



Mt. Plaisir Estate Hotel:

A local green-blue enterprise in Trinidad and Tobago 2019

CASE STUDY #5: Local Green-Blue Enterprises in the Caribbean

This case study reflects findings of a process using CANARI's **Local Green-Blue Enterprise Radar**¹. This is a tool to help local community small and micro-enterprises assess how they are delivering 'triple-bottom line' benefits (economic, environmental and social) and good governance, and what are possible areas for improvement. A focus group session is facilitated with members of the enterprise and they are asked to assess how they think that the business is doing based on a set of indicators. Each indicator is discussed, and members agree on a ranking for each. The ranking for each indicator is placed on a spider diagram, which visually represents a snapshot of how the enterprise is delivering benefits. The rich discussion helps members of the enterprise work together to assess how they are doing and areas where they want to grow.

Introduction to the enterprise

Mt. Plaisir Estate Hotel (Mt. Plaisir) is a beachfront eco-resort in Grande Riviere, a remote village on Trinidad's rugged north coast. Formerly an old boarding house on a cocoa estate, the property was



purchased by Italian photo journalist Piero Guerrini in 1993 after he fell in love with the area while on assignment about the 1992 Nobel laureate for literature, Derek Walcott.

Grande Riviere beach is a prime nesting site for sea turtles, including the Leatherback turtle. Seeing potential in the village, combined with its practically untouched surroundings and a true sense of community, Guerrini decided to open a hotel catering to eco-tourists and nature lovers.

Eco-resort Mt Plaisir Estate Hotel (Mt Plaisir): This former cocoa estate house now houses a restaurant on the ground floor and guest rooms on the upper floor, both with views and beachfront access to Grande Riviere beach, in Grande Riviere village on Trinidad's north coast. PHOTO COURTESY MT PLAISIR.

¹ See here for more information on the Local Green-Blue Enterprises Radar and CANARI's work: <http://www.canari.org/progrAMMES/issue-programmes/green-economy>

Grande Riviere has a population of about 300 people and is located about halfway between the villages of Matelot and Toco. Surrounded by lush forests, a river runs through part of the village, ending at the beach where it feeds into the Caribbean Sea. This provides visitors to Grande Riviere beach with the option of, as the locals say, ‘a river bath’ or ‘taking a dip’ in the sea. Every year, during the main turtle nesting season of March 1 to August 31, there is an influx of visitors wanting to see turtles laying their eggs in the loose sand of this beach or, later in the season, witness turtle hatchlings emerging from the sand and heading instinctively towards open water.



A view of the Caribbean Sea and Grande Riviere beach – on which turtles come to nest each year – from the upper floor of building two at Mt. Plaisir Estate Hotel, Grande Riviere, Trinidad. PHOTO COURTESY MT. PLAISIR.

Nature-based tourism is the biggest source of income for villagers, with Mt. Plaisir being one of the main employers. Local government is the other major sources of work – either at the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation or in the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government via the Community-Based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) Company Limited. A few other villagers rely on fishing and agriculture to earn a living.

Since opening its doors to guests on December 30, 1993, Mt. Plaisir has expanded to include an on-site restaurant and bar, with a total of 13 rooms, with eight on the upper floor and five at beach level. These accommodate 45 to 50 people, depending on the guests’ sleeping arrangements. The lobby and rooms feature artwork handcrafted by local artisans – mainly from wood – which has led to sales over the years, as Mt. Plaisir puts interested guests in contact with the artisan/s who made the pieces they are interested in purchasing.

Economic benefits of the enterprise

Mt. Plaisir provides full-time and part-time employment to 17 to 20 villagers, depending on peak season bookings. Most employees live in Grande Riviere, but a few come from the neighbouring villages of San Souci, Matelot and Monte Video. Locals have a greater appreciation of the importance of being a local green-blue enterprise, given that their livelihoods and that of many of their neighbours depends on eco-tourism activities and the presence of Mt. Plaisir and other eco-resorts. They have the bonus of a short commute to work versus travelling several hours a day to/from work in the more developed parts of Trinidad.

Mt. Plaisir continues to build strong economic linkages in the Grande Riviere community since several former employees have gone on to start their own businesses after gaining the necessary skills and experience at Mt. Plaisir. The latter is something Mr. Guerrini said he was most proud of when asked about the economic impact of his hotel on Grande Riviere and environs.

Mt. Plaisir feels that they need to improve on collective ownership or shareholding because it is solely owned by Mr Guerrini. There is an assistant manager who has been with the hotel for about 15 years, so there is a degree of participation in the day-to-day operations, but the owner makes all major decisions.

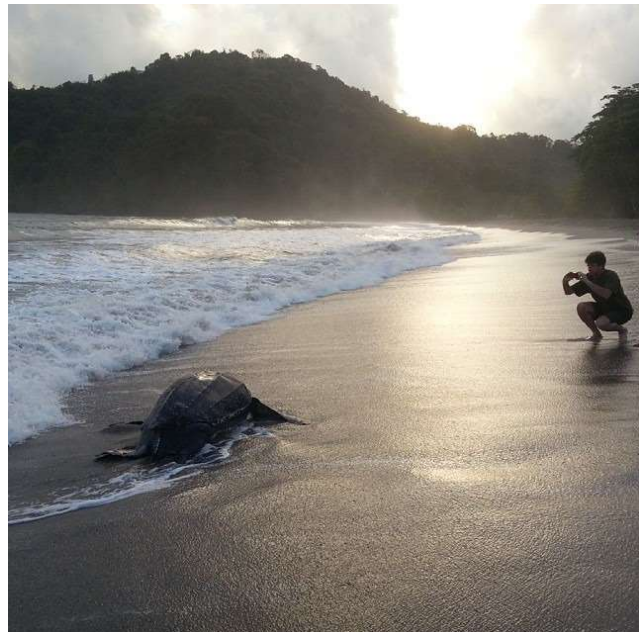


Artwork – much of it hand carved from wood – on display in the lobby at Mt Plaisir Estate Hotel, Grande Riviere, Trinidad. PHOTO COURTESY MT PLAISIR.

Environmental benefits of the enterprise

Mt. Plaisir is committed to sound environmental management practices since their operations and activities seek to minimise or avoids soil and water pollution, conserve biodiversity and manage water use. Staff ranked the hotel lower on avoiding air pollution due to the use of diesel/gasoline vehicles to transport linens to a laundromat outside the village. Staff also ranked the hotel lower on ensuring energy efficiency and use. This was attributed to the lack of solar power, which proved unfeasible due to the extensive tree cover around the property. However, use of electricity at the property was not felt to be wasteful.

However, the hotel is striving to be more energy efficient and has installed energy-efficient air-conditioning units and uses energy-efficient appliances and light bulbs throughout the property. Mr. Guerrini credits this for his “reasonable” electricity bill. The ‘green’ focus is also reflected in signs in each



A guest at Mt. Plaisir Estate Hotel in Grande Riviere, Trinidad, takes a photo of a leatherback turtle as she comes ashore during sunset to lay her eggs in the loose sand of Grande Riviere beach. PHOTO COURTESY MT. PLAISIR.

room, encouraging guests to turn off the lights and air-conditioning in their rooms when not in use. In, 2019 Mt. Plaisir hopes to install a solar-powered water heating system. While it isn't feasible to install solar panels on the hotel for general use, Mr. Guerrini said it is possible to use solar panels to provide guests with warm water – the panels can be installed a short distance away. This is likely to be done after the start of turtle nesting season, when there is extra income to make such an investment.

The 2019 turtle nesting season will see an addition to this conservation message, when Mt. Plaisir will install signs encouraging guests to use their towels more than once, thus helping to conserve water, electricity and reduce vehicle emissions because fewer towels to wash per week means fewer trips to the laundromat.

Social benefits of the enterprise

Staff at Mt Plaisir rated the enterprise very well on providing decent work. This is because the hotel is committed to hiring unskilled or lowly skilled villagers and training them as well as giving staff opportunities to learn new skills. Mt. Plaisir also strongly supports buying/supporting local products and gets much of its food from local fisherfolk and farmers as possible. Everything else is sourced from the nearest towns. Staff also rated the hotel well on giving opportunities to the marginalised and enhancing voice since they agreed that staff are encouraged to share ideas on how to improve/expand Mt. Plaisir's services with management.

The eco-resort's lowest social rating was for building capacity because although it has an experienced assistant manager, Mr. Guerrini is the sole person in charge and no one has been identified, yet, to succeed him should he no longer be able to do so. Plans are being put in place to address this.



Red Snapper, topped with herbs grown in Grande Riviere, is one of the seasonal items served for lunch at Mt Plaisir Estate Hotel, Grande Riviere, Trinidad. The meal also included potatoes and locally grown tomatoes. PHOTO COURTESY MT PLAISIR.



One of the rooms at Mt. Plaisir Estate Hotel in Grande Riviere, Trinidad. Much of the furniture in the rooms and throughout the eco-resort was made by local carpenters, using wood from the area. PHOTO COURTESY MT. PLAISIR.

Mt. Plaisir encourages development of its employees and staff are given the opportunity to learn new skills. For example, a waiter can get training in-house to become a cook if he/she so desires.

Governance of the enterprise

Mt. Plaisir continues to build a common vision since Mr. Guerrini's vision of a sustainable enterprise and his support of conservation efforts, are not only shared by villagers but are well-known locally and internationally.

Mt. Plaisir also utilises participatory decision-making in management of the business. Guest feedback via staff, and the staff's take on how situations should be handled, play a large part in Mr. Guerrini's regular assessments of how the hotel can/should be improved. That's because he spends part of the year outside of Trinidad, so communication with staff input is key to ensuring the continued success of Mt. Plaisir.

In the quarter century since it opened, the hotel has forged strong partnerships and networks with suppliers, customers, environmentalists, turtle conservation groups and government agencies with responsibility for matters involving tourism and the environment. Mt. Plaisir is known as a turtle-friendly establishment, using only red lights at night during turtle nesting season and educating guests on the importance of protecting our biodiversity.

A key area for improvement was supporting ownership of knowledge and content for two main reasons – the owner makes the major decisions and staff do not have a guide to promotion within the business. They said while one can learn new skills, it was not part of a larger process to move up the ranks.

A bright future ahead

Mt. Plaisir is an example of a successful local green-blue enterprise, promoting protection of Trinidad and Tobago's biodiversity while providing jobs and training opportunities to villagers.

The owner and staff have identified a few key areas for action to help strengthen the delivery of economic, environmental and social co-benefits and good governance, including:

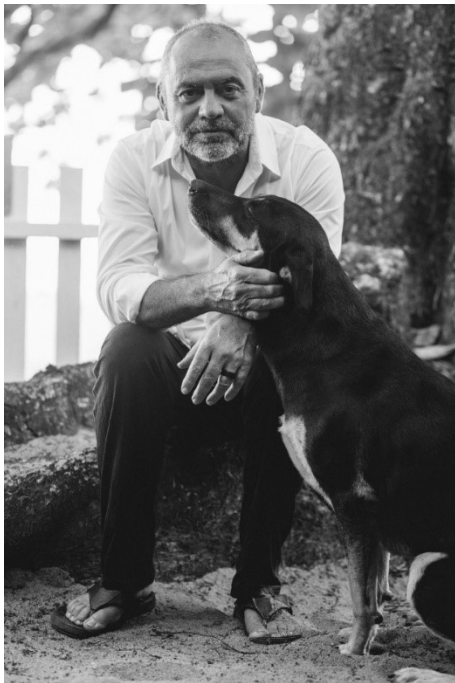
- installing a solar-powered water heating system to reduce their electricity use;
- creating a more formal system for staff promotions.
- creating a succession plan to ensure the hotel's continued existence if/when owner and manager, Piero Guerrini, is no longer able to do so; and
- installing signs encouraging guests to conserve water by reusing their towels.

Mt. Plaisir is a good example of what it means to be part of an inclusive, green and resilient economy. Always assessing what's working and what's in need of improvement, owner Piero Guerrini intends to meet guest demand for the wooden sculptors on display at his hotel by opening a little gallery in 2019. The gallery will also have a write up on the hotel's history – from abandoned cocoa estate to thriving eco-resort.

By expanding its services while maintaining its original goal of being a sustainable business, Mt. Plaisir is a successful example of a local green-blue enterprise that is always seeking new opportunities to provide economic opportunities for its community while protecting the rich natural resources of the area.



Two employees of Mt Plaisir Estate Hotel (centre) in discussion with other local green-blue enterprise stakeholders during the eco-resort's Radar session in September 2018 at the Grande Riviere Visitor Centre, Grande Riviere, Trinidad. PHOTO BY CANARI.



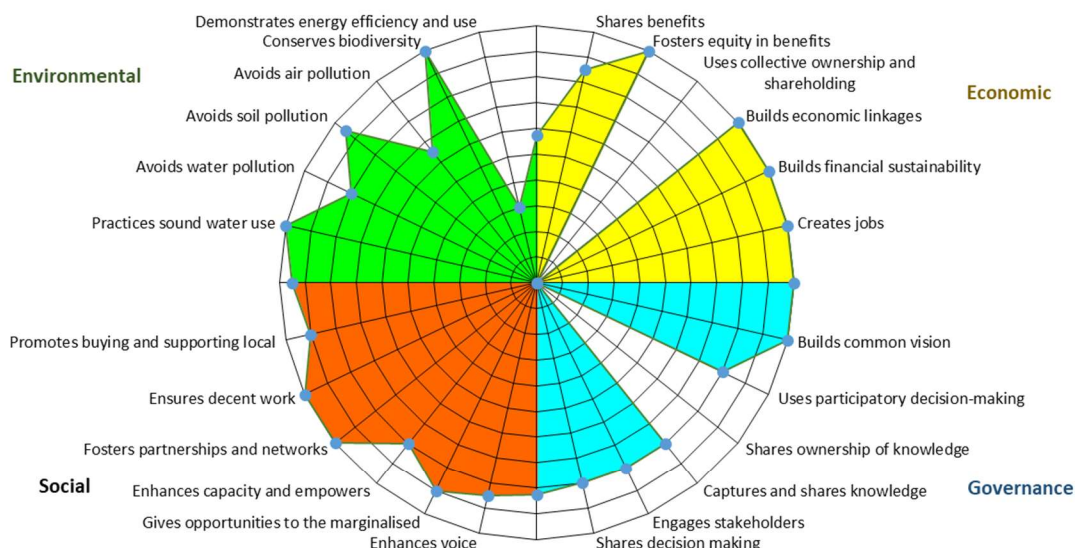
Piero Guerrini – Founder, Owner and Manager of Mt Plaisir Estate Hotel – taking a break with his best friend, Stark, outside his eco-resort in the village of Grande Riviere, Trinidad. PHOTO COURTESY MT PLAISIR.

“Everything in the world should be greener. We should all think globally and act locally, and doing the Radar helps you identify what needs to be done. Turtles are the big attraction in Grande Riviere, so it’s important that their habitat remains as untouched as possible.

Doing the Radar showed us how we can continue working towards this goal in a more efficient way. It brought to the front burner things that had been put on hold, but which really need to take priority now.

The Radar should be shared with as many businesses as possible because it helps pinpoint what needs to be done to support local green-blue enterprises, to achieve a green economy.” - Piero Guerrini, Owner and Manager of Mt Plaisir Estate Hotel.

Mt. Plaisir Estate Hotel Radar



The Radar for Mt. Plaisir Estate Hotel, developed by management and staff based on their self-assessment in September 2018. This shows that members ranked the enterprise as being very strong in delivering environmental and social co-benefits. The business is also good at delivering some economic and governance co-benefits, but staff identified opportunities for improvement in collective ownership and shareholding and sharing ownership of knowledge.



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European Union

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