

Caribbean projects



Marker buoys are used to designate "marine protected areas" around Bluefields Bay, Jamaica



Wolde Kristos of the Bluefields Bay Fisherman's Friendly Society: "tourism must get onboard"

Holidays that give back

The Caribbean is a focus for responsible tourism projects by UK suppliers. **Philippa Jacks** visits a new marine sanctuary project in Jamaica and reports on other initiatives in the region

Wolde Kristos is a man with a plan. As president of the Bluefields Bay Fishermen's Friendly Society, he is coordinating a long-term project to safeguard jobs, food, education and sustainable natural resources for the 25,000 Jamaicans that live in the Bluefields area.

Since the 1960s, aggressive fishing techniques have caused a decline in the number and size of fish being caught, meaning less for the local population to eat, and less to sell on to hotels and restaurants.

After pressure from campaigners like Kristos, the Jamaican government passed legislation in 2009 to create nine marine protected areas around the island, where fishing is banned to allow fish populations to recover.

Last month, money donated by Virgin Holidays, The Travel Foundation and the Sandals Foundation enabled Kristos and his team to make 50 concrete blocks and floating marker-buoys to set out the edges of the 10-hectare sanctuary. The marker buoys will make it easier to patrol the area and also to

accurately monitor the fish stocks.

Despite the inconvenience of having to go out much further to drop their nets, Kristos said he had the support of almost every fisherman in the area: "They understand that without the sanctuary, this resource might disappear altogether."

Dr Owen Day is head of communications and biodiversity at Caribsave, a not-for-profit organisation that has advised the Bluefields Bay Fishermen's Friendly Society on creating and maintaining its new marine sanctuary.

He said that, properly managed, the sanctuary could become a fish "maternity ward", leading to more and bigger fish outside the no-take zone within just two or three years.

"I'm very excited about Jamaica. Governments around the Caribbean are starting to realise that sanctuaries are a solution, but we need success stories. Bluefields Bay could be a great success story," he said.

Day emphasised the crucial role that the tourism industry must play. "The sanctuary will only work if the tourism sector comes on board. If you look at how tourism benefits from a sanctuary like this, and

what it contributes, it's not comparable. We need something like a tax, where there's a willingness of tourism to contribute," he said.

Kristos's vision for Bluefields Bay includes tourist products such as snorkelling tours, scuba diving and glass-bottomed boats, to bring money into the economy and provide fishermen with an alternative to fishing. He hopes to create an underwater sculpture park, as in Grenada and Cancun, but with statues of famous faces from Jamaica's reggae scene. The Society has already begun construction of a building to house a craft and fresh produce market.

"Voluntourism" is also to play a role, with archaeologists and marine conservation bodies keen to pay to come and study Bluefield's heritage and wildlife. But Wolde hopes even mainstream holidaymakers will be able to contribute to the project's success.

"There's now a huge number of people who want to volunteer for a day of their holiday. We want to make it possible for people to give something back for even one day," he explained.



The Sandals Foundation has adopted 26 schools across the Caribbean

SANDALS FOUNDATION

The Sandals Foundation is to build new environmentally-friendly premises for the pupils of Culloden School in Jamaica.

The new building is made from recycled containers and uses natural daylight and ventilation to minimise energy consumption.

The 150 pupils of the school have not had a permanent base for several years.

Culloden is just one of 26 schools supported by the Sandals Foundation, the charitable arm of Sandals Hotels International, which was formally-established in 2009.

The Foundation supports more than 28 initiatives in Jamaica, St Lucia, Turks & Caicos, the Bahamas and Antigua, and has donated \$5.8million since it was established.

Other new initiatives for 2011 include further marine sanctuaries, school upgrades in Jamaica, a community centre focussed on literacy in St Lucia, planting trees to create a buffer zone against forest fires in Antigua and a recycling programme at a high school in Turks.

"We sit in a great position to make a difference here in the Caribbean; we have amazing partners and guests who really care to make a difference," said Heidi Clarke, director of programmes for the foundation.

■ sandalsfoundation.org

VIRGIN HOLIDAYS

A new Branson Centre of Entrepreneurship in Jamaica will act as a hub for satellite centres across the Caribbean.

Following the model of the Branson Centre South Africa, it will support local businessmen and women in setting up small and medium-sized businesses, with a particular focus on tourism-related enterprises. Support will include mentoring, networking, office services and seed funding, with a rigorous selection process to select 15 candidates for each intake.

Virgin Holidays, has committed £2 million to the centre over the next 10 years, with satellite offices on other islands intended for next year.

The centre officially opened last month, and will soon launch its search for potential candidates.

Salli Felton, responsible business manager for the operator, said the scheme will work in partnership with existing programmes in the Caribbean.

"There are some good business training programmes, but the Branson Centre will bring local programmes together and be a kind of end point," she explained. "We believe that you can't really teach entrepreneurship; you either have it or you don't."

■ bransoncentre.org

Responsible Business 2011



Responsible tourism will be one of the topics at a two-day event at the **Business Design Centre** in Islington, London, organised by TTG's parent company UBM next month.

TTG's latest Green Think Tank with the Travel Foundation forms part of the **Responsible Business 2011** event, which is seeking to encourage businesses to trade more responsibly. It is free to attend, with 150 charities, voluntary organisations and social programmes exhibiting.

The event includes the **BITC Responsible Business Convention** on March 17 and 18 led by charity **Business In The Community**, with seminars, panel debates networking sessions and clinics.

Travel agents are invited to join the Green Think Tank, which takes place at the show from 3-5pm on March 17. TTG editor Daniel Pearce will introduce presentations from the following guest speakers:

Julie Middleton, industry programmes manager, The Travel Foundation

Rachel McCaffery, responsible business manager, Virgin Holidays

Karen Simmonds, managing director, Travel Matters

Amanda Bailey, senior sustainability consultant, Arup

Agency-owner Karen Simmonds says: "Anyone with a shop front can steer and influence clients in the way they think, so sustainability should definitely come into the conversation. I'll be talking about how I promote the message to my customers, and about the resources and advisory bodies that I've found useful."

■ responsiblebusinessevent.org

■ thetravelfoundation.org.uk



Trees for Cities is one scheme supported by Karen Simmonds (right) and her Travel Matters agency