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## The Emergence of Experiential Tourism in Jamaica

**St. Elizabeth, Jamaica-** Treasure Beach is located on the southwest of Jamaica, on the South Coast of the Parish of St. Elizabeth and comprises of eight districts, namely: Calabash Bay, Sandy Bank, Billy's Bay, Frenchman, Fort Charles, Great Bay, Bluntlers, and Beacon. Heritage sites and natural beauty spots are readily accessible, though not strictly within the target area. These natural assets are complemented by a community characterized by small hoteliers, farmers and tour operators who form the Treasure Beach cluster.

On July 3, 2014, Compete Caribbean (CC) provided Treasure Beach with a USD 500,000 grant to support the community in developing the tourism potential of the area and develop and market a unique brand of tourism for Treasure Beach, Jamaica. The funding would be used to support three main aspects of local tourism development- 1) Organizing the Treasure Beach enterprises for success ; 2)Development of a world class tourism product; and 3) Branding and advertising strategies.

October marked the closing of The Treasure Beach Cluster project, focused on supporting the Treasure Beach community to bolster the tourism potential of the area and develop and market a unique brand of tourism not only for Treasure Beach, and also for Jamaica as a whole. This was done by first encouraging the cluster to better understand the economic potential of the type of Tourism most suitable to their natural endowments and the extent to which they had the basis in terms of tourism related products and services to compete for tourists. In addition,

at the start of the project more than 90% of the small businesses in Treasure Beach did not meet the standards or the formal requirements to participate in the industry. With technical assistance from CC, more than 60% of the businesses in Treasure Beach were able to achieve or start the process of achieving compliance with government regulations, and Jamaica's tourism enterprise standards. The project even spurred the emergence of the new Tourism Product Development Co. Home Stay category, which extended the possibility of formalization to many operators in the Treasure Beach area. Compliance ensures that even the smallest tourism enterprises could actively participate in and benefit from a revitalized Treasure Beach economy.

In addition to developing the enterprises in Treasure Beach, the project also sought to develop the community's brand of Tourism. Studies supported by the project revealed that at an increasing level tourists want authentic experiences from their travel and are willing to pay more for it. This helped to provide the basis for the development of Treasure Beach Journeys, or the refinement of authentic, people based experiences from Treasure Beach. From Captain Dennis's Adventure Tours to Dawn's Dancing Dinners or Jake's pick your passion, a visitor to Treasure Beach can now engage in any one or all of the ten new experiences the project helped to develop. One community member is quoted as saying "the cluster group gives people confidence and gives people ideas, recognizing that they can turn something "everyday" into tours; ideas that you don't need a ton a money to do". Taking this to the world became the next challenge and emerging as a result of the support of the project was the new Treasure Beach Brand and e-commerce platform. With the tagline "you are born here", the brand's tone and feel were designed to elicit emotion around the key attributes of a Treasure Beach visit, specifically that you feel as if you belong there when visiting and are forever changed after visiting Treasure Beach. Moreover, project resources were also dedicated to the development of successfully establishing and staffing a Destination Management and Marketing Organization (DMMO) which will hold the responsibility of managing the Treasure Beach brand and executing the community's market strategy. The DMMO will serve the community and key stakeholders to educate them on the meaning and usefulness of the Treasure Beach brand to maximize its benefits.

The project motivated the cluster to work with the relevant public sector entities and achieved several notable results including the Tourism Enterprise Fund revolving loan fund and other financing options. There have also been public commitments from the local government to road improvement work in the area, and an ongoing support for community tourism in Treasure Beach. These fortuitous breakthroughs come after 20 years ongoing dialogue centred around the collaboration of Treasure Beach and the Jamaican government to fulfill the market potential that the community had to offer Jamaica's tourism sector, and local residents agree that as a result of the Compete Caribbean intervention, the Treasure Beach community has been brought into focus with local stakeholders and its potential in the global niche tourism market.

Compete Caribbean has significantly contributed to the development of Treasure Beach's tourism product and to marketing its unique brand of community based tourism. Treasure Beach now has a great deal of momentum on its side as well as an engaged tourism community, support from the Government of Jamaica and the opportunity to exploit a global trend in travelers seeking a more authentic and community based tourism experience.

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