

Is Tourism Haiti's Magic Bullet?



An Empirical Treatment of Haiti's Tourism Potential

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A french tourist negotiates the price of raspberries outside of the Baptist Mission Bakery, a popular destination for religious service groups visiting Haiti.

The Haitian government has elevated tourism to the top of its development agenda. Yet prospects for success are uncertain. This assessment is the first empirical treatment of the attitudes and perceptions of tourists and service providers in Haiti. It is based on a survey of more than 2,000 tourists and 390 industry professionals. It finds that just over 3% of tourists reported crime victimization and that the current tourism model should be revisited.

Introduction

Tourism is often described as key to Haiti's salvation. The economic potential of foreigners visiting the island nation is cited in virtually all major assessments of the country's current development problems. This may seem at first counter-intuitive: the impoverished and disaster-stricken country has long-struggled with violence and political instability. But it is increasingly regarded as necessary. Immediately after the January 2010 earthquake it was recognized that strategic investments would be needed to secure Haiti's economy once foreign aid had diminished.¹

Tourism was recently elevated to a top priority by Haiti's current administration and the Ministry of Tourism. The government hopes that an influx of foreign currency generated by tourist dollars could help lift the country out of aid-dependency.² This is not as surprising as it may seem. Haiti used to be a Caribbean destination - Graham Green described it as a tropical idyll in the mid-twentieth century during the early years of the Duvalier regime.³ What is more, former U.S. president Bill Clinton publically reminisces of his honeymoon in Haiti and until the 1990s Club Med ran a resort just an hour outside of Port-au-Prince.⁴

Yet the prospects for tourism are still highly uncertain. After coups in 1991 and 2004, recreational tourism has all but vanished.⁵ Since the devastating 2010 earthquake, one is more likely to see missionaries and aid workers in Haiti than vacationers. This *Strategic Note* assesses the extent to which Haiti is safe for tourism and explores how tourists and those in the industry view their role in Haiti's development efforts to increase tourism. It draws, as in past Igarapé Institute publications, on both quantitative surveys and qualitative research. Informed by this empirical evidence, the study sets out a number of recommendations to improve the tourism industry within the country.

This *Strategic Note* considers the perceptions of tourists visiting Haiti in 2013 and their motives and perceptions of the country. A total of 2,231 tourists were surveyed with a response rate of almost 75 per cent. An additional 390 tourism professionals were also consulted and interviewed. Key findings of this *Strategic Note* include:

- The primary reasons tourists visited Haiti in early 2013 was to see family and friends or to volunteer in aid development projects. Few tourists decided to visit Haiti explicitly for leisure or recreational purposes;
- In spite of dire warnings, violent crime was rarely experienced by tourists, though property crime was more common. Only some 3.1% of tourists in the study reported any kind of criminal victimization;
- Not surprisingly, given the relatively low incidence of criminal victimization, the perception of Haiti as a safe place to visit positively changed from arrival to departure and overall tourists felt safer than expected during their stay;
- Informal interpersonal interactions with ordinary Haitians were highlighted by many visitors as the most meaningful part of their trip to Haiti; and
- Efforts to create Haiti as a high-end tourist destination may be misdirected as most current visitors - whose tourism needs are being incompletely met at the current time - are working class or middle class in their country of origin.

1 See, for example, Collier and Jean Louis (2012).

2 See Ministry of Tourism, Haiti (2013).

3 See Greene (1966).

4 See Baltimore Sun (1994), Hughes (2012), Rucker (2010).

5 See Rucker (2010), World Bank (2013).



Background

Haiti features amongst the highest number of active relief and development agencies in the world. There are anywhere between 3,000 and 10,000 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the country earning in the sobriquet - Republic of NGOs.⁶ Missionaries and aid workers descended on Haiti in record numbers after the January 2010 earthquake, mainly to provide and support aid development projects and local community-based associations.⁷ After “humanitarian tourism” reached its apogee in 2010, reports suggest arrivals of aid-workers fell by 25% in 2011.⁸ In 2012, 950,000 entered Haiti on tourist visas, a drop in the bucket compared to 4.6 million who visited the neighboring Dominican Republic during the same year.⁹



Translator and guide Simon Ulysse shows off a wood carving he made. Like many tourism professionals, Ulysse depends on business from service groups and missionaries, some of whom he hopes will stay in his newly opened guest house near Laboule, Haiti.

Far from the headlines, missionaries and aid workers have recently been joined by a small cadre of tourists. Many of them are from the Haitian diaspora. And while the Haitian Ministry of Tourism estimates that only five per cent of Haitians in the diaspora visit Haiti, the past few years witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of first, second and third generation emigrants returning to visit or even visiting Haiti for the first time.¹⁰ Some came to see family and friends, but many also came as typical tourists, staying in hotels and engaging in sightseeing activities and cultural events. While there are some tourists that visit specific areas of the country, such as those that enter the north through Royal Caribbean

6 See <http://www.thenation.com/article/170929/ngo-republic-haiti#>.

7 See Schuller (2007).

8 See Euromonitor International (2012).

9 See Luxner (2013), Watkins (2013).

10 See Ministry of Tourism, Haiti (2013).

cruises, many do not leave the area they arrive in due to inadequate transportation and a lack of leisure infrastructure around the country.¹¹

Owing to a history of political violence and frequent natural disasters, Haiti is not traditionally cast as a high-end tourist destination. There are good reasons for this. Indeed, the country has experienced a high degree of volatility in the 1990s and early 2000s. The capital and surrounding areas were destabilized again following the deposing of Aristide in 2004 and two years of rule by an unelected government. And while past Igarapé Institute studies have shown an overall improvement in safety since 2007¹² (along with a sharp deterioration of security in urban areas between 2011-2012),¹³ recent assessments by foreign consulates have generated a flurry of reports and warnings against travel to the country.

For example, on December 28, 2012, the U.S. State Department issued a dire-sounding warning against travel warning of kidnapping, physical and sexual assaults and property crime, saying that “travelers arriving in Port-au-Prince on flights from the United States were attacked and robbed shortly after departing the airport” and that “no one is safe from kidnapping.”¹⁴ The Canadian government followed, with warnings that visitors to Haiti should “exercise a high degree of caution due to high crime rates in various parts of the country and ongoing political tensions.” The security warning characterized the security situation in Haiti as “hazardous and unpredictable,” stating that “rioting and related violence can occur with little or no notice.”¹⁵

In an effort to turn the page, the Haitian government has identified tourism as a priority in improving Haiti’s economy. Initial efforts to improve the infrastructure for the industry are starting to take root. Government programs include the development of the Ministry of Tourism whose primary aim is to advance Haiti as tourist destination through improving the conditions for investment, training in tourism and business, planning and promotion of tourist areas, improving transport sector tourism, the introduction of performance standards and legal frameworks and through foreign direct investment in tourism projects.¹⁶

Foreign donors and investors see potential in Haiti’s tourism industry as well. In December 2012, the posh 128 room Royal Oasis hotel opened in Petion-Ville. The Clinton-Bush Haiti Fund made a nearly \$2M equity investment in the business class hotel which is managed by Occidental Hotels and Resorts and has rooms which start at USD \$246 per night.¹⁷ A short walk away is the Best Western, one of the American hotel chain’s few Caribbean locations, which opened in March 2013 with rooms starting at USD \$149 per night.¹⁸

Other, concrete investments have been made as well including the recent reopening of L’Ecole Hôtelière d’Haiti (EHH) an educational training center supported by the Ministry of Tourism and the Clinton-Bush Haiti Fund. EHH students have

11 See World Bank (2012).

12 See Kolbe and Hutson (2006), Kolbe and Muggah (2011), Kolbe and Muggah (2012), Kolbe, Muggah and Puccio (2012).

13 See Kolbe and Muggah (2012), Kolbe, Muggah, and Puccio (2012).

14 See U.S. Department of State (2012).

15 See Government of Canada (2013).

16 See Ministry of Tourism, Haiti (2013).

17 See Watkins (2013).

18 See Roshan Lall (2013), Watkins (2013).



A particularly animated guide gives a short lesson on Haitian history to tourists visiting Fort Jacques

the option to complete a 9-18 month course in tourism related professions including human resource management, accounting, touristic geography and world languages. In the coastal town of Faugasse, the Institute of Hotel and Tourism Training of Les Cayes (IFORHT) was opened recently after a 9 million gourdes remodeling project sponsored by the Ministry of Tourism. The IFORHT program is specifically aimed at training young people to serve as tourism professionals in the South department, where a government sponsored eco-friendly resort is in development on the island of Ile a Vache.¹⁹ And in December 2012, construction began in Port-au-Prince for a 145 room full-service hotel which is being developed by Marriott in cooperation with Digicel, a major Caribbean cell phone provider owned by Irish businessman, Denis O'Brien.²⁰

The chief advocates of Haiti's tourist drive say international investment and Ministry efforts along with training and educational programs such as EHH and IFORHT will assist Haiti in becoming a popular tourist destination by enabling tourist providers to deliver quality services.²¹ Although in the initial phases, it is reported that Haiti and Ecuador are also beginning to collaborate on developing Haiti as a tourist destination. Reports suggest that the collaboration between the two countries will focus on developing and managing the National Historical Park in Cap-Haitien as a key destination, training tourism professionals in human resources, and advocating for tourism legislation in Haiti.²²

¹⁹ See Haiti Libre (2013), Caribbean Journal (2013).

²⁰ See Jamaica Gleaner (2012), Watkins (2013).

²¹ See Goldman (2013).

²² See Vaugeois (2000).



A Haitian American tourist joins local teenagers for a game of football outside Fort Jacques

The idea that tourism could pivot the country away from aid dependency is hardly unique to Haiti. The development of a tourism-based economy is often championed by those who see the positive impacts of globalization. They argue that increasing disposable incomes of residents in developed countries and emerging powers, their desire for international travel, and the prospect of capturing some of their foreign exchange are likely to grow. By embracing a tourism-based economy, proponents contend that underdeveloped countries will benefit economically from foreign exchange earnings and increased employment.²³

Advocates contend that Haiti should adopt Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT) which positions the tourism sector as a key developmental platform for poverty alleviation and economic stabilization.²⁴ The PPT approach includes a number of specific strategies aimed at improving the economic status of a country through tourism. These strategies include increasing economic benefits by expanding local employment, training and enterprise opportunities; enhancing non-financial livelihood impacts through investment in natural resource management; improving investment in cultural and other public goods; increasing local access to infrastructure and services developed to incentivize tourism; and enhancing citizen empowerment by creating policies and frameworks that include lower income residents in joint-decision making and pro-poor partnerships with the private sector.²⁵

Improving tourism can, it is argued, generate knock-on effects in relation to political participation and economic growth. This approach has been successfully demonstrated in a number of cases, including in St. Lucia. In 1998, after elevating tourism as an economic development priority, the government initiated the St. Lucia Heritage Tourism Programme. This was a community based initiative intended to feature St. Lucia as a tourist destination through the use of natural

²³ See Vaugeois (2000).

²⁴ See Chok et al (2007).

²⁵ See Ashley et al (2000), Lewis and Brown (2007), Renard (2001).



and cultural sites, attractions and activities within the country. The successful development of the program (and the application of PPT strategies) has resulted in tourism now being the principle source of foreign exchange. By 2011, the tourism sector contributed to 42.5% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in St. Lucia, up from 31.8% of the GDP in 1998.²⁶

Methods

A key focus of this Strategic Note is on better understanding the changing face of tourism to Haiti and implications for future investment. The methodology adopted by the research team was primarily focused on eliciting the perspectives of people coming to Haiti as tourists. This was achieved by interviewing tourists directly, and by eliciting their opinions indirectly by surveying Haitian drivers, translators, guides and other tourism professionals with whom visitors often interact. It is, to our knowledge, the first independent empirical assessment of Haiti's contemporary tourist environment.

The primary research instrument consisted of a two-stage oral survey of tourists who were contacted as they arrived at the Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haïtien airports as well as surveys with inn keepers and other tourism professionals including translators, drivers and guides. To survey a large enough sample of the population to generate generalizable findings, the team applied random sampling methods of tourists arriving at the two major airports. Tourists were chosen randomly with every n th individual leaving the airport being approached by the survey team.²⁷ Tourists were asked for basic contact information and completed a five-question survey during the first interview and were then interviewed again by phone or at the airport 24 hours before their departure.²⁸ The assessment was administered over a 90 day period by an experienced Igarapé Institute-led team of Haitian and international researchers including 31 national enumerators.²⁹ A total of 2,231 tourists were included in the study with a response rate of 74.3 per cent.³⁰

Additional research tools included qualitative semi-structured interviews with members of the tourism industry in Haiti proper. As there is no centralized database or professional organization to which the majority of those working in the tourist

26 See KPMG Consulting LP (2003), Lewis and Brown (2007), World Travel & Tourism Council (2012).

27 Surveys were conducted by interview pairs who chose every n th person to interview randomly based on a Kish number table. So, if the random number for that enumerator for that hour was 5, every fifth person was approached. Everyone who looked to be over the age of 14 was approached, even those who appeared to be Haitian, and were asked a series of screening questions to determine if they were a tourist and eligible for the study. Survey consent was obtained orally and then the team completed a 12-minute survey with the respondent. Survey interviews were orally conducted in English, French, Creole, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian. German, Korean, Vietnamese and Tagalog surveys were available for respondents to complete in writing if they did feel comfortable completing their interview in one of the languages spoken by the research team. Tourists were eligible to participate in the study if they were over the age of 14 (14-17 year olds were required to have oral consent from a parent or guardian traveling with them), had the cognitive capacity to understand and participate in the study, lived outside of Haiti, entered on a tourist visa, stayed for less than 90 days, and did not engage in paid employment or income-generating activities while in Haiti.

28 Though there was no statistically significant difference in responses based on whether the individual was interviewed privately or within earshot of others, it should be noted that there is the danger of respondents modifying their answers when interviewed in the presence of others. Though respondents were always offered the opportunity to complete their interview privately, often those who were approached during peak departure times were unable to leave their place in line to complete a private interview out of earshot of others.

29 Data collection began on December 20, 2012.

30 A total of 3,000 tourists were selected for the study. Of these 52 were ineligible because they were under the age of 14 and/or they were between 14-17 but their parent or guardian did not give them permission to participate in the study. The remainder either refused to participate or initially agreed to participate when they arrived in Haiti but were unavailable or unreachable during the 24 hours prior to their departure.

industry belong, tourism professionals were contacted using existing lists of hotels, guest houses, tourist destinations and guidebooks as well as by in-person contact with individuals who had airport badges and entry permission slips for the Port-au-Prince airport. Snowball sampling was also used to identify translators and guides to complete the survey. It should be noted that this group of respondents was not randomly chosen and thus, may not represent the entire population of those working in the tourism industry. A total of 447 tourism professionals were asked to participate in the survey; 390 agreed, giving a response rate of 87.2%.

For both groups the respondent was interviewed by a two-person team who administered the survey questions and recorded responses using a tablet-based data entry program.³¹ No personally identifying information was collected and all interviews were asked to complete an informed consent process. At the conclusion of fielding, data was downloaded and analyzed using SPSS 17.0, a standard statistical software program. This study was approved by the Ethical Research Committee of Enstiti Travay Sosyal ak Syans Sosyal (Institute of Social Work and Social Science) in Petion-Ville, Haiti.

Demographics of Haiti's Tourists

Tourists included both foreigners who are not of Haitian descent and those whose families originally came from Haiti. The demographics of the sample were diverse, ranging from 14 to 88 years of age, and were almost evenly split between men and women (see figures 1-2). When asked an open-ended question of why they were visiting, those of Haitian descent most often said they were coming to see family and friends while those not from the Haitian diaspora said their motivation was to volunteer or engage in service projects or experience the culture (see figures 3-5). Interestingly, nearly a quarter (n=262) of those tourists who said they were of Haitian descent were not born in Haiti. Tourists from the Haitian diaspora were more likely to be male and were, on average, older than those tourists who were not of Haitian descent.

Figure 1. Demographics of Tourists to Haiti

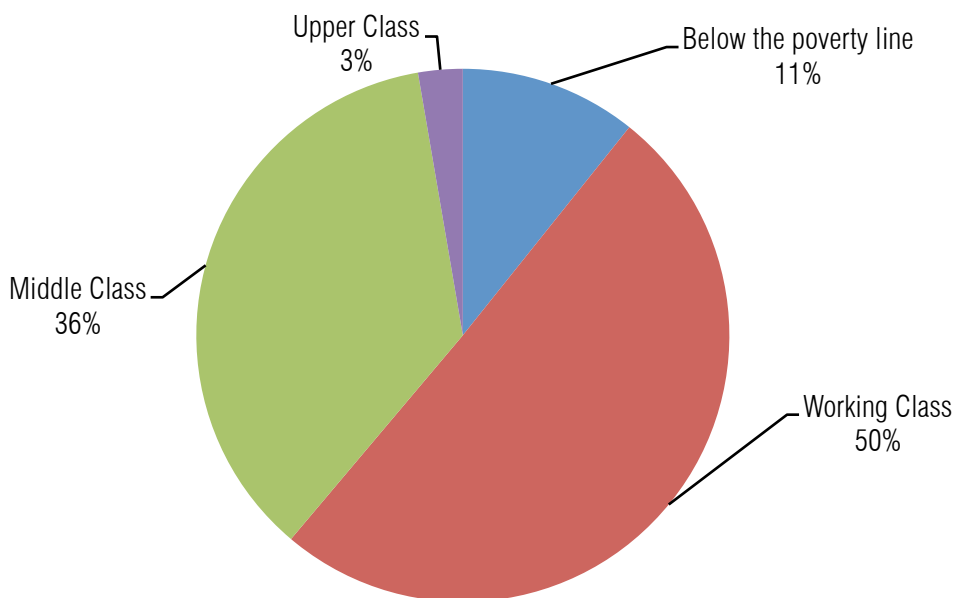
	Haitian Diaspora (n= 1135)	Not of Haitian descent (n=1096)
Male	56.4% (640)	50.8% (557)
Female	43.6% (495)	49.2% (539)
Mean Age	39.7 (SD: 12.6)	22.5 (SD: 7.8)
Mean Years of Education (asked of those 25 years or older only)	15.2 (SD: 6.0)	15.8 (SD: 4.1)
Traveled to Haiti with others	29.4% (333)	73.3% (804)
Traveled to Haiti alone	70.6% (801)	26.6% (292)
Traveled outside of the Port-au-Prince area on this visit	70.0% (794)	64.9% (711)

³¹ Respondents who completed paper surveys in alternative languages had their responses to open-ended questions translated and all responses were then entered into the dataset manually.



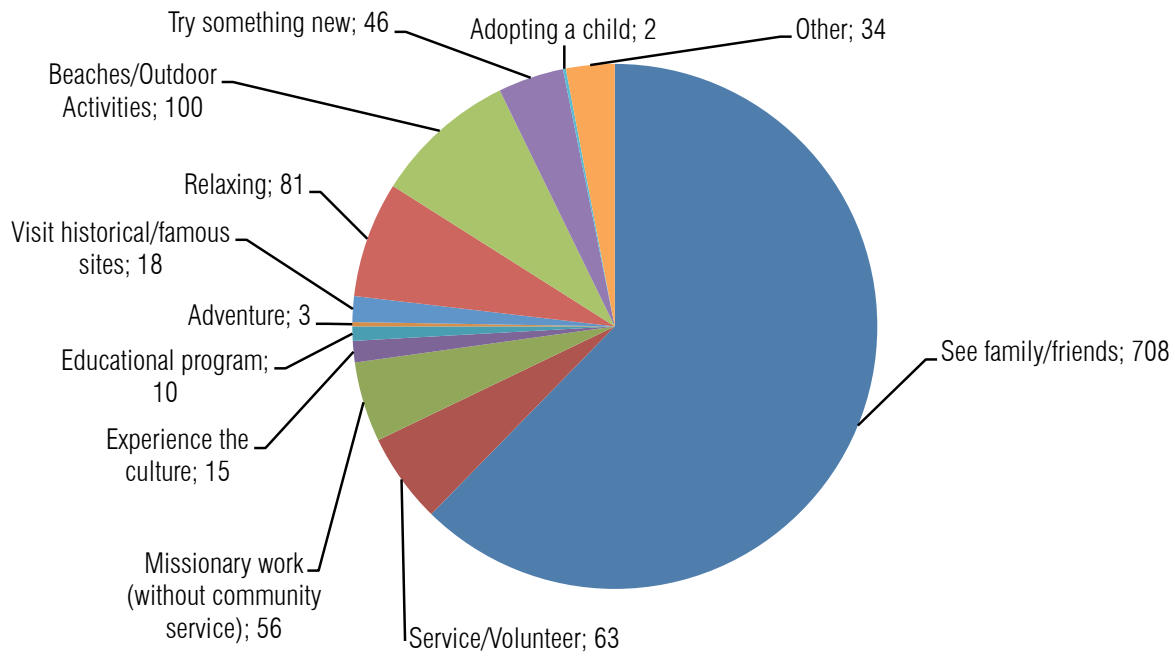
Both foreigners and Haitians visit the Baptist Mission Museum in Ferme, Haiti

Figure 2. Socioeconomic Background of Tourists³²



³² Calculated based on the respondent's reported annual salary, the number of persons in the respondent's household, and the income levels of the tourist's country of residence. Youth and students not traveling with their parents who were unsure of their household income were excluded from this calculation. Youth and student respondents who were traveling with family members usually consulted with a parent to determine how to respond to this survey question and generally this figure was given to the research team by the parent rather than by the survey respondent. This was the only exception to the survey protocols which otherwise specified that only the randomly chosen respondent was allowed to contribute data during the research process. Interestingly, the vast majority of those who came on religious missions or to volunteer with religiously affiliated aid projects were working class.

Figure 3. Primary Reason for Visiting Haiti (Tourists of Haitian Descent) (n=1134)



Tourists picnic outside a historical site overlooking Port-au-Prince



Figure 4. Primary Reason for Visiting Haiti (Tourists not of Haitian Descent) (n=1093)

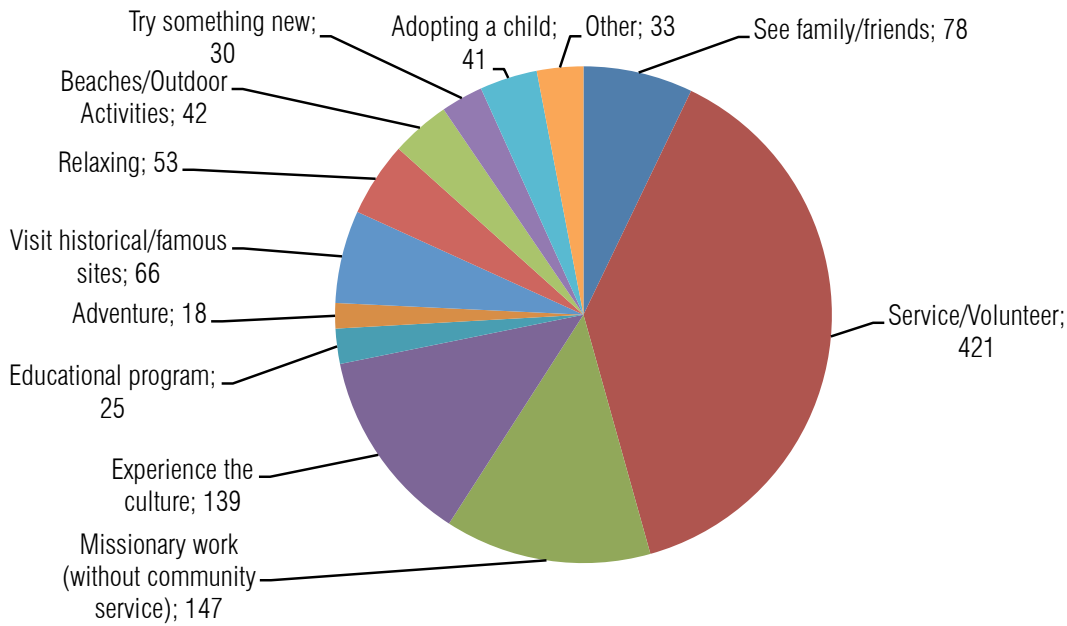
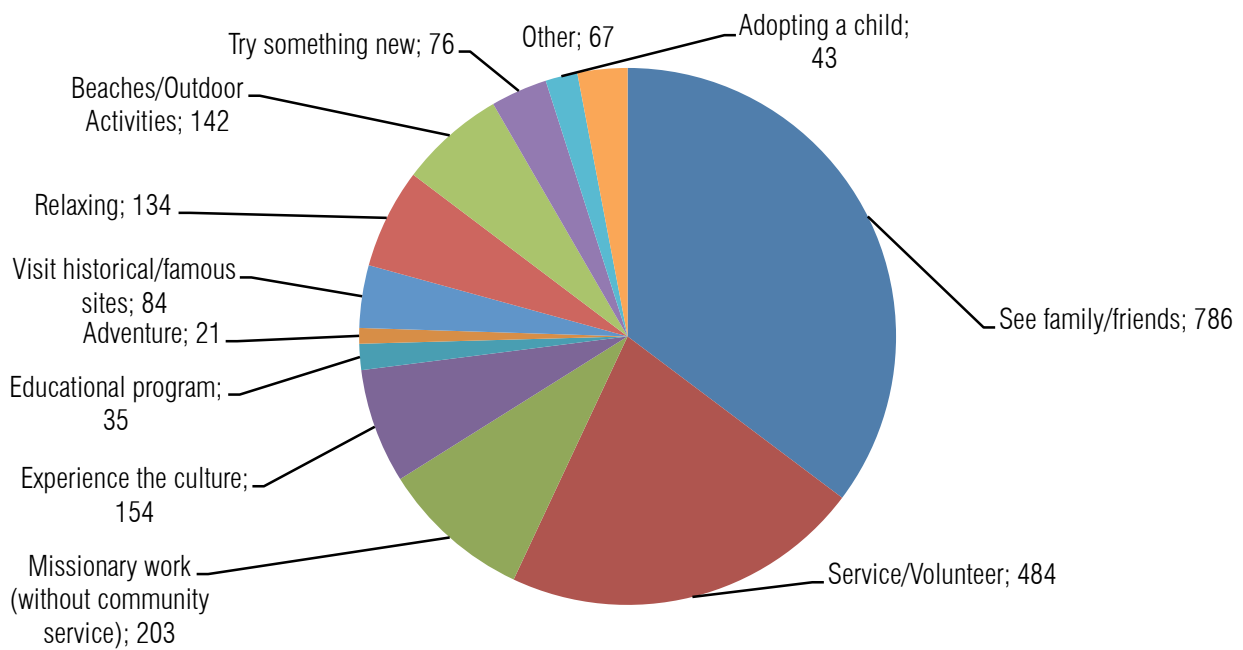


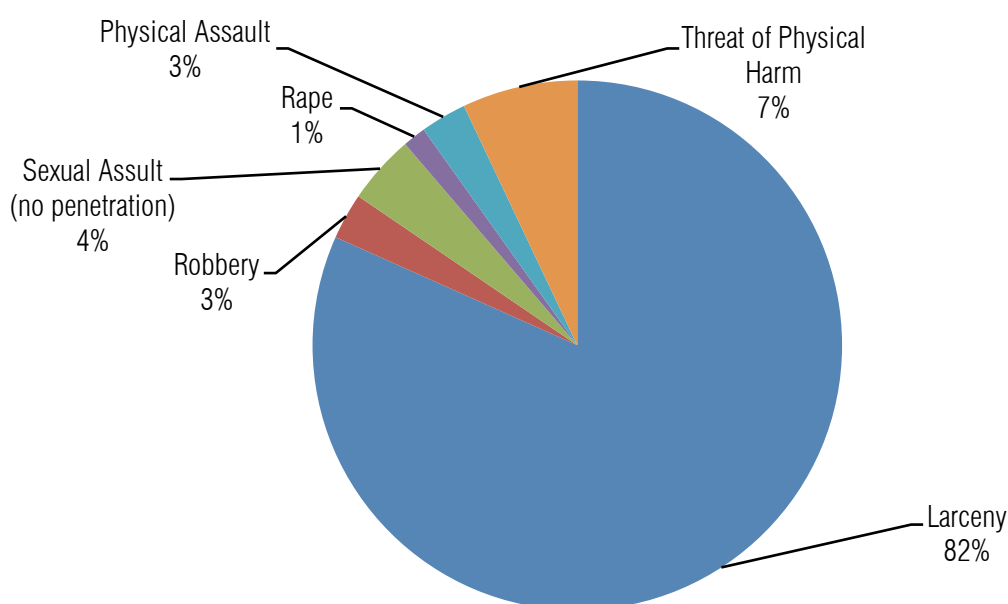
Figure 5. Primary Reason for Visiting Haiti (All tourists) (n=2227)



Crime and Other Disturbing Experiences

All respondents were asked if they had experienced a crime during the period of their visit to Haiti. Specifically each person was asked about property crimes, sexual assaults including unwanted sexual touching or sexual threats, physical assaults, kidnapping or unlawful detention, and extortion. Survey respondents were also asked if any other crimes, other than those specifically mentioned, were experienced by the respondent or their traveling companions. Crimes were rarely reported by respondents (see figure 6) with larceny³³ being the most commonly reported event. Only 3.1 percent of respondents said they had been a victim of a crime while in Haiti.³⁴

Figure 6. Reported incidents of crime



Theft of unattended property - larceny - was widely reported. Those items reported stolen were often inexpensive and included food, small amounts of money, and personal articles (for instance a comb, sunglasses, or a pen); the mean value of that which was stolen was US \$6.84 (SD: \$5.05). Though few survey respondents reported the incident to police (n=3; 5.0%) or tourism professionals such as guides or hotel workers (n=10; 16.7%), nearly 70 percent said that the incident made them think more negatively about Haiti and/or the Haitian people (n=41; 68.3%).

Respondents were also asked if they had witnessed or experienced anything that disturbed them while in Haiti. This question was asked to capture experiences which the respondent may have been hesitant to define as a crime, but which were still illegal or occurred in a legal gray area. Common experiences described by respondents included being aggressively asked for a tip or pressured to retain services at the airport or a tourist destination, aggressive begging,

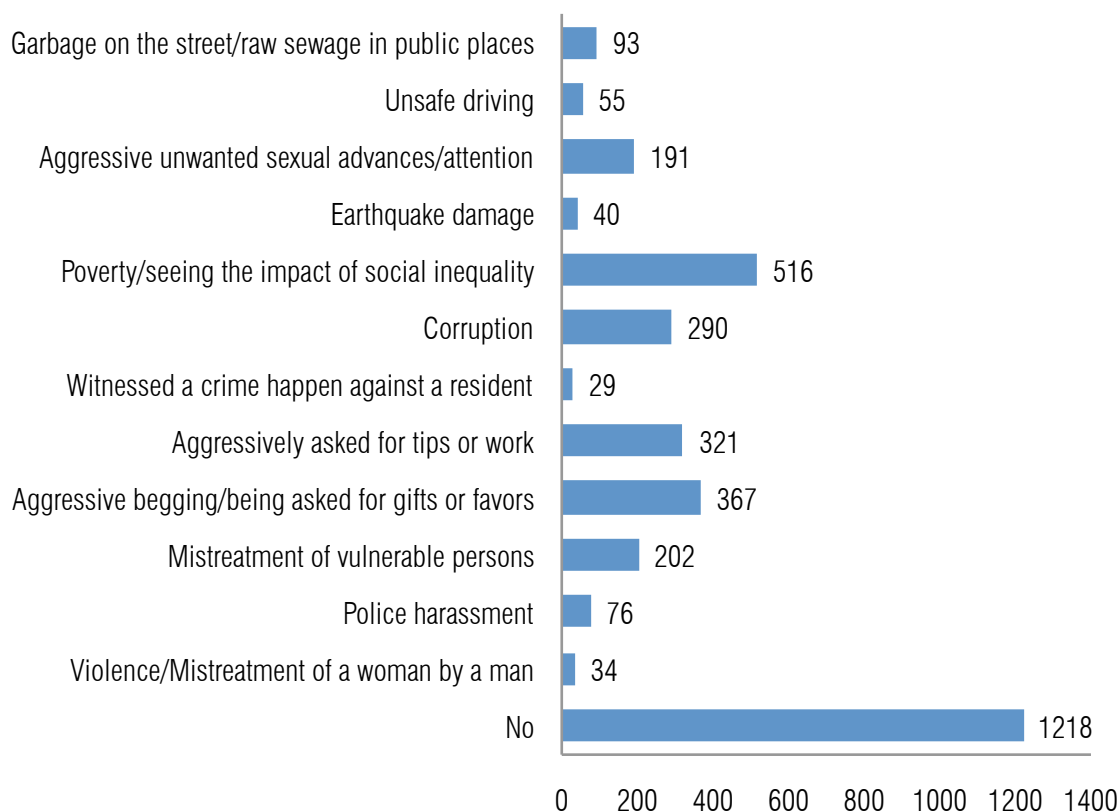
³³ Larceny is the theft of unattended property while robbery is theft from an individual. In this study, incidents of pickpocketing were defined as robbery.

³⁴ A total of 71 incidents were reported by 70 respondents. There was one incident that a respondent identified as a crime by the respondent which was excluded from this figure. In this incident the respondent was asked for a bribe by a police officer who implied that he could be arrested if he did not pay the bribe. The respondent was driving while intoxicated and had forgotten his driver's license and passport at the hotel. After telling the officer that he had no money to pay a bribe the respondent was driven back to the hotel by another police officer who did not ask for a bribe.



witnessing poverty, corruption such as being asked for a bribe or charged a higher price than Haitians for the same service at a business with posted or established prices, and witnessing the mistreatment of vulnerable persons such as a *restavek*³⁵ or a person with disabilities (see figure 7).³⁶

Figure 7. Did you see or experience anything that disturbed you during your visit? (n=2227)



Though Haiti does not have the same reputation for sexual harassment of female travelers as some other countries (most recently India, for example), sexual harassment and violence was still reported by respondents with 18.5 (n=191) percent of female tourists being subjected to aggressive sexual advances and 0.3% (n=3) of females complaining of unwanted sexual touching or groping. All of the latter three incidents happened in public places and two occurred during the Carnival celebration in Cap-Haïtien. One female respondent reported being sexually assaulted by an acquaintance during her visit in Haiti.

None of the sexual assaults described by respondents were reported to the police. When asked why the respondents choose not to report the sexual assault or rape incidents three said that they were embarrassed or didn't want to talk about it, two stated that they did not know how to report such an incident, one individual explained that she didn't think being groped was a "big deal" because it happens to women "all the time," and two stated that it was useless to report

³⁵ A *restavek* is a child who lives with and works as an unpaid domestic servant with another Haitian family in exchange for room, board, and in some cases, schooling costs.

³⁶ Numbers do not add up to 2227 as some individuals responded to the question with multiple events. Readers need to be mindful of the fact that these were responses to a single open-ended question reflecting those problems or experiences which bothered the respondent so much that he or she named them during the interview without being prompted to think about particular types of experiences a tourist may be bothered by when visiting Haiti. Had respondents been asked about each experience individually ("Were you disturbed by unsafe driving during your visit to Haiti?") the results would have varied considerably from the findings presented in this figure.

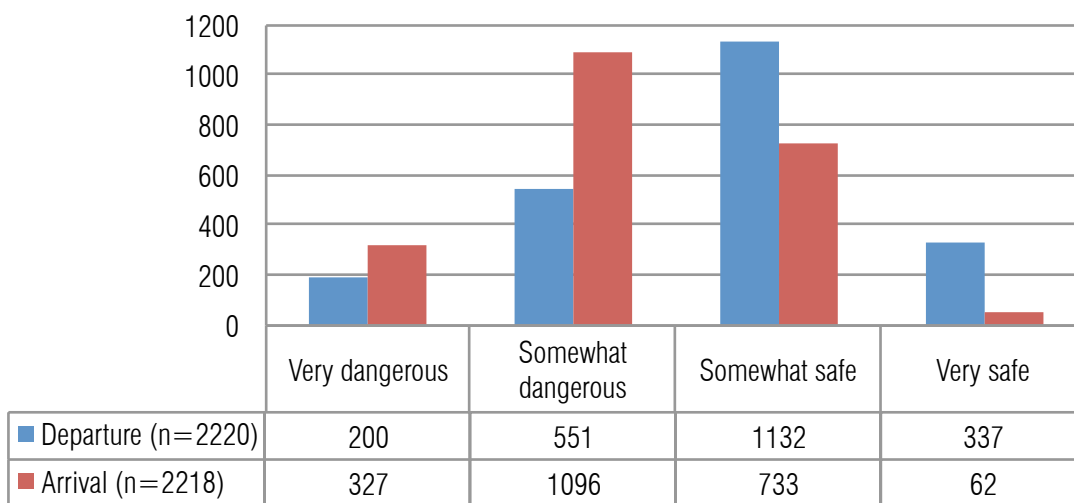


Kenscoff, Haiti

the crime because nothing would happen.³⁷ When asked how they responded to aggressive sexual attention, women and girls reported that they ignored it (n=60; 31.6%), left or sought out the company of other people (n=22; 11.6%), complained to their traveling companions (n=21; 11.1%), confronted the individual (n=19; 10.0%), asked tourism professionals for help (n=6; 3.2%), and that they did nothing in response (n=44; 23.2%).

There is little doubt that the perception of crime and insecurity can impact the tourism industry just as much (or even more) than the reality of crime experienced by tourists. This is a phenomenon experienced in many other parts of the world, and Haiti is no exception. For example, recent attacks on tourists in Brazil and India have triggered a massive reaction in the international media and are believed to be affecting wider patterns of tourism.³⁸ Indeed, tourist visas dropped by 25 per cent after reported sexual assaults in India in 2013.³⁹ Respondents were queried about their opinions of security on both arrival and within 24 hours of departure from Haiti (see figure 8). In general, tourists felt safer than they expected while in Haiti with few respondents describing Haiti as more dangerous after at the end of their visit than they had stated in their initial interview.

Figure 8. Response to the question “How safe is Haiti for tourists?” asked of respondents on their arrival and within 24 hours before their departure from Haiti (n=2227)



37 These figures add up to more than four (the number of incidents) because each woman gave multiple reasons for not reporting the event to authorities.

38 See, for example, <http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/sexual-attacks-impact-india-tourism-business-349901>.

39 See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/mar/31/india-tourist-visits-down-delhi-gang-rape>.



Interaction with Ordinary Haitians

Though interactions with ordinary Haitian citizens were often frustrating to tourists – who complained of aggressive sales or begging, unwanted sexual attention, and being asked for favors – it was interactions with ordinary Haitians that many tourists described as the most rewarding part of their visit. When asked an open-ended question about the best or most rewarding aspect of their trip to Haiti, nearly half stated that it was interactions with ordinary Haitian residents and new or renewed friendships and familial relationships with people they interacted with during their trip. As one 22-year-old Canadian Haitian put it:

“We had a great time eating all the good Haitian food, going out, going to the beach. But for me the best part was just sitting and talking with people, hearing about their lives and building relationships. Because in the long run that’s what matters, you know?”

Others agreed, citing conversations with market women, Haitians associated with projects where they volunteered, local children, and those employed to drive, guide and translate for them, as the highlight of their trip. One 57-year-old nurse who came on a medical mission from the United States remembers a late-night chat with the market woman who roasted coffee in front of her guest house.

“I’d fallen in love with this coffee. And I’d asked this woman could she sell me some to take with me to our next stop on the trip. Well she didn’t have any more beans roasted so she got out this little stove and roasted the beans for me while we sat on these little wooden chairs and talked. For hours it was just me and her and the security guard, shooting the breeze about politics, religion, family, love, loss. I learned all about Haitian marriage, polygamy, how dating works here... In all my years of travel, Haiti if one of the few unspoiled places in the Caribbean where you can still have authentic interactions with local people.”



A teenager from Montreal in Haiti with her family to visit relatives watches vendors prepare fried pork and plantains outside the historic Fort Jacques.

Interactions with local residents - both positive and negative - had a great deal of influence on how survey respondents viewed their experience overall. Those who complained of unwanted sexual attention, aggressive begging, aggressively be asked for jobs, tips or favors, or of experiencing corruption, were much less likely to wanted to return to Haiti again soon. Conversely, those who identified positive sustained interactions with local people as the most rewarding part of their trip were much more likely to say they wanted to return to Haiti again soon.

Visitors did have concrete suggestions for improvements to the existing tourism infrastructure. When asked what was the one most important need they had as a tourist that was unmet during their recent trips, most identified infrastructural issues including good roads, reasonably priced accommodations such as budget hotels, and improved internet access. Indeed, the lack of tourist-friendly budget hotels and inexpensive youth hostel accommodations was frequently cited by survey respondents as a hindrance to independent or extended travel in Haiti.⁴⁰ (See figure 9).

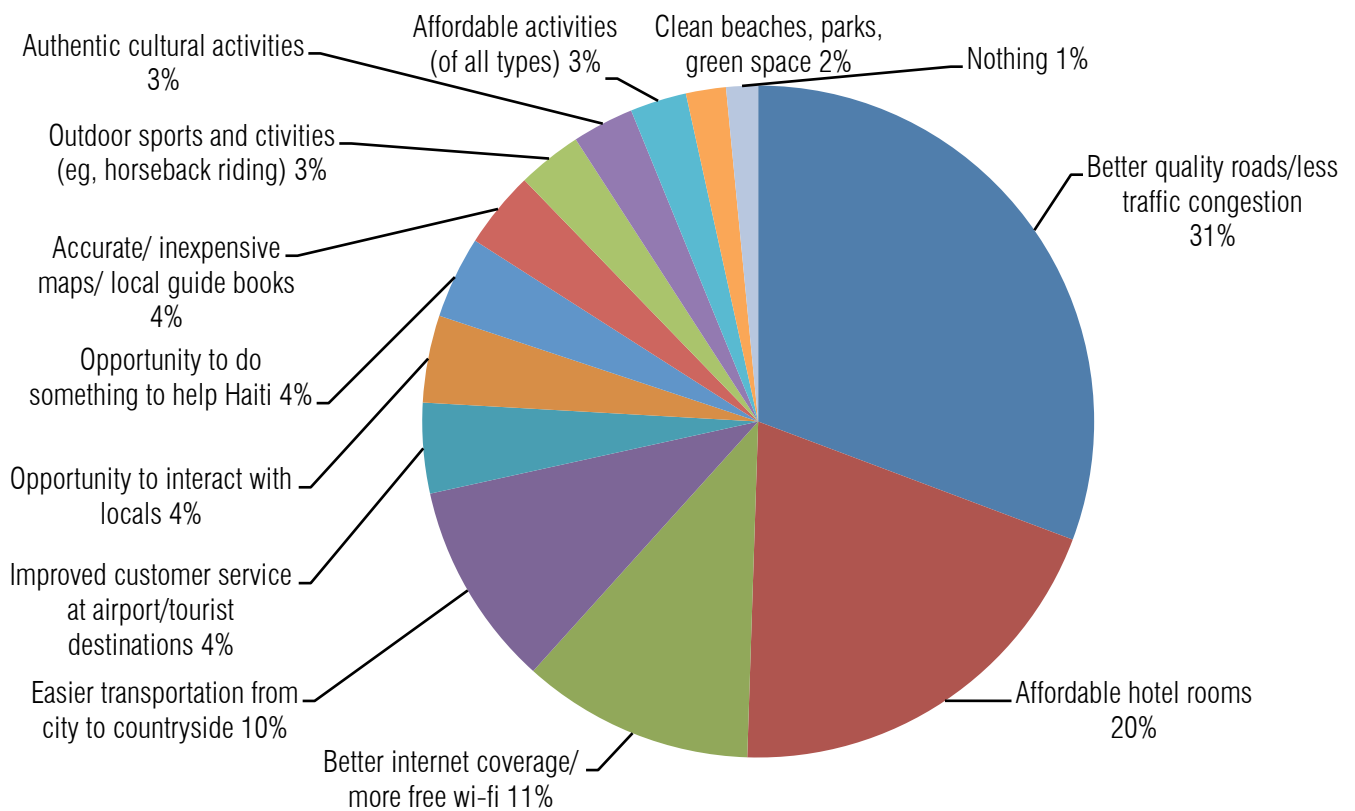


Marilene Jean Pierre makes roughly US\$10 per week selling produce and flavored rum to tourists outside a Port-au-Prince area historical site.

40 Hostel-type accommodations in Port-au-Prince are often offered by foreign-run missions. These type of accommodations can be quite sparse and typically feature a twin sized bed in a shared dorm room, limited electricity and no running water, but with breakfast included. The average cost per night is without dinner included is USD\$29.11 (SD: \$8.02) and \$37.40 (SD: \$11.85) with dinner included.



Figure 9. Response to the question “What was the one most important unmet need you had as a tourist during this recent trip?” (n=2225)



Perceptions of those in the Tourism Industry

Overall, 390 individuals who work in tourism were interviewed; they ranged from 22 to 54 years of age with a mean of 31.4 years (SD: 9.6 years). The vast majority were male (n=333, 85.3%) and most had only attended secondary school (n=280, 71.8%) with a handful reporting post-secondary vocational or academic program participation (n=14, 3.5%). Nearly all respondents were self-employed, often as drivers, guides or translators (n=346, 88.7%), with the remainder working for hotels or other businesses. The average annual income reported by respondents was USD\$2,090 (SD: \$1,314). Respondents had worked in the tourism industry for an average of 5.6 years (SD: 6.1 years).

The survey completed by tourism workers looked at perceptions of safety and experiences of crimes against tourists as well as changes in the tourism industry over time and the respondent's perception of needs and successes in the development of a tourism-based economy in Haiti. Overall, tourism workers agreed that Haiti is “very safe” for tourists and that complaints from tourists were “rare” (see figures 10 and 11). Respondents who had sustained interaction with a minimum of 100 tourists in the previous month (n=390) were asked to describe the complaints they had heard from tourists regarding crime and security in the previous 30 days.⁴¹ Complaints about poor infrastructure and roads

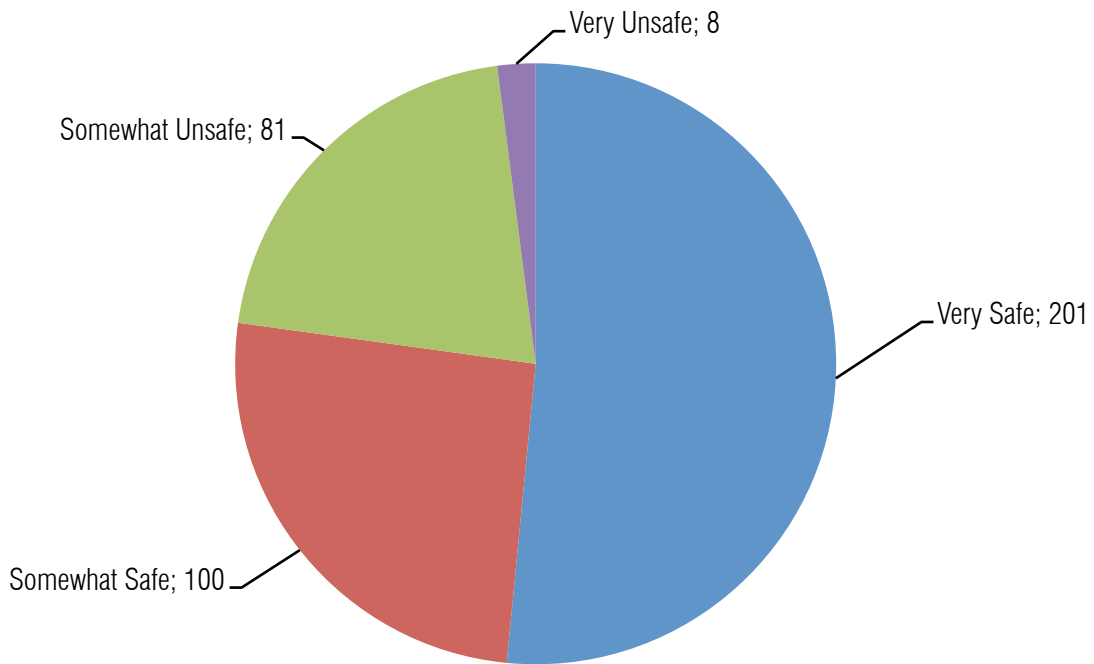
⁴¹ This should not be viewed as a definitive picture of all opinions expressed to tourism professionals as only those who had frequent sustained interactions with tourists were included; tourists might be less likely to complain to the tourism professional providing them with services if they are dissatisfied with his or her work. Additionally, some respondents may have worked in areas with a greater likelihood of complaints, such as the Port-au-Prince airport, where aggressive behavior by porters frequently elicits complaints from overwhelmed tourists arriving in the country.

as well as complaints of “feeling threatened” were the most commonly reported issues (see figure 12).⁴² When asked to describe needs and challenges facing the development of a tourism economy in Haiti, tourism professionals most commonly cited problems with infrastructure, perceptions of crime or insecurity in Haiti, and the high costs of goods and services as major hindrances.



Guerda (left), 12, and Marie, 14, hoped to sell their wares to tourists visiting Fort Jacques on a recent holiday.

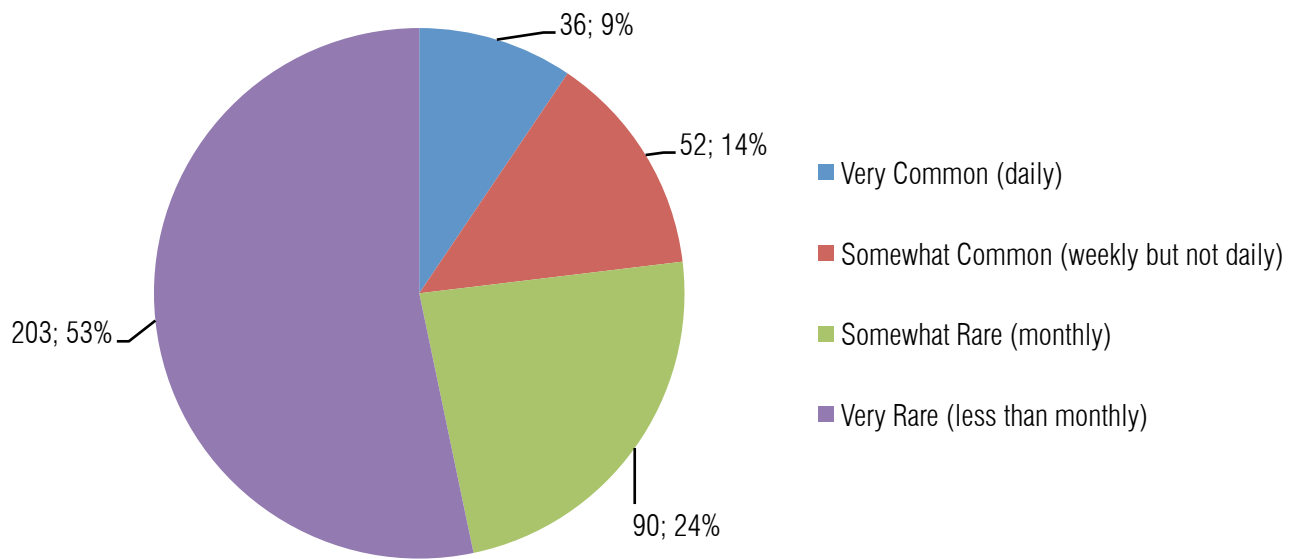
Figure 10. How safe is Haiti for Tourists right now? (n=390)



⁴² Tourism professionals described these types of incidents as one or more the following events: 1) aggressive begging and/or following or crowding the tourist after she/he refused to give the person a gift; 2) overly aggressive unwanted sexual interest by a man towards a woman; 3) verbally threatening a person during an altercation; 4) using physical intimidation by standing in the tourist’s personal space or raising their voice when trying to convince the tourist to pay for goods or services. It should be noted that though tourists may have felt threatened in these incidents, tourism workers generally described this as an overreaction.

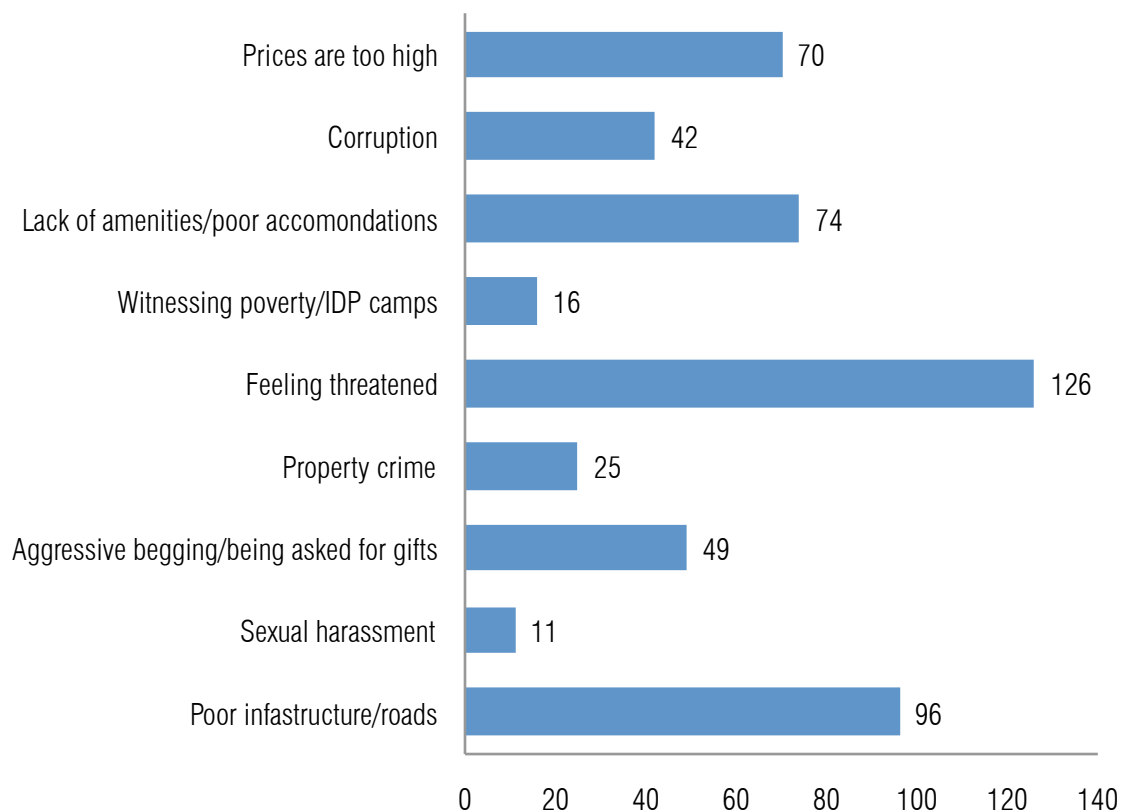


Figure 11. How often do you receive complaints from tourists about safety or other problems that make them feel uncomfortable while in Haiti? (n=381)



Tourism workers agreed that Haiti is “very safe” for tourists and that complaints from tourists were “rare”. When asked to describe needs and challenges facing the development of a tourism economy in Haiti, tourism professionals most commonly cited problems with infrastructure, perceptions of crime or insecurity in Haiti, and the high costs of goods and services as major hindrances.

Figure 12. What complaints do tourists have about their experience in Haiti? (n=377)



Conclusions

This modest study highlights some of the challenges facing tourism, including lack of infrastructure, petty property crime, and negative interactions between tourists and locals including begging and sexual harassment. It also uncovers some surprising strengths and avenues for developing the tourist economy that respects and includes ordinary Haitians but also builds on existing characteristics shaping Haiti's current tourism industry.

One encouraging finding of this study was that Haiti is a fairly safe place for tourists. Despite fears that foreigners will be targeted for serious crimes such as kidnapping, tourists rarely experienced crimes while in Haiti. Those who did most commonly reported larceny of items that had a relatively low monetary value. The perception of crime and safety in Haiti was positively changed between arrival in Haiti and the time the tourist departed the country. This was reinforced by tourism workers who also agreed that Haiti is safe for tourists and that complaints regarding safety were rare. This is not to minimize the annoyance of petty crime, as theft of small and inconsequential items was associated with a decreased desire to return to Haiti.

Recent tourism projects including expensive hotels in Petion-Ville are geared towards wealthy individuals and business travelers who can afford to pay upwards of \$150 per night for a room. However, half of all tourists who come to Haiti are working class and another ten percent live below the poverty line in their country of residence. These visitors struggle to find affordable accommodations in areas like the capital, where hotel room prices are inflated in response to the per diem rates available to development professionals and international organization employees. Efforts to improve the tourism infrastructure in Haiti should be mindful of the fact that few tourists come to Haiti solely for recreational or leisure purposes - even if wealthy tourists are desirable market segment from a foreign exchange perspective. Many do come to visit family and friends (particularly those tourists from the Haitian diaspora) and to engage in service or missionary work. Enterprising tourism professionals are already capitalizing on the desire of these visitors to engage in touristic activities in addition to their other activities in the country, though other barriers to a positive tourism experience by this population - notably the lack of infrastructure and difficult customer service experiences - still need to be addressed.

With a rich history and vibrant culture, Haiti has much to offer visitors. But tourism efforts to harness the potential presented by Haitian culture need to be mindful of possible commodification of Haiti's culture. Commodification - the process in which rituals, traditions, religious ceremonies and history become commercialized goods to be marketed in the tourism industry - could easily happen in Haiti as some of the experiences commonly cited by survey respondents such as voodoo ceremonies, are those most at risk for commodification. In cultures where tourism has commercialized sacred rituals and important historical narratives, the very identity of the residents has been deformed as locals altered their practices to meet the expectations of tourists.⁴³ This loss of culture isn't inevitable though. With careful planning and inclusion of all socioeconomic classes in tourism efforts, Haitian culture can be preserved as local residents are empowered to present and celebrate their own definition of local culture.

Proponents of Pro-Poor Tourism have also demonstrated that interest in authentic interaction with locals can be harnessed in a way that is inclusive of ordinary citizens and which demonstrates respect for a country's poor majority. However, any efforts towards this would need to be done carefully and intentionally with full involvement of ordinary Haitians to avoid

⁴³ See, for instance, Stronza (2001) and McLaren (2003).



exploiting vulnerable communities and objectifying their suffering. A critical priority for the Haitian government, then, is to explore ways of creating the conditions for positive interaction, while ensuring the integration and dignity of Haitian citizens from all backgrounds.

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