Rapid evaluation of the tourism Potential for the Bas Limbé to Chouchou Bay coastal area

Haïti

for the

Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF)

CEPF is a joint program of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the European Union, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan, the MacArthur Foundation and the World Bank.

Protecting Biodiversity by Promoting Nature-Based Tourism and Sustainable livelihoods in the Massif – Plaine du Nord Conservation Corridor

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Introduction

This report is an activity of the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) project Protecting Biodiversity by Promoting Nature-Based Tourism and Sustainable livelihoods in the Massif – Plaine du Nord Conservation Corridor and is a rapid evaluation of the potential for the development of eco-tourism related activities in the project target area of Bas Limbé to Chouchou Bay in Northern Haiti.

Site description

General
The coastal area from Bas Limbé east to Chouchou Bay in north central Haiti is composed of three sandy bays (from west to east: Chouchou, Port Margot, and Nan Coco) and tombolos with four tied islands (from west to east: Chouchou, Novion, Boyeau, and Bas Limbé). It is mostly comprised of coastal flats dominated by rivers and mangrove systems. Bas Limbé island is attached to the mainland by two tombolos, one to the southeast and the other to the southwest with Ilet Bas Limbé (aka Karamel) just to its east. The coastal area is primarily scattered agricultural patches, many with peanuts, mixed in between small villages and mangrove areas with more than 14km of grey/white sandy beaches in the bays between the various tied islands. The beach area at Bas Limbé(Bord de Mer) and to its south is fairly polluted with marine debris most likely emanating from the village itself (the village does have a dedicated dump site to its north). This coastal pollution is somewhat less visible along the area of the three bays to the west.
**Rivers**

Two small rivers run north through this area on their way to the sea; the Limbé River exits to the sea just to the southwest of Bas Limbé Island, and the Port Margot River exits just to the southwest of Boyeau Island. The *Redoute* tributary of the Port Margot River joins with it just before entering the sea. Waters offshore of the grey sandy beaches in the area are somewhat muddy even during periods of calm seas due to sediment from the river outfalls. The Limbé River itself at this level is not very navigable even in the small local artisanal boats. When it is dry enough that the river runs fairly slowly, low water levels and sand banks make navigating almost impossible. During rainy season when the water levels are higher the speed of the river generally makes it impractical to navigate. The Limbé River (north of the National Road) at its widest may vary between 15-50 meters. Small local artisanal boats are available at various locations to ferry people across.

The mouth of the Limbé River enters the sea approximately 800 meters to the southwest of Bas Limbé village with various connected waterways/canals and seasonal branches. One of these canals directly to the southeast of the island can easily flood with upper watershed rains, such as occurred with tropical storm Sandy in Oct. 2012, but can usually be crossed by foot during the dry season with waters often at knee or waist level. These attributes makes crossing from the *Bas Limbé* region to points west somewhat difficult as the only bridge crossing is on the Route National east of the town of Limbé.

**Mangroves**

There are five primary mangrove sites within the target area. Between the two *Bas Limbé* tombolos is the *Bassin Caiman* mangrove forest with approximately 100 ha composed primarily of Red Mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*) with Black Mangroves (*Avicennia germinans*). The *Diotin* mangroves located near the village of *Diotin* inside Limbé Bay contains approximately 37 ha of mangrove habitat. The mouth of the *Diotin* mangrove system is approximately 2.2 km west of *Bas Limbé*. The *Diotin* mangroves show heavier exploitation than the *Bassin Caiman* area. The mangroves at Chouchou Bay are the largest in the area at approximately 160 hectares, also composed primarily of Red Mangrove.
Marine Environment

The area to the east of Bas Limbé village is primarily composed of the sea grass *Thalassia testudinum* with generally very small patches of various types of hard coral heads.

The three bays of *Chouchou*, *Port Margot*, and *Nan Coco* are primarily sandy/muddy substrate giving way to small scattered patches of *Thalassia*. Water clarity is generally not very good in these
bays, often going to zero visibility with any type of increased run-off from area rivers. Chouchou Bay tends to have clearer water although it too often suffers from turbidity issues.

Beaches
With 14 km of sandy beaches all three of the bays in the area may be suitable for various types of tourism development involving beach activities, however, Nan Coco Bay, as well as the beach area to the southeast of Bas Limbé village have low lying near shore rocky shoals which make access to the sea in many parts of these bays extremely difficult if not impossible.

Animal life
There is a small community of iguanas (*Cyclura spp.*) located on *Ilet Bas Limbé* (*Karamel*). Sea turtles are also often observed and caught in the area both when nesting and at sea. Both of these animals are used for food in the local communities with sea turtle eggs also being exploited. Birds are noticeably absent from many of the local ecosystems.
Structures/ruins
The village of Bas Limbé has the remnants of an old French fort and port, as well as what appears to be, and what we were told, was an old colonial chapel on Ilet Limbé/Karamel. This old chapel may actually be what is known as a “four à chaux”, where calcium rich rocks, in this case coral, were baked to produce lime for various types of construction. There are also the remnants of what we were told was an old “wharf” or dock which supplied the fort. Although these sites contain only vestiges of their former structures, they may also be a tourism draw to the area.

Tourism
There is a low level of local tourism estimated at <1,000 individuals/yr with almost all visitors being day-trippers from local villages and cities (e.g. Limbé, Cap Haïtien) and staying in the area at Bas Limbé/Bord de Mer Limbé. A few take the very short boat ride to Ilet Karamel just offshore. Peak periods revolve around Christmas, Carnival, and Easter.

There is no organized tourism sector whatsoever. The first person to greet the tourist and offer services such as food or drink is the person who benefits.

There is a “festival” every Wednesday at Seau d’Eau in Ti Twa on the main entrance road to Bas Limbé for the Voodoo God Boran who often manifests himself as a snake or crab. This site is small, dirty, not maintained, and has minimal tourism interest.
Many of those interviewed in the tourism sector are familiar with the target area, and particularly with Chouchou Bay, although most are not as familiar with the Bas Limbé area. All would be interested in developing potential tourism projects in the area if conditions permitted (infrastructure, financing, etc.).

Informal consultations were also held on this topic during the same conversations concerning mangrove and sea turtle protection and management with 11 charcoal producers, 30+ fishers, as well as 15+ other individuals ranging from local public sector officials to older individuals and students. Although all are in agreement that management issues are critical in the area not only in terms of the need for better environmental laws, but also enforcement. The need to develop environmentally sustainable alternatives remains high, especially for those involved in direct extraction activities.

**Infrastructure**

**Roads**

Although all members of the tourism industry interviewed were certainly interested in developing and increasing attractions and developing tours in order to bring in more tourism business, various issues remain including, and especially, a lack of local infrastructure. The main road from Port-au-Prince to Cap Haïtien, the Rte. Nationale is in horrible condition from the community of *Ennery* to the north of *Gonaïves*, all the way to *Cap Haïtien*. Although the road is presently under repair near the entrance to *Cap Haïtien*, what should normally be perhaps a 5 hour drive from Port-au-Prince to *Cap Haïtien* is now 2.5 hours of excellent road from Port-au-Prince to Gonaives followed by 4-5 hours of broken paved road in very poor condition. This has in no uncertain terms hindered the development of potential tourism from Port-au-Prince to the area, including potential tourism to the Bas Limbé area.
Carnival 2013 was held primarily in Cap Haïtien. In preparation, the road from Gonaïve to Cap Haïtien had been repaired and patched at various points. The road from Port-au-Prince to Cap Haïtien can now be undertaken in 5 to 6 hours instead of the previous 6.5 to 7.5 hours. However, many parts of the road which were not well “repaired” were already crumbling within days after Carnival).

The entrance road to Bas Limbé off of the Rte. Nationale is approximately an hour long over 13km of unpaved dirt/rock road requiring the use of an all-terrain vehicle which ends with a brief but potentially treacherous passage through a mangrove forest. A recent (2013) poor attempt by local authorities to fix the last kilometer of the road at the entrance of Bas Limbé village has left the road in worse condition than before, especially during rainy season.

(This portion of road was also “repaired” for the Carnival in Cap Haïtien. The repair consisted of filling and grading this road, which remains a dirt road susceptible to damage from rains.)

Similarly, the side road off of the Rte. Nationale at Limbé which leads off to the Chouchou Bay area to the west is also primarily a dirt and rock road. Although the vast majority of the road remains unpaved, parts are currently under construction and are being paved. As with the Bas Limbé area infrastructure is severely limited.

Although Bas Limbé and Chouchou are but 10km apart, as the crow flies, due to a lack of connecting roads a trip between these two villages could take up to three hours over more than 40km of generally poor roads.

**Lodging**
There is no suitable hotel/motel/guesthouse in the area except for those willing to engage in what could be considered extreme, and somewhat risky, adventure tourism.

**Other types of infrastructure**
There is no electricity in most of this area. Piped water, sewerage management, garbage collection, or any other type of real infrastructure is scarce. This lack of any type of infrastructure severely limits potential tourism development in the area except for potential day trips.

Of course, this same isolation of many of these areas is a great draw for “adventure” tourism as well.

**Potential**
With more than 14 km of sandy beaches within the target area including the three bays of Nan Coco, Port Margot, and Chouchou our work with the Nature Teams developed by FoProBiM during this project has provided evidence that sea turtles are still present in the area and come ashore to nest although, by all accounts, in significantly smaller numbers than ever before. The presence of the turtles, in agreement with certain local fishers, does provide certain possibilities of developing ecotourism in the area if the sea turtles can be valuated to present more income to
the community alive rather than dead. At present all sea turtles are captured and killed on site for food and shell.

Fishermen in the area expressed their interest as well in being able to provide quick trips between Bas Limbé and Ilet Limbé/Karamel (400m away) which has a small (200m) nice white sandy beach along with a small community of iguanas (*Cyclura spp.*). The local community members also eat the iguanas when they can catch them.

The mangrove areas at the tombolos to the south of Bas Limbé (Bois Caiman) offer approximately 100 ha of forest suitable for some potential bird viewing and in-close observations of smaller mangrove ecosystems, but little else. Bird life in the area though appears to be quite scarce.

The Diotin mangroves located near the village of Diotin provide approximately 37 ha of mangrove habitat. In this area there is the possibility of taking a small local artisanal boat up one of the canals for approximately 1 km. However, the mangroves in this area tend to be quite small with most not exceeding 3m in height. This makes for a somewhat interesting trip by row boat with a local guide but cannot compare in any way with other much more interesting mangrove forest sites in other countries. Near Bas Limbé at the Bassin Caiman mangroves a small canal allows one access to the interior of this mangrove region, but not for very far (~200m). As with the Diotin mangroves bird viewing and observations of smaller mangrove ecosystems would be possible.

The Limbé River itself at this level is not very navigable even in the small local artisanal boats. When it is dry enough that the river runs fairly slowly, low water levels and sand banks make passage almost impossible. During rainy season when the water levels are higher the speed of the river generally makes it impractical to navigate.

All three of the bays in the area may be suitable for various types of tourism development involving beach activities, however, Nan Coco Bay, as well as the beach area to the southeast of Bas Limbé Village have low lying near-shore rocky reefs which may make access to the sea in many parts of these bays extremely difficult if not impossible.
The local communities, although willing to participate in any potential eco-tourism linked income generating activity are not equipped to receive any type of tourists for anything more than a visit of a few hours. There are very few somewhat suitable small boats for very short trips around the area, but they are fishing boats or slightly modified fishing boats and ill suited for any type of comfort. In an area which is extremely beautiful, basic safety gear and amenities from life jackets to easy availability of a cold drink, are lacking.

If access can be limited, Ilet Karamel could be a great site for establishing a protected area for the iguanas and other potential biodiversity.

Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines (RCCL) did provide a sheet to be filled out by prospective tour operators which requested information on:

1. Tour Operator Basic Tour Information
2. Pricing and Basic Tour Participation Guidelines
3. Restrictions and Advisements
4. Tour Content
5. Accessibility Questionnaire
6. Tour Equipment, Content Types, and Guide Information
7. Tour Descriptions

It would require a significant effort by the local community in order to attract the attention of RCCL and prove that they have a value-added benefit to bringing over tourists from their facilities at Labadie. In this regard, potential activities/attractions discussed with the communities included: visits to the mangrove sites by land and boat; visits to the apiculture sites; sales of honey to the tourists; visits to Ilet Karamel; development of a “maritime museum”; the development of tours related to the workings of a functioning artisanal fishing community.
Distances between various points in the target area

Labadie Cruise Port to Bas Limbé (straight line) = 14.0km (7.6nm)
Labadie Cruise Port to Bas Limbé (around reefs) = 14.5km (7.8nm)
Cap Haitien to Bas Limbé 24km (13nm)
# Site Potential

## By boat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By boat from Labadie (RCCL), Cap Haitien or other</th>
<th>Positive (Opportunity)</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long term visit (&lt; 1 night)</td>
<td>Small boats can beach or anchor in protected cove</td>
<td>No infrastructure (restaurants, bathrooms, water)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No suitable lodging or amenities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No dock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day trip boats to the target area for remote quiet beaches</td>
<td>Remote quiet beaches</td>
<td>Labadie already has a beach with all amenities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The trip by boat is an added expense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No infrastructure (restaurants, bathrooms, water)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Many parts of the beaches (especially near Bas Limbé) are unsuitable for swimming due to near shore rocky shoals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day trip boats to the target area for sea turtle viewing</td>
<td>Observe sea turtle nesting</td>
<td>Sea turtle viewing is seasonal and usually occurs at night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>There may not be enough turtles nesting in order to guarantee viewings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The trip by boat is an added expense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No infrastructure (restaurants, bathrooms, water)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day trip boats to the target area for viewing ruins</td>
<td>Historical sites</td>
<td>Ruins are not significant and in very poor condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The trip by boat is an added expense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No infrastructure (restaurants, bathrooms, water)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day trip boats to the target area for iguana viewing</td>
<td>Observe iguanas</td>
<td>Viewings cannot be guaranteed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The trip by boat is an added expense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No infrastructure (restaurants, bathrooms, water)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day trip boats to the target area for bird watching</td>
<td>Bird watching</td>
<td>Degraded mangroves may not guarantee viewings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The trip by boat is an added expense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No infrastructure (restaurants, bathrooms, water)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day trip boats to the target area to see a Haitian fishing village</td>
<td>Visit a working Haitian fishing village</td>
<td>Labadie village is closer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The trip by boat is an added expense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No infrastructure (restaurants, bathrooms, water)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over-night visits</td>
<td>Visit remote Haitian site at night</td>
<td>No infrastructure (restaurants, bathrooms, water)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## By road

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>By Road</th>
<th>Positive (Opportunity)</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Long term visit (< 1 night)   | Visit remote Haitian site at night | - Roads are in bad condition and access generally requires the use of an all-terrain vehicle  
- No infrastructure (restaurants, bathrooms, water)  
- No suitable lodging or amenities |
| Day trip for remote quiet beaches | Remote quiet beaches | - Roads are in bad condition and access requires the use of an all-terrain vehicle  
- No infrastructure (restaurants, bathrooms, water) |
| Day trip for sea turtle viewing | Observe sea turtle nesting in Haiti | - Roads are in bad condition and access requires the use of an all-terrain vehicle  
- No infrastructure (restaurants, bathrooms, water)  
- Sea turtle viewing is seasonal and usually occurs at night  
- There may not be enough turtles nesting in order to guarantee viewings |
| Day trip for viewing of ruins | History of Haiti | - Roads are in bad condition and access requires the use of an all-terrain vehicle  
- No infrastructure (restaurants, bathrooms, water)  
- Ruins are not significant and in very poor condition |
| Day trip for iguana viewing | Observe iguanas in Haiti | - Roads are in bad condition and access requires the use of an all-terrain vehicle  
- No infrastructure (restaurants, bathrooms, water)  
- Viewings can not be guaranteed |
| Day trip for bird watching | Bird-watch in Haiti | - Roads are in bad condition and access requires the use of an all-terrain vehicle  
- No infrastructure (restaurants, bathrooms, water)  
- Degraded mangroves may not guarantee viewings |
| Day trip to see a Haitian fishing village | Visit a working Haitian fishing village | - Roads are in bad condition and access requires the use of an all-terrain vehicle  
- No infrastructure (restaurants, bathrooms, water)  
- Labadie village is closer |
| Over-night visits | Visit remote Haitian site at night | - Roads are in bad condition and access requires the use of an all-terrain vehicle  
- No infrastructure (restaurants, bathrooms, water) |

The lack of suitable infrastructure, while increasing the possibility of attracting the “adventure” tourist will certainly limit the attraction of anything more that day-trippers.

## Consultations with the tourism sector

Jean Bernard Simonnet – Cormier Plage, Cap Haitien; President, Comite de Direction NORD de l’Association Touristique D’Haiti; ATH NORD  
Nicolas Bussenius – Hotel Mont Joli, Cap Haitien  
Joelle Lemoine Mourral – Hostellerie du Roi Christophe, Cap Haitien  
Jacqueline Pompilus – Ministry of Tourism, Port-au-Prince,  
Dieudonne Luma Etienne - Directrice Régionale Nord du Ministère du Tourisme, Cap Haïtien  
Maryse Penette-Kedar– SOLANO/Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines  
Dominique Carvonis – DFC Consulting