. Many of them overlap, so the intention of this question was to ascertain if there are certain qualities in tourists (i.e. activities, accommodations, motivation for travel etc.) that Belizeans would like to see more or less of.

Because the objective of this question was to get as broad a view as possible of the types of tourists local people would like to attract in overnight tourism destinations, the total random household sample of all the overnight tourism destinations has been used to ascertain these perceptions, which were then compared with those of the Belize City sample. These results are listed in Table 3 including mean ranks of each value. Responses for residents of overnight destinations and those for the Belize City sample are

<sup>7</sup> The analyses presented in this study were conducted using the statistical program SPSS 11.01.

<sup>8</sup> See section 4 for a discussion of the limitations of comparing these samples.

**Table 3**Local desires to attract different types of tourists to the community in overnight destinations and Belize city (% responses).<sup>a</sup>

Tourist Type	Description	Less		No change		More		Mean Rank	
		Overnight	Belize City						
<b>Overnight</b>									
Ecotourist	Ecologically conscious tourists	3	15	6	13	87	72	5.3	4.7
SCUBA Diver	Come to SCUBA dive	2	6	10	30	83	63	5.2	4.6
Sport Fisher	Come to sport fish	4	15	12	26	84	54	5.1	4.1
Cultural	Come to enjoy the local culture	1	6	16	24	77	70	4.9	4.8
Resort	Stay in expensive resorts	5	6	21	17	72	76	4.7	5.0
Boater	Come on own boat or charter a boat	15	20	19	20	62	52	4.1	4.1
Backpacker	Stay in cheap hotels and carry backpacks	42	33	19	13	33	52	2.9	3.9
<b>Cruise Ship</b>	Come on cruise ships	21	15	22	11	49	72	3.8	4.8

<sup>a</sup> Percentages may be <100 due to missing data or alternative responses, or > 100 due to rounding.

listed separately. Friedman tests ([31]: 369) on the mean ranks in Table 3 showed significant differences in the responses across the different tourist categories in Belize City and the overnight destinations ( $p < 0.05$  and  $p < 0.001$  respectively). A series of post-hoc Wilcoxon Signed Rank ([31]: 259) tests showed all the differences between responses pertaining to specific tourist categories to be significant for the overnight destinations with the exception of desires to attract SCUBA divers and sport fishermen, cultural tourists, or ecotourists, and desires to attract sport fishermen and cultural tourists or ecotourists.<sup>9</sup>

These results indicate that locals in overnight tourism destinations most want to attract ecotourists (defined as tourists who care about the environment), followed closely by those who engage in SCUBA diving and sport fishing, and cultural tourists (defined as those who come to enjoy the local culture). Backpackers are the least desired type of tourist for these destinations and cruise ships are the second least desired.

Post-hoc Wilcoxon Signed Ranks tests on the data for Belize City showed significant differences between desires to attract backpackers and all other tourists types, and between desires to attract sport fishers and SCUBA divers or resort tourists (all  $p < 0.05$ ). These results indicate that backpackers are also the least desirable type of tourist in Belize City. With the exception of divers and resort tourists being more desirable than sport fishers, local desires to attract all the other types of tourists to the community are comparable.

In order to make an overall comparison between local desires to attract cruise tourism and overnight tourism, categories of overnight tourists were grouped together to get a mean response for all groups. Follow-up Wilcoxon Signed Rank tests showed a significant difference in local responses in the overnight destinations (overnight tourists had 101 positive ranks and 66 negative ranks,  $p < 0.01$ ) and no significant difference for Belize City. These results suggest that locals in overnight tourism destinations would prefer to continue to attract overnight tourists more than cruise tourists, where locals in Belize City have no preference between either type of tourism.

### 3.1.2. Comparison of perceptions of tourism impacts in Belize city and San Pedro

Villagers were asked how they would describe the changes, if any, tourism has brought to their communities using five ordinal response categories ranging from 'very bad' to 'very good'. The

results show that locals in both communities believe that tourism has resulted in good and bad changes in the community (San Pedro: 71% of the respondents, Belize City: 32% of the respondents). A follow up Mann Whitney *U* test showed no significant differences in the responses of San Pedro and Belize City residents. When asked to describe how much the community had changed because of tourism using 3 ordinal response categories (a lot (3), a little (2), not at all (1)), the results showed Belize City to rank significantly lower than San Pedro (San Pedro: 14% a little, 86% not at all, mean Rank = 69.3; Belize City: 39.5% not at all, 32.5% a little, 28% a lot, mean rank = 36.3,  $p < 0.001$ ).

In order to ascertain local perceptions of some of the more common social, economic, and environmental impacts of tourism, villagers were asked to respond to a series of statements about these impacts using a 7-point response scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The questions and responses were presented visually to the respondents using a grid format depicting equal distances between each response on the scale.

Table 4 shows mean local responses and standard deviations (SD) for statements about selected social, economic and environmental impacts of tourism in Belize City and San Pedro. Impacts were selected that are most frequently associated with tourism in tropical developing countries in the academic literature. Their relevance and relative importance in Belize was also verified with key informants during the development of the surveys. Throughout this analysis, responses to statements about impacts have been coded on an interval scale of 1–7 with 1 being the lowest degree of agreement, 4 a neutral response, and 7 the highest degree of agreement. Independent sample *t*-tests showed the differences in responses between the Belize City and San Pedro samples to be statistically significant for all the statements with the exception of "there are more jobs for women" and "there has been an increase in criminal behavior" (all  $p < 0.001$ ). In addition, significant

**Table 4**Local perceptions of the impacts of tourism (mean response  $\pm$  SD).<sup>a</sup>

Statement:	Belize City	San Pedro
<i>Because of tourism in this community...</i>		
There are more jobs for locals	6.3 $\pm$ 0.6**	6.9 $\pm$ 0.3**
There are more jobs for non-Belizeans	5.6 $\pm$ 1.4**	6.6 $\pm$ 0.8**
There are more jobs for women	6.4 $\pm$ 0.7**	6.5 $\pm$ 0.8**
More non-Belizeans have moved here	5.3 $\pm$ 1.6*	6.8 $\pm$ 0.8**
More people from other parts of Belize have moved here	5.9 $\pm$ 1.2**	6.8 $\pm$ 0.7**
We have more pride in our traditional culture	4.9 $\pm$ 1.8**	6.6 $\pm$ 1.1**
Overall quality of life has improved	5.2 $\pm$ 1.4**	6.7 $\pm$ 0.6**
People want more possessions	5.2 $\pm$ 1.6**	6.7 $\pm$ 0.9**
There has been an increase in criminal behavior	4.5 $\pm$ 1.9	4.9 $\pm$ 2.5*

<sup>a</sup> \*\* $p < 0.001$  (single sample *t*-tests against a test value of 4 (neutral response)); \* $p < 0.05$ .

<sup>9</sup> Responses were coded on an ordinal scale of 1–5 in order to detect more subtle differences in responses. Categories included 1 = a lot less, 2 = a few less, 3 = no change, 4 = a few more, and 5 = a lot more. Cultural tourists and ecotourists or resort tourists,  $p < 0.05$ ; sport fishers and resort tourists,  $p < 0.05$ ; backpackers and cruise ship tourists,  $p < 0.05$ ; the rest  $p < 0.001$ .

differences were observed between the responses of tour guides and business owners in Belize City for “there has been an increase in criminal behavior” (mean response business owners =  $5.4 \pm 1.3$ , tour guides =  $3.7 \pm 2.0$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ).

In summary, locals in San Pedro agree more strongly with all of the impacts statements than local is Belize City with the exception of increases in jobs for women (a positive impact) and increases in criminal behavior (a negative impact), where no significant differences between responses were detected. Locals in both communities agreed with all the impact statements to some degree, suggesting that all of the impacts listed in Table 4 are manifested in both communities.

### 3.1.3. Tourism and local conservation awareness and support

Local respondents were also asked a series of questions relating to the impacts of tourism on local conservation awareness and support, in particular support for and belief in the benefits of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). For the purpose of this study, an MPA, marine reserve or marine park will be defined as any area of the marine environment set aside for the partial or complete protection of the natural and/or cultural resources within it. Activities permitted within the boundaries of MPAs vary in accordance with the enabling legislation and the motivations for its designation. The statements about MPAs were combined to create two composite variables: SUPCONS and MPASUP. These variables are defined as follows:

A. Increase in local conservation awareness and support (SUPCONS). Average of mean responses to the following statements: Because of tourism in this community:

- people care more about protecting the marine environment
- people are becoming more educated about the marine environment
- fishermen are more likely to follow fishing regulations
- local people are more likely to enforce fishing regulations

B. Increase in local support for and beliefs in the benefits of MPAs (MPASUP). Average of mean responses to the following statements: MPAs:

- can increase the health of corals
- are necessary in Belize
- are necessary in my community

Independent sample *t*-tests showed mean responses for both variables to be significantly different in San Pedro and Belize City (SUPCONS, Belize City,  $4.7 \pm 1.4$  and San Pedro  $6.0 \pm 1.2$  ( $p < 0.001$ ), and MPASUP, Belize City,  $5.9 \pm 0.7$  and San Pedro,  $6.5 \pm 0.8$  ( $p < 0.05$ )). These results suggest that locals perceive that tourism is increasing local conservation awareness and support in both communities and that the perceived levels of these changes are significantly greater in San Pedro.

### 3.1.4. Perceived relative concern of hotel owners and cruise ship companies about protecting the marine environment

Also related to the environmental impacts of tourism, local respondents were asked how much they think cruise companies and hotel owners care about protecting the marine environment. Responses were recorded using 4 ordinal categories including ‘they don’t care’, ‘they are indifferent’, ‘they care a little’, and ‘they care a lot’. Random household samples from all the study communities were used to obtain values for this variable ( $N = 277$ ) as this is the most representative of the opinions of Belizean people overall. A Wilcoxon Signed Rank test on the results showed that residents of the study communities believe hotel owners (don’t care, 5%; indifferent, 9%; care a little, 16%; care a lot, 35%; don’t know or no

**Table 5**  
Selected Sample Characteristics of Cruise and Overnight Tourists (% sample).<sup>a</sup>

	Overnight tourists	Cruise tourists
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	53	47
Female	43	57
<i>Age</i>		
18–30	32	24
31–45	36	32
46–59	20	32
60 +	12	10
<i>Nationality</i>		
USA	60	95
European	23	1
Other	17	1
<i>Highest level of education completed</i>		
High school	10	30
College	45	50
Graduate school	45	20
<i>Length of Stay (overnight tourists only)</i>		
≤ one week	44	–
One to two weeks	37	–
More than two weeks	19	–
<i>Visits to Belize</i>		
First time visitor	65	94
Prior trip to Belize on a cruise (cruise tourists only)	–	6
Prior overnight trip to Belize	35	0
<i>Number of communities visited in Belize (all trips)</i>		
1	26	–
2	23	–
3+	51	–
<i>Tour activities</i>		
Marine Tour	78	32
Visited MPA	67	20
Maya archaeological site Tour	45	16
Rainforest Tour	32	16
Belize City Tour (cruise tourists only)	–	14
Stayed in Tourism Village (cruise tourists only)	–	14
<i>Additional activities</i>		
Social interaction with locals	90	23
Purchased locally made souvenirs	52	64
Ate in a local restaurant	76	48

<sup>a</sup> Percentages may be <100 due to missing data or alternative responses, or > 100 due to rounding.

response, 45%) care significantly more about protecting the marine environment ( $p < 0.001$ ) than cruise ship companies (don’t care, 29%; indifferent, 11%; care a little, 4%; care a lot, 6%; don’t know or no response, 50%).

## 3.2. Overnight and cruise tourist characteristics

### 3.2.1. Sample characteristics

Table 5 shows selected characteristics and activities of cruise and overnight tourists in the study samples. The results show similar distributions of age and gender in both samples, but a substantially higher concentration of tourists from the United States in the cruise tourist sample, which was comprised almost entirely of individuals possessing this nationality. This is to be expected as the origin of the cruises is the USA. The distribution of the education variable is also varied, with more than twice the percentage of overnight tourists having completed a graduate degree. The results also show that a considerably higher proportion of overnight tourists said they interacted socially with locals and ate in local restaurants, where a higher proportion of cruise tourists said they had purchased locally made souvenirs. The majority of cruise tourists encountered in this study were first time visitors to Belize, where 35% of overnight tourist had visited the country before.

**Table 6**  
Mean Level of Importance of Factors that Influence Tourists' Choice of Cruise Vacation (mean response  $\pm$  SD).<sup>a</sup>

Factor	Importance**
Personal safety	6.0 $\pm$ 1.5
Price	5.7 $\pm$ 1.7
Diverse opportunities to take tours outside the tourism village at your ports of call	5.6 $\pm$ 1.7
The opportunity to have an authentic cultural experience in the countries you visit	5.6 $\pm$ 1.6
The opportunity to buy locally made arts and handicrafts	5.1 $\pm$ 2.0
Fewer tourists on the tours you go on in your ports of call	4.9 $\pm$ 2.0
Environmental ethics of the cruise company	4.8 $\pm$ 2.0

<sup>a</sup> \*\* $p < 0.001$  for all responses (single sample  $t$ -test against a value of 4 (median)).

### 3.2.2. Factors affecting choice of cruise

Cruise tourists were asked to rate a series of factors in terms of their importance in influencing their choice of cruise vacation. The factors included in the list were intended to represent the main considerations of cruise tourists when choosing a cruise vacation. They were selected using information from the internet (i.e. what information do cruise companies routinely offer to prospective clients?) and key informant interviews. Responses were recorded using the same 7-point visual grid format described earlier. The response categories ranged from not important to very important (1 = not important, 7 = very important). Mean responses of cruise tourists are recorded in Table 6. Factors are listed in descending order of importance.

Post-hoc paired sample  $t$ -tests on the results in Table 6 showed all the differences in importance between the factors to be significant (all  $p < 0.001$ ) with the exception of:

- The environmental ethics of the cruise company and (1) diverse opportunities to take tours outside the tourism village in your port of call, and (2) opportunity to buy locally made arts and handicrafts; and
- opportunities to take tours outside the tourism village in your port of call and (1) the opportunity to have an authentic cultural experience in the countries you visit, (2) price, and (3) the opportunity to buy locally made arts and handicrafts;
- the opportunity to have an authentic cultural experience in the countries you visit and price.

These results indicate that all the factors have some influence on tourists' choice of cruise (i.e. all values above the median response), with personal safety being the most important factor.

### 3.2.3. Repeat visits

Overnight and cruise tourist were asked if they planned to come back to Belize, and whether they planned to come back on a cruise or for an overnight stay in a hotel. These questions were presented as statements using the 7-point agreement grid described previously (i.e. 7 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree). The results show that, on average, cruise tourists would like to return to Belize either on another cruise mean = 5.4  $\pm$  1.8,  $p < 0.05$  (single sample  $t$ -test against a neutral response) or for an overnight stay mean = 5.4  $\pm$  1.6,  $p < 0.05$  (single sample  $t$ -test against a neutral response). Overnight tourists are slightly more likely than cruise tourists to come back for another overnight stay mean = 5.8  $\pm$  1.4,  $p < 0.05$  (single sample  $t$ -test against a neutral response) and very unlikely to return on a cruise ship mean = 1.8  $\pm$  1.4,  $p < 0.05$  (single sample  $t$ -test against a neutral response). Independent sample  $t$ -tests between the responses of the different types of tourists were significant in both cases ( $p < 0.001$  for repeat visit on a cruise ship and  $p < 0.05$  for repeat overnight visit).

**Table 7**  
Responses of Overnight and Cruise Tourists to Statements Related to Environmental Conservation and Interest (mean  $\pm$  SD).<sup>a</sup>

Statement:	Overnight Tourists	Cruise Tourists
MPAs are necessary in Belize*	6.6 $\pm$ 1.2	6.2 $\pm$ 1.3
Tourists should be charged a fee to visit MPAs*	5.3 $\pm$ 1.9	4.7 $\pm$ 1.9
I would be more likely to visit a tourism destination if I know they protected their marine environment*	5.8 $\pm$ 1.5	5.3 $\pm$ 1.6
Because of my trip to Belize I have learned more about the marine environment**	5.4 $\pm$ 1.2	4.9 $\pm$ 1.6
Because of my trip to Belize I have more desire to protect the marine environment*	5.7 $\pm$ 1.3	5.2 $\pm$ 1.6

<sup>a</sup> All means  $p < 0.001$  (single sample  $t$ -test against a value of 4 (median)); \*\* $p < 0.001$  for independent sample  $t$ -test between tourist types; \* $p < 0.05$ .

### 3.2.4. Environmental concern

Tourists were asked a number of questions relating to their level of environmental concern as it relates to protecting the marine environment. Their responses, which were recorded using the visual 7-point agreement scale described previously, are shown in Table 7. The results show that both tourist types agree with all the statements, indicating some degree of environmental interest and conservation awareness for both groups. However, responses of overnight tourists were significantly higher in the agreement categories for all variables, indicating they have higher level of environmental interest and conservation awareness than cruise tourists. Although these responses cannot reflect actions that such individuals take to protect the environment, they can suggest the degree of likelihood that they will conform to environmental regulations or respond to environmental education.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Limitations of the study

Prior to discussing the results, important limitations of this study related to the sampling procedure must be addressed. The local samples from the overnight tourism communities were collected in the appropriate way to ensure the resulting data are representative of the overall population. Conversely, this claim can not be made in reference to the sampling strategy used in Belize City. Data from this community only allow for inferences about the impacts of cruise tourism perceived by individuals working in the service sector in the vicinity of the "tourist bubble." As discussed previously, the tourism environment in Belize City (i.e. primarily a cruise tourism destination, tourist activities concentrated in a small area), warrants the chosen approach to data collection. The majority of the local data for Belize City are compared with data from San Pedro, where tourism is uniformly concentrated, which necessitated the selection of individuals who have comparable levels of exposure and contact with tourists. It is worth noting that tour guides and business owners and managers in Belize City, who may have been construed to be biased by their respective dependences on cruise and overnight tourism, had consistent views in the majority of cases.<sup>10</sup> This is a testament to the ability of these individuals to be relatively objective in their responses to the survey questions.

<sup>10</sup> The marine tour guides interviewed in Belize City worked almost exclusively with cruise tourists where business owners and managers tended to benefit more from overnight tourists, in particular, hotel and restaurant owners.

Although it may not be considered entirely random, the overnight tourist sample was large and dispersed enough to consider the responses representative of the majority of tourists who visit coastal communities in Belize. Again, given the many different locations, activities and potential ports of entry of tourists into Belize, an entirely random sample would have been impossible. The cruise tourist sample did not contain responses from those tourists who did not disembark. However, taking into consideration the fact that those who do not disembark represent a small proportion of cruise tourists (key informants confirmed around 20%) and that they are unlikely to have an impact on the destination, this should not be considered a major limitation of the study.

The use of statistics to analyze non-random samples warrants debate and should not be applied without full consideration of its limitations [see [30,31]]. However, given that truly random samples can be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to achieve in many fieldwork scenarios, many social scientists continue to make work with these limitations and still provide useful information to decision-makers e.g. [32].

#### 4.2. *Implications of the results*

The results suggest a number of important trends. First, cruise tourism and overnight tourism in Belize each result in perceptions of both negative and positive impacts. The possibility that Belize is approaching a critical limit where the negative impacts of overnight tourism may exceed the positive has been documented in a related study [33]. In addition, locals in overnight tourism destinations favor overnight tourists over cruise tourists, where locals in Belize City show no preference between the two. Second, cruise tourists have less interest in conserving the marine environment than overnight tourists and the perceived impacts of tourism on local conservation support are higher in San Pedro than in Belize City. In addition, cruise companies are considered to care less about environmental protection than hotel owners. The link between overnight tourism development and local support and awareness of coral reef conservation has been documented by Diedrich [34], suggesting that environmental concern among tourists and the tourism industry is an important factor of sustainable tourism in Belize. Third, although overnight tourists suggested they would be more likely to come back for a repeat visit, a significant number of cruise tourists expressed the desire to return for an overnight visit.

With respect to the first point, the fact that locals in San Pedro and Belize City perceived positive and negative impacts and “good and bad” changes in the community resulting from tourism supports the assertion made in the introduction of the paper that sustainability is not inherent to any particular type of tourism. In fact, locals in San Pedro had stronger perceptions of impacts in a number of cases. In addition, the results show that locals in overnight tourism communities wish to continue to attract overnight tourists, particularly those perceived as ecotourists, and that locals in Belize City have no preference between cruise and overnight tourists. In addition, Table 2 shows that locals prefer certain types of overnight tourists over others. Backpackers tend not to be favored, the main reason being expressed by a significant number of locals that they do not spend money. In fact, backpackers were considered less desirable than cruise tourists in both locations. These results are a clear signal that tourism policy in Belize needs to consider the impacts of all types of tourism and supports the idea of maintaining a separation between the markets, a recommendation that is elaborated later on in this section.

The fact that, on average, cruise tourists agreed they would like to come back to Belize for an overnight stay is a promising trend from the perspective of the compatibility of the two sectors. Conversely, perhaps the most incompatible aspect illustrated by

this research is environmental. Belize's overnight tourism destinations strive to attract ecotourists and SCUBA divers. These types of tourism are largely dependent on an attractive and healthy marine environment, and cruise tourism is a potential threat to the maintenance of this attraction. In this context, careful attention should be paid to developing those aspects of cruise tourism policy which relate to managing the impacts of cruise tourism on the marine environment. Enforcement of such regulations will also be critical. Observations made during this research (participant observation, key informant interviews) suggest that cruise ship companies are able to bypass some of the more stringent regulations pertaining to minimizing environmental impacts, which must not be permitted to continue if Belize's overnight and cruise tourism sectors are to co-exist. For example, although the Cruise Tourism Policy clearly states a limit of eight tourists per marine tour guide when visiting local MPAs, many respondents commented that this standard is rarely upheld on cruise tourist tours. One key informant in one of the prominent tourism associations commented that one of the reasons why the cruise ship companies may be construed as not being concerned about conserving the environment for the benefit of the tourist's experience is that the cruise industry does not depend on repeat visits (supported by the survey data), so the quality of experience of the guest is not as important.

The fact that cruise tourists are shown to have less interest in conserving the marine environment could be one reason why this type of tourism may not generate as much environmental concern among local people. It is possible that local concern for protecting the marine environment in San Pedro is related to the recognition that that's what the tourists come to see and that they expect it to be in good condition. Catering to a less environmentally aware and concerned tourist might result in more lax conservation attitudes among the locals. However, it is worth noting that cruise tourists did agree with all the statements in Table 7, which indicates that environmental protection is still important to them, even though to a slightly lesser degree. Although, the fact that the environmental ethics of the cruise company appear to play a minor role in influencing cruise tourist's choice of a cruise company also places less pressure on these companies to engage in sound environmental conduct, which could exacerbate the environmental impacts of cruise tourism. Local perceptions of the levels of environmental concern of cruise companies also suggest that there is room for improvement of the environmental standards of these companies. In addition, a number of informants commented on the fact that relatively few tour guides possess business permits to operate within the Tourism Village has resulted in many (informants estimated close to 60), often unlicensed guides operating outside the gates. Because they are forced to offer lower prices to try and entice the tourists into going with them, these guides allegedly uphold extremely low safety and environmental standards.

During the fieldwork for this research, it was observed that overnight tourists avoid visiting locations where they expect to encounter large groups of cruise tourists. It is therefore important that efforts are made to ensure that tours to popular natural and cultural sites in Belize are well planned so as to ensure minimal overlap and overcrowding in these areas. Additionally, the fact that locals in overnight tourism destinations generally do not favor the expansion of cruise tourism over other forms of tourism in their communities suggests that cruise tourism should remain concentrated in Belize City. Installing additional ports in other communities could threaten the integrity of already established overnight tourism sectors.

An important consideration for assessing impacts of the different types of tourism is that cruise tourists tend to remain concentrated in certain areas, tours are taken to selected sites, and the data confirm that they do not interact socially with local people

as much as other types of tourists. In this context, it is feasible to assume that the impacts of overnight tourism could be more widespread and that they could have more of an influence on Belizean society due to more opportunities for social interaction. Overnight tourists, for example, are more likely to visit the more remote villages and natural places, bringing tourism impacts to areas than may not otherwise experience them.

The proposed plans to build the Carnival Cruise Lines docking port in Belize City warrants some specific attention in this discussion since it is an event that brought the controversy surrounding the future of Belize's tourism market into the limelight. Interviews conducted throughout the research suggest that the majority of tourism business owners and managers in the community felt that the new port would have mostly positive impacts on their business (68% positive, 4% positive and negative, 4% negative, 12% neither) and, to a lesser degree, on the community (44% positive, 40% positive and negative, 4% negative, 16% neither).

Key informants in the Cruise Tourism Village claimed that providing docking facilities for the cruise ships would increase the disembarkation rate of the tourists, many of whom are deterred from taking a tender ride for fear of safety. In relation to this, many respondents of this study expressed concern that the individuals currently operating tenders in the Tourism Village would be unemployed if the new port is built. Finding alternative livelihoods for these individuals, in addition to expanding the opportunities for tour guides and vendors to benefit from cruise tourism should be an important focus for the new tourism port.

One benefit of focusing time and resources on developing cruise tourism in Belize City would be the potential to revitalize the community. The data show that safety is the most important factor influencing cruise tourist's decisions about which cruise to go on. Evidently, this is largely related to the safety of the vessel itself, but many tourists encountered during this study said they felt harassed and threatened when they ventured outside of the Tourism Village. In fact, many had even been warned by crew on board the ship that Belize City is not safe and that they should remain inside the Village unless they are on a guided tour. Belize City's reputation also deters many overnight tourists from spending time there. In this context, a revitalization of the city, similar to efforts that have occurred in other popular cruise ports such as Majahual, Mexico, could, in addition to providing more widespread benefits to the community, increase the area's attractiveness to the overnight tourist market. However, it is important to note that such revitalization does not occur without conflict and requires careful assessment of impacts and planning to succeed [35].

## 5. Conclusions

In conclusion, recognizing that all types of tourism in Belize have the potential to generate negative impacts is vital. In this context, the Belizean government's focus on creating synergy between the cruise tourism and national tourism policies is necessitated. The Belizean government's failure to enforce self-imposed restrictions on cruise tourism growth is illustrative of a dilemma shared by many governments throughout the world. Tourism brings much needed foreign exchange into the country, resulting in increased standards of living for local people. The immediate gains of tourism development and the short-sightedness that is inherent to the political cycle overshadow the realization that rapid, uncontrolled growth can not be sustained in the long run. In the majority of cases it is not ignorance to the negative impacts of tourism development that impedes the enforcement of necessary restrictions; rather, it is driven by short term political and financial incentives. In this context, viable, realistic solutions that recognize this scenario and attempt to maximize economic gain

while maintaining a long term vision for sustainability are necessary. Stringent restrictions, although they may be the ideal solution from the perspective of environmental sustainability, are just as ineffective as no action at all if they fail to be implemented.

This research suggests that careful attention should be paid to maintaining a physical separation between the two markets so the overnight tourism market can continue to offer a viable ecotourism experience. Equally stringent, enforced policies for environmental conduct should be applied to businesses and individuals operating in both sectors. Perhaps most important of all is not to allow the level of tourism in either sector to exceed the threshold that could tip the balance between negative and positive impacts and result in the degradation of Belize's natural and cultural attractions, which represent the crux of the country's tourism market. However, if efforts are made to ensure minimal impacts from both types of tourism, Belize will be able to sustain a higher level of tourism without tipping this balance.

The growth of cruise tourism in recent years is described by Dowling [17] as "phenomenal" and "explosive". The overlap between overnight and cruise tourism and its potential impacts on local people, the environment and the tourism image of the destination is a predicament faced by many locations. The lack of research focused on providing the information necessary to make these transitions positive is limited. Research on sustainable tourism in general tends to be more focused on why different types of tourism are unsustainable and others sustainable. It is suggested here that there needs to be a pragmatic shift in focus towards research that provides practical recommendations for how all types of tourism, which will inevitably continue to grow as long as there is a market for them, may develop in a sustainable way. Expecting governments to simply limit the number of tourists that visit their countries when these visits are a major source of income is not as realistic as providing them with explicit ways in which to maximize benefits and minimize costs.

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