

About to introduce me at the South Coast Resort Board meeting, the effervescent Chairman, Tony Freckleton, mused aloud about Jamaica's regard for two Canadian prime ministers, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, and the current Justin Trudeau. And he went on to announce, "so let's hear from Mr Trudeau's cousin..." Apparently that meant...me! So I began with, "the last time I was in Jamaica, Mr Chairman, was 47 years ago. Now, that's a very long time between Red Stripes..."

In June I had arrived in Treasure Beach, on Jamaica's south coast, as CESO (Canadian Executive Services Organisation) Lead Volunteer Advisor, to establish the basis for future Volunteer (there are 735 of us) visits from CESO, in specialised areas of Community-based Tourism, looking specifically at capacity-building and market-readiness. This CESO mission is in conjunction with a number of other consultancies, all supported by Compete Caribbean and the Inter-American Bank. At Treasure Beach, our CESO client is the tourism 'Cluster Group'. Prior to my visit, I had read nearly 800 pages of Consultants' Reports, and while at Treasure Beach, I met another 6 consultants. Was I to be in the midst of some sort of 'consultant bumper-cars'? Thanks to the astonishingly efficient Facilitator, Maisie Allen, she seemed able to effortlessly juggle industrial-quantities of consultants (and probably toss in a few pelicans as well!)



Maisie Allen at Breds Office

Now...the first thing to know about this wonderful Treasure Beach is that there's no such place! What it is is a chain of coastal communities; and any of the gregarious locals will name all four for you. Or all seven. Perhaps eight! Or, some other number in between.

And the second thing to know? In this 'place' that doesn't formally exist, it also gets along pretty well without any municipal governments! None! Treasure Beach

is more a 'state-of-mind', than an actual place! And yet...and yet, the sense of community is steel-strong! Almost miraculous. And wonderful.

Two organisations in particular keep it humming. The Breds Foundation contributes to much of the infrastructure of this community; and the Treasure Beach Women's Group offers a rainbow array of social services. And how much they have been able to accomplish! There is a Sports Complex with fields and amenities built and maintained by Breds that would grace a much larger community! They promote and provide "Education, Sports, Cultural Heritage and Emergency Health Care". The latter is critical as the nearest medical facility is 25 km away in Black River.

So what did the Foundation do? They established, and operate, a community-based Ambulance Service!

And the Women's Group - if I had a hat on, I'd take it off to them. Twice-a-year free medical clinics. Literacy Training Program. Kids' Summer Arts Programs. Christmas Parties for local children. And elders and shut-ins! Support for the Orphanage. Free sewing classes, and workshops - fabric printing, book-binding, crocheting using recycled plastic bags.

And they donate! To the primary school, to Jamaica Aids Support, to the Walk for Haiti. Yes, and to the Community Ambulance too. How? They raise their own funds of course; by community events and their "Treasure Hunt Craft Shop". They even accept men members, though this particular "Mr Trudeau's cousin" wouldn't have a smidgen of the energy and drive of these remarkable women!



Treasure Bay Women's Group

All up and down the Treasure Beach communities, one can find praiseworthy examples of initiatives to better the place where they all live. And to look after their own. When a recent spate of petty thefts occurred, the informal telephone-tree alerted an army of 'eyes' and the problem disappeared immediately. As only a community that believes in itself can accomplish.

So...what happened when one of Treasure Beach's two 'anchor industries' collapsed? As the waters of Jamaica became over-fished and that vital mainstay industry evaporated, the community collectively came to the conclusion that the other anchor industry - farming - needed another 'leg' to maintain employment and opportunity for their people. (But not before the Breds Foundation began remediation with the Galleon Bay Fish Sanctuary of course!)

Hence, tourism. But, as they gazed around, they settled on two decisions - neither all-inclusives nor mega-developments would better their lives or enhance their life-style. They resolved to become Jamaica's proud, "Home of Community Tourism". And the Government of Jamaica agreed.



Enter the Enterprise Innovation Challenge Fund of Compete Caribbean and the IDB. Baseline studies and strategic plans and branding exercises and training programs were undertaken; by international consultancies (just some of those 800 pages!!!!) of which CESO has been, and will continue to be, an integral part; all backed by Government of Jamaica agencies such as the TPDCo (Tourism Product Development), the Ministry of Tourism and the Jamaica Tourist Board.

But most important of all have been the enthusiasm and cooperation of the local people. Without this commitment and enthusiasm, and their collective vision, none of this would be possible. And because that commitment is so unswerving, it's not

only "possible" but is coming to reality. So, does it take a place that doesn't really exist to make a community enterprise a reality? The people of Treasure Beach, and their many helpers and supporters, can show you how.

And what will their 'tourism experience' offer? It's still being developed, but I have no doubt it will reflect the 'Community Tourism' they have embraced and the attributes they have developed together: "Unexpected. Authentic. Connection". "Authentic" and "Connected" it will be I'm sure - whether it's a sizzling breakfast at Dawn Moxam's "Smurf's Cafe", agritourism with Jason Henzell of Jake's Hotel's "Jerk and Melon Tour", or Damian Parchment's bicycle tour to Great Bay and dinner there with feet-in-the-sand at the "Lobster Pot".

Or how about the well-established biennial literary Calabash Festival? Or a special Jamaican Dinner with Captain Dennis at his home; or a Rastafarian Dinner with Rebecca Wiersma's Treasure Beach Tours at Frankie and Keisha's laid-back "Ital Rest". Or the new hiking trail developed by Josh Williams and the community group at Billy's Bay; tourists WILL connect with the communities of Treasure Beach.

But what about that "Unexpected"? On my last morning at Sunset Beach Resort, I asked two guests who'd been having a romantic sundown meal at Frenchman's Reef the night before - dressed up for what was their farewell dinner - what they'd liked most about their visit? They were a late-30's couple from Holland - and widely travelled - and she answered immediately. "You know, in Holland, at night we see only city lights or grow-lights from all our greenhouses. As we sat at our dinner, it was so magical to look out over the Caribbean. And see just the dark!"

Life's simplest pleasures, and a tourist memory so...unexpected.

Roger, Maisie Allen and Chris Seek, Solimar International  
Roger's Birthday at Frenchman's Reef



