

FEATURES

# The Buccoo Reef marine park or Sandals?

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There have been concerns that the Angostura Estate and No Man's Land (also known as Sheerbird's Point) is the location under consideration for development of the Sandals all-inclusive hotel project in Tobago. It is likely that other sites are being scouted, but for now we will focus on No Man's Land and the surrounding habitats, including the Bon Accord Lagoon and Buccoo Reef area.

Bon Accord Lagoon and No Man's Land are unique public spaces etched into the identity of Tobagonians, that serve as major tourism attractions of great economic, cultural and environmental significance. The lagoon links important habitats, such as the mangroves and seagrass to the coral reefs. These are essential feeding and breeding grounds for many species of birds, fish, crabs and rays. If the resort were built in this area, would traditional uses be allowed to continue and how will the environment be affected? How will the identity of this piece of Tobago change? The proposed plan is for a self-contained, all-inclusive establishment of massive proportions, between 700 and 1000 rooms.



TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO  
**FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB**

This issue is not specific to Tobago, and we can gauge from other places how these developments might affect both the environment and society. Here are some considerations if a resort is to be developed on the No Man's Land area:

**Water quality** - Mangroves serve as a natural trap for sediments and nutrients from the land before being released into the ocean. Seagrasses also remove more sediment from the water; allowing cleaner water to flow onto the reefs. The likely removal of mangrove and other wetland vegetation associated with a resort development in the No Man's Land area will result in the loss of this buffer of land-based run-off such as may be expected with heavy rainfall during the construction and operational phases of the resort. The increased amount of sediment and nutrients in the

marine environment will not only cloud the water column but have adverse effects on the seagrass beds, fish nursery areas, and coral reef health. Mangroves also act as a natural "sink" (nature's storage area) for nutrients.

**Coastal Erosion** - Beaches and coastal areas are a dynamic environment. The natural sand trapping habitats of mangroves and lagoon systems governs the stability of the beach areas. Further the removal of coastal vegetation and the addition of solid structure can exacerbate erosion processes and change the natural hydrodynamic regime of the area affecting water flow and sand transport.

**Effects on wildlife** - Vegetation clearance will result in loss of habitat for bird species, and mangrove clearance will further result in the loss of habitat for juvenile fish and shellfish, many of which are ecologically and commercially important species e.g. parrotfish, snapper, crabs and lobster. Diving, snorkelling and glass-bottom boat tours, as well as commercial and recreational tours all rely on the presence of fish, turtles, sharks and marine life in surrounding waters for a sustainable income.

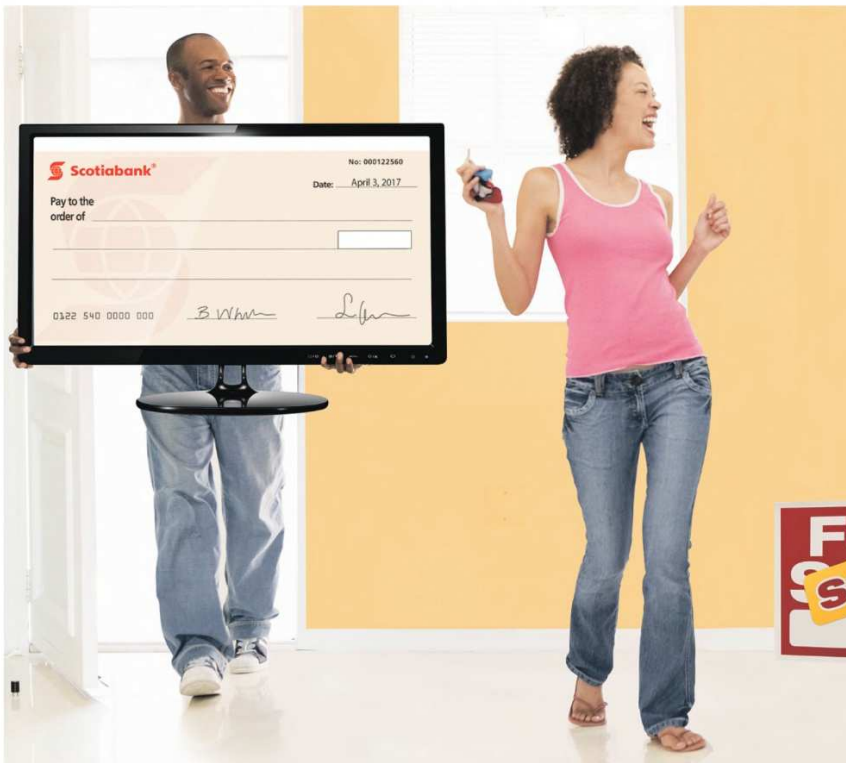
**Degradation of Buccoo Reef** - The Buccoo Reef is home to a di-



versity of marine life and its health relies on the healthy waterways of the mangrove and lagoon system. If this connection is broken or degraded there will be serious consequences for the sustained health of the reef. Buccoo Reef already has a long history of local and regional environmental disturbances. Recommendations have been proposed for its protection and conservation since the 1960s to improve the ecosystem and the livelihoods of those that rely on it. The Buccoo Marine Park was designated in the 1970s. The Buccoo Reef was also named a park of importance to Trinidad and Tobago according to the Ramsar Convention. **Loss of valuable environmental assets** - 40 percent of

the tourists that visit Tobago come for coral reef related activities. Healthy coral reefs, seagrasses and mangroves alone are estimated to provide seven trillion US dollars in assets worldwide, including income from tourism, shoreline protection and fisheries. The current estimation of (direct and indirect) economic benefit from coral reef tourism for Tobago is about US \$100 - 130 million dollars annually. Reef associated fisheries add an additional \$1 million USD, while the annual value of shoreline protection is estimated at 18 - 33 million USD; this is expected to increase with the predicted sea-level rise from climate change.

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FEATURES

# Conflicts for natural resources

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The loss of these ecosystems will have severe economic consequences on all stakeholders that rely on them (World Resource Institute Report 2008).

As the Tobago economy grows and expands it is inevitable that there will be conflicts for natural resource use e.g. between coastal communities and tourism developments. While several laws and policies have been implemented, there is still a lack of enforcement. The Buccoo Reef/Bon Accord Complex has been designated a Ramsar site of ecological significance; the Buccoo Reef Marine Park was declared a restricted area more than 40 years ago; but poor management of human activities continues to stress the area.

Proper administration, man-

agement and development of the area designated a marine park is potentially a greater source of revenue and education; than the return on investment expected from construction and maintenance of an exclusive all-inclusive resort. We can promote tourism in the Tobago without having to compromise our paradise. One important suggestion - touted by several bodies over the years including the Buccoo Reef Trust, University of the West Indies, University of Trinidad and Tobago and the Institute of Marine Affairs - includes making the Buccoo Reef a fully functional marine park. Healthy and protected coral reefs will boost current tourism and fisheries. Improved regulation and protection of these areas contribute economically by creating jobs for the protection

and utilisation and attracting a different type of visitor. The Marine Areas Preservation and Enhancement Act 1970, includes essential steps for the protection and enhancement of wildlife in the area, and promoted more scientific understanding of the area. Internationally the science of coral reefs, mangroves and reef organisms is of great interest for environmental value. Instituting a university-associated research station, with programmes and facilities run by Trinbagonians will provide jobs and income and learning opportunities for those who live in the area.

For more information on our natural environment, you can contact the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club at [admin@ttfnc.org](mailto:admin@ttfnc.org) or visit our website at [www.ttfnc.org](http://www.ttfnc.org) and our Facebook or YouTube pages.

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