

TRANSFORMATION OF PARADISE: GEOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON
TOURISM DEVELOPMENT ON A SMALL CARIBBEAN ISLAND (UTILA,
HONDURAS)

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the recent development of tourism on Utila, the westernmost island of the Bay Islands of Caribbean, Honduras. Especially during the 1990s, international tourists, mostly Europeans and North Americans, were attracted to the island because it was a relatively inexpensive place to dive on a beautiful fringing reef and to enjoy other benefits of a tropical beach community. Larger nearby islands, Roatán and Guanaja, had developed something of a tourism industry earlier.

A review of the economic and culture history of Utila reveals that modern islanders -- English-speaking Anglo- and Afro-Caribbeans originally from the Cayman Islands were preadapted for international tourism. Previously, they had interacted with the international community through the fruit trade and merchant sailing. Returning islanders enjoyed a "laid back" lifestyle which was also appealing to tourists.

Because Utila has been a relatively cheap spot for tourists, it first attracted a "backpacker" type and when Europeans seeking cheap diving and drugs discovered the island, its reputation as a preferred destination attracted this lower level of the tourist types. As the tourism industry matured, interest in up-scale facilities has increased and a few small resorts have been constructed. At the moment, construction of an international airport, access roads to resort areas, and other large scale alterations of the landscape are locally severe and might be expected to seriously affect the island's environmental stability. Another source of significant environmental and culture change are the Spanish-speaking Hondurans from the mainland, who have been attracted to Utila by the island's reputation as a place of developing tourism and economic prosperity.

Introduction

Since World War II, tourism has blossomed as a major economic component of the world market. Undoubtedly connected to globalism, this institution has become one of the largest industries in the world (Chambers 1997). From major cities to remote locales, the increasing dependence on tourism as an economic supplementary and in some cases economic mainstay is astounding. Traditional forms of economic activity are increasingly abandoned for the more informal tourist related work sphere. However, transformations occurring as a result of dependence on tourism are not solely economic. Tourism can also bring about cultural, social, and political changes significantly affecting a region's ethnic and historical identity and geography.

Much of Central America did not participate in the initial tourist boom that occurred after World War II (Davidson 1974). It was not until the 1960s that tourism became a significant catalyst for change in this region. Honduran tourism was no exception. In fact Honduras had been largely bypassed because of infrastructural inequities, geographically restricting tourism flow to the western one-third of the country, leaving a significant portion of highly marketable tourist area untouched. However, in the 1960s, many of the Central American governments saw the potential tourism could have in their economic futures. For each Central American country, specific geographic regions with their respective cities were designated as having qualities appealing for international tourism. Among these designated regions, Honduras's Bay Islands were seen as a large asset to the country's international tourist market (figure 1). Utila, the smallest of the three major islands is the focus of this research.

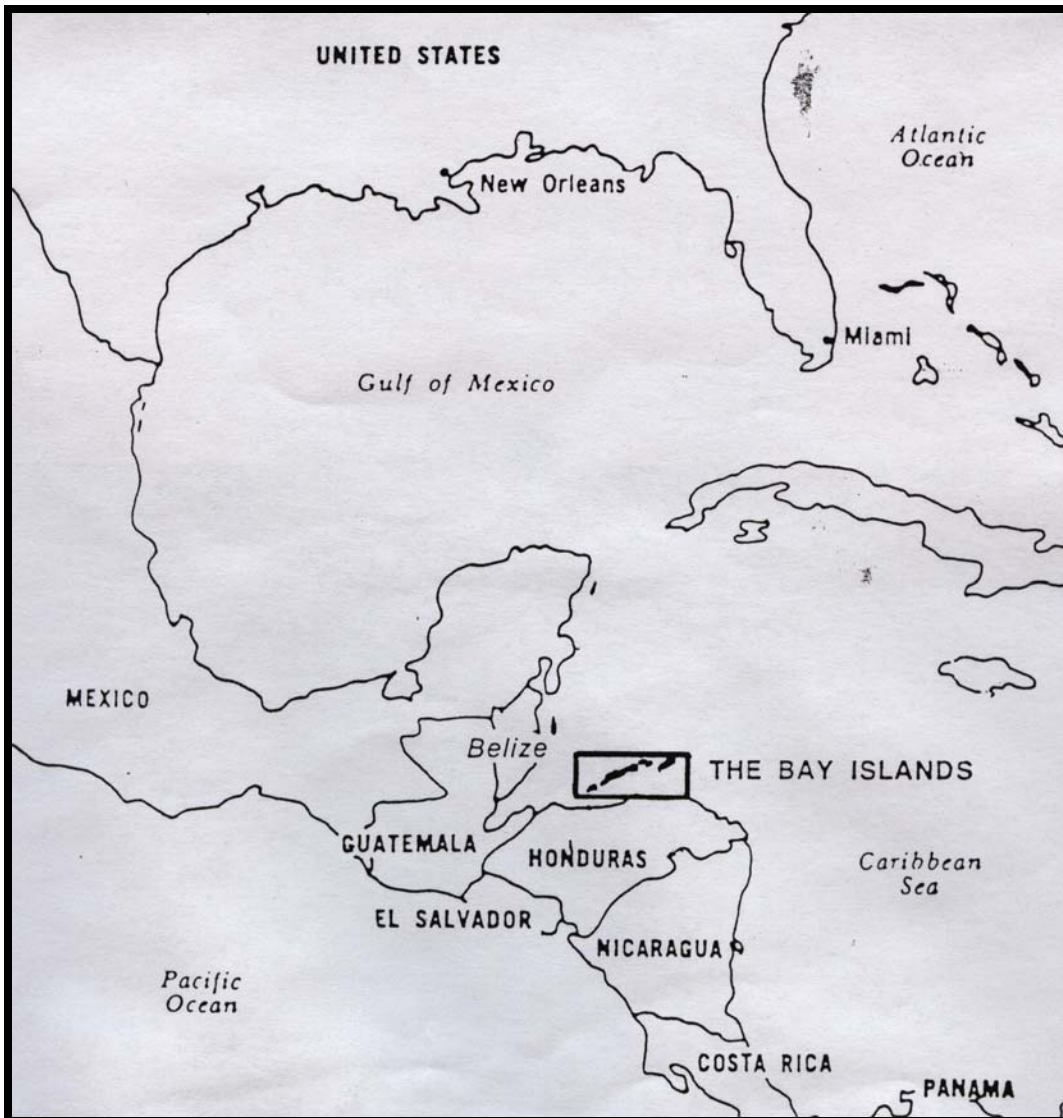


Figure I.1: The Bay Islands' location in Central America

During the last two decades island population has increased significantly and the composition has changed drastically. Since 1980, the population has virtually doubled. This date coincides with the national decision to push tourism as a means for economic prosperity.

The Bay Islands remained relatively remote until well into the twentieth century. Although they were accessible to wealthy explorers, scholars and the occasional fugitive, for the modern tourist, getting to the islands was difficult because the only transportation

from the mainland was by small dories and fishing boats (Keenagh 1937). Though a modern tourism industry emerged in the 1960s it grew slowly until the 1990s. Documentation of this development by academics has primarily focused on the environmental impacts that the industry has had and potentially could have on the islands (Nance 1970; Vega et al 1993; Stonich 1998; Parker 2000; Harborne 2000). More specifically this attention has focused on Roatán because development has been concentrated there (Nance 1970; Vega et al 1993; Stonich 1998; Stonich 2000).

The physical geography of Utila and the Bay Islands is perhaps one of the most valuable features for the development of its tourism industry. The tropical environment, including the Caribbean Sea, provide important resources for the type of tourism that is popular today.

The Bay Islands, including Utila, have a distinctive and diverse cultural heritage. The *mélange* of ethnicities stemming from its settlement history has created the diverse population seen today. This cultural diversity has been important in the island's tourism industry. Traditionally Bay Islanders have been culturally and economically oriented to the sea. Livelihoods depended on ship building, fishing and more recently merchant sailing. Documenting the shift from a formal fishing economy to a tourism economy on Utila will also be a major focus.

Being the smallest of the three major Bay Islands, Utila has historically drawn a different type of tourist. Those not interested in big resorts and lavish facilities, looking for a fairly “cheap” way to see Central America and the Caribbean, find their way to this island. It would seem that this type of tourist has determined the character of tourism

facilities on Utila. In addition to the international “backpacker” phenomena associated with tourism on Utila, the component of mainland Hondurans is growing.

During the summer of 1999, as an undergraduate student, I visited Utila for the first time and first contemplated this project. It became apparent that tourism was an overwhelmingly important aspect of life and local livelihood on the island. In the following chapters I hope to explain how Utila was before tourism became important and to illustrate how this industry has grown and the effects it is having on the island and its population.

Chapter 1

Tourism as a Geographical Phenomenon

There are three wants that can never be satisfied: that of the rich, who want something more; that of the sick, who want something different; and that of the traveler, who says, "Anywhere but here."
(Emerson 1968)

Tourism is an inherently geographical phenomenon. Tourism's concepts are embedded in the physical and cultural attributes of a visited place and the movement of people from the realm of the known to the realm of the unfamiliar or exotic. Each destination is important, as it holds some physical or cultural attribute that is distinctive to that place and thus the tourist seeks out this distinctiveness on the Earth's surface. Tourism also holds particular spatial characteristics that lure tourists, such as different climates, physical landscapes, cultural landscapes, and often ethnic variation. These spatial characteristics are an important quality to a specific region's tourism industry.

Geographers have approached tourism studies using spatial-analytical methods that helped to identify historical connections to contemporary patterns. This approach enabled scholars to forecast possible changes to the physical and cultural landscapes of a particular place resulting from tourists flows and activities. The geographical scope and economic size of modern tourism encompasses a wide range of disciplines. Thus, the body of literature covering tourism related topics is enormous. In this chapter I will review some of the early literature that is important in understanding the ways in which tourism research has taken place. I will also discuss tourism as a modern industry in three separate but equally important and over lapping categories, world tourism, tourism in Central America, and tourism in Honduras. I will also discuss my research

methodologies in the field and the geographical perspectives I used as I conducted my fieldwork on one very small island.

Review of the Literature

Geographers became interested in tourism as a subject of research in the 1930s (McMurray 1930; Jones 1933; Brown 1935; Selke 1936; Carlson 1938). Ralph Brown (1935:471), in an article in the *Geographical Review*, offered “an invitation to geographers” writing “From the geographical point of view the study of tourism offers inviting possibilities for the development of new and ingenious techniques for research, for discovery of facts of value in their social implications in what is virtually a virgin field.” However, as Campbell (1966) noted, this so called invitation, was accepted by only a few geographers and therefore techniques for collection, analysis, interpretation, and cartographic representation of tourism data lagged (Deasy 1949). After World War II, however, those who began conducting tourism studies did so under the guise of economic geography, and looked at the regional and destination economic impacts of tourism as well as travel routes (Eiselen 1945; e.g. Crisler and Hunt 1949; Deasy and Griess 1966). American geographers such as Cooper (1947) were involved in discussions concerning seasonality and travel motivations which became a major precursor to works conducted in the 1980s and 1990s (Hall and Page 1999). By the 1950s, although many scholars felt tourism studies had not yet received the proper attention by geographers, McMurray (1954) included tourism studies in a chapter in an overview text on the state of geography in the United States (*American Geography: Inventory and Prospect*).

American geographers were not the only scholars conducting tourism research during these initial decades. In Britain and Canada, Gilbert and Wolfe, also delved into tourism studies. Gilbert (1939, 1949) published articles concerning British seaside resorts while Wolfe (1951) conducted research on “cottaging” in Ontario. Wolfe’s studies created a base for later works on second home development (Coppock 1977). After Gilbert’s initial work little other research was conducted in the United Kingdom until the 1960s.

During the 1960s geographical research on tourism accelerated and continued to grow rapidly over the next decade. Several influential reviews were produced in the 1960s such as, Murphy (1963), Winsberg (1966), Wolfe (1967), and Mitchell (1969a and b). These authors focused on the geography of the tourism industry which led to works conducted by regional geographers such as Guthrie (1961), Christaller (1963) and Piperoglou (1966). However, as Williams and Zelinsky (1970:549) noted,

virtually all the scholarship in the domain of tourism has been confined to intra-national description and analysis...In view of its great and increasing economic import, the probable significance of tourism in diffusing information and attitudes, and its even greater future potential for modifying patterns of migration, balance of payments, land use, and general socio-economic structure with the introduction of third-generation jet transport and other innovations in travel, it is startling to discover how little attention the circulation of tourists has been accorded by geographers, demographers, and other social scientists.

The concerns of Williams and Zelinsky are at the forefront of tourism geography today, as well as the growing concern of the increases in leisure time world wide. Mercer (1970) suggested a discussion of the increase in leisure time in the affluent countries of the world in the 1970s and commented that, “leisure still remains a sadly neglected area of study in geography.” Whether a dearth still exists today in this aspect in geographical

studies is open for discussion, however, few can argue that it is important in determining source regions for tourist.

Several influential publications appeared during the 1970s and 1980s that indicated tourism studies in geography were increasing. Geographers such as Cosgrove and Jackson (1972), Lavery (1971), McCannell (1973), Robinson (1976), Coppock (1977), Butler (1980), Pearce (1981, 1987a), Mathieson and Wall (1982), Patmore (1983), Pigram (1983), and Smith (1983) published articles and texts concerning the new field. However, as Mitchell (1979:235) noted in the introduction to a special issue of *Annals of Tourism Research*, “the geography of tourism is limited by a dearth of published research in geographical journals.” Likewise, Pearce (1979, 1995) commented that the geography of tourism was not coherent and lacked a conceptual and theoretical base. Perhaps he was unaware that Butler (1980; 1991) had modeled cycles of evolution of destinations in the 1980s and has published on this topic into the 1990s.

While the study of the geography of tourism remains on the periphery of geography in general, this subject does not occur in, “isolation from wider trends in geography and academic discourse nor of the society of which we are a part” (Hall and Page 1999:7). A large degree of the research conducted by geographers has used techniques inherent in spatial analysis and applied geography (ibid). Hall and Page (1999) suggested that the three most influential works on the geography of tourism written in the last two decades (Pearce 1987, 1995 and Smith 1983) approached their research from a spatial perspective with a small emphasis on the role of behavioral research. However in the 1990s geographers such as Shaw and Williams (1994) took a more critical approach to tourism studies and showed the importance of other factors

such as the political economy, production, consumption, commodification and globalization in the ever shifting character of tourism. This perspective shift is important, because tourism studies connect with many other aspects of geography. Tourism as its own phenomenon engages topics beyond what can be seen and experienced in the natural environment of a particular place. As Matley (1976:5) observed, “There is scarcely an aspect of tourism which does not have some geographical implications and there are few branches of geography which do not have some contribution to make to the study of the phenomenon of tourism.”

Tourism as a World Phenomenon

Tourism is the world’s largest industry and continues to grow (WTTC 1993; Prosser 1994; Pearce 1995; Lundberg, Krishnanmoorthy, and Stavenga 1995; Goodwin 1995; WTTC 1998; Meethan 2001). Total gross expenditures for travel and tourism were \$3.2 trillion in 1993 or, approximately six percent of the global GNP (WTTC 1993). By 2005 the number of tourism related jobs is expected to exceed 350 million (ibid). In the 1990s more than 200 million people were directly or indirectly employed in the global tourism industry and 20,000 jobs are created for every 1 million dollars of revenue generated (Smith 1995). Tourism accounts for more than 11 percent of all consumer spending world wide (ibid). In the 1990s, in the United States, tourism produced 13.4 percent of the nation’s GNP, generated \$50 billion in tax revenue and employed 11 million people (Lundberg, Krishnanmoorthy, and Stavenga 1995).

According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO) international tourist arrivals grew from 93 million in 1963 to 284 million in 1981 (WTO 1997). By 1990 arrivals had reached 456 million and are expected to double by 2010 (WTO 1997).

However, after the recent international terrorist events these expectations are not likely to be met. It appears that the stage is set for the continued growth of tourism in the developed world in the quaternary sector of the economy. Many developing nations are also moving towards a more service-based economy as governments begin to comprehend the potential economic magnitude of the industry. In recent years the most rapid growth of the tourism industry has been in the developing world. In these countries tourism makes up a substantial portion of their gross national and gross domestic products as well as a major portion of their foreign earnings. Many scholars feel these countries show the greatest prospects for continued growth (Laarman and Durst 1987; Carter 1994;). However, tourism is not a panacea for the economic crises of the developing world although it has become an economic fact in today's society.

Tourism in Central America

Central America's reputation for political unrest and inadequate transportation and infrastructure has caused an uneven growth in tourism since the 1960s. However, in 1965 the Central American Bank for Economic Integration, in conjunction with the U.S. Agency for International Development's regional office for Central America, commissioned Porter International Company to examine the possibilities of the development and promotion of tourism in the region (Ritchie et al 1965). According to Ritchie and his associates (1965:1),

The objective was that the conclusions and recommendations reached could serve as a basis for a Master Plan of Tourism, which would permit the promotion, financing, and execution of specific investment projects for the development of a tourism industry in Central America.

For each country specific locations were designated as having qualities favorable for tourism. These qualities included important historical-cultural sites, such as Esquipulas in Guatemala, and areas where the physical geography was conducive to tourists, such as the Bay Islands of Honduras. David Weaver (1994), some three decades later, discussed characteristics of tourism development that followed the recommendations of Ritchie and his associates. Weaver suggested that tourism development in Central America was based on physical and cultural geographical factors. The insular region, according to Weaver (1994), attracts tourists because of its appealing climate, extensive beaches, developed resorts, and its close proximity to the tourism markets of the United States. In this region the traditional “3s” (sand, sea and sunshine) type of tourism takes place. The mainland region of Central America relies on the extensive culture-history of the Maya and other pre-Colombian tribes and the more recent colonial additions for its tourism draw (Weaver 1994). However, this region also has the “3s” attraction along with more highly diverse natural areas and ecosystems (ibid).

The number of tourist visiting Central America from 1960 to 1970 grew from 124,000 to 744,000 (WTO 1993, 1994, 1996, 1997). This growth followed the international trend during this period. Annual tourist arrivals between 1970 and 1975 in this region rose from 744,000 to nearly 1.7 million (WTO 1993). This increase surpassed the global rate of growth, which was documented at 134 percent, as well as the rate of the growth to the Americas (118%) and to Mexico (143%) (WTO 1993). The next decade (1975-1985), however, did not follow this trend. Total tourist arrivals to the region dropped from 1.7 million to 1.1 million annually (Table 1.1) (WTO 1993; West and Augelli 1989). The decline was associated with the highly publicized escalating violence

throughout the isthmus (Chant 1990). Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, the countries with the most widespread public violence, lost the most tourists. However, Costa Rica, the country with the most stable reputation, was also affected to a lesser extent by the regional drop. Honduras' international tourist arrivals during this time were slightly lower than the other countries in the region and remained relatively constant. Panama, the hub for air and sea travel in the region, according to West and Augelli (1989), had always enjoyed a steady flow of tourists. During the regional lull in tourism Panama's arrivals increased. Susan Stonich (2000) associates this increase with the inclusion of U.S. military personnel and their families in the national statistics.

Since the 1980s the governments of the Central America countries have been in the process of strengthening their economies through new avenues of development (Stonich 1993). Stonich suggested that these avenues are designed to "integrate their economies, diversify exports, promote foreign investment, and increase foreign exchange earnings" (Stonich 1993:5). One of the most important of these tactics has been the promotion of international tourism. However, because these countries are still considered developing relying on tourism as a means to fix their economies remains problematic. Tourism is cyclical in nature and in many developing countries disasters have ensued as tourism becomes a leading economic component (Butler 1991). Much like the product cycle of economic theory, the product cycle of tourism development of a given area or the development of a specific type of tourism must pass through specific stages (ibid). The first stage of development, like that of a new product, begins as a relatively unknown place with just a trickle of visitors over a given period (ibid). As it becomes better known its popularity grows until it reaches its popularity peak. Once this happens, visitation to

this site will reach a saturation point and then it will begin its decline (Butler 1991; Prosser 1994). Destination can take steps to overcome the likelihood of decline as suggested by Robert Butler (1991) that will reinvent the site and continue to attract tourists. However, further complicating the tourism product cycle is the capricious nature of the tourist. It has been suggested that tourists often favor the in-style, most publicly advertised places, and move on to new sites once the fad has dissipated (Butler 1991). Unless the site can reinvent itself the likelihood of decline is probable.

Among other drawbacks discussed widely, and one of the most important for this discussion, is the possibility of economic leakage. Economic leakages occur most often in developing countries because unfettered foreign development and investment are allowed in hopes of gaining significant revenues from tourism growth (Goodwin 1995). Leakages arise as a result of large ownership percentages held by foreigners or corporations and thus much of the revenue generated leaves the host country and returns to the country of investment origination (Beekhuis, 1981). External labor brought into a host country by foreign investors can exacerbate leakage problems (Wheatcroft 1998). John Beekhuis (1981) calculated that Central America's leakage rates ranged from 30 percent to 50 percent while in Cancún, Mexico estimates were as high as 90 percent (Garret 1989). In 1994 Erlit Cater (1994) suggested that 90 percent of the coastal development in Belize was foreign owned thus leakage rates were much higher.

Under the leadership of Mexico, in 1988, the presidents of El Salvador, Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras began one of the region's earliest attempts at promoting regional tourism with the creation of *El Mundo Maya* (The Mayan World). Relying upon the financial assistance of groups in the United States and Europe the five presidents

signed a joint tourism promotion pact (Stonich 2000). The group's first goal was to secure financial and technical assistance from the European Community to expand both the public and private tourism sectors in the five countries (ibid). The goal of the project, as stated by Mexico's Minister of Tourism was to, "showcase the history and culture of the entire region as one entity without borders ("Neighbors to Aid Mayan Ruins" 1991). Cancún would become the "doorway" for the world to the project (ibid). In 1991 the European Community loaned the group \$1 million and the project began (Stonich 2000). In each country three types of tourism were endorsed: cultural/historical tourism, coastal tourism, and ecotourism or adventure tourism (Rivas 1990). Fourteen tourism circuits were established, each containing one of the three types of tourism (ibid). Examples of three of the circuits established in Honduras were the Copán ruins (cultural/historical tourism), Roatán Island (coastal beach tourism) and *la Mosquitia/Río Plátano* Biosphere Reserve (eco/adventure tourism). The inclusion of Roatán and *la Mosquitia* are ironic because these two sites have never been inhabited by the Maya, although it is likely that Maya might have visited these places. However, these areas have become popular tourist attractions for Honduras and have been featured in several articles promoting Honduran tourism (Stephens 1989; Basch 1992; Yost 1992; Gordon 1993; Sletto 1993; Olson 1994; Danger 1999; Ferrari 2001). Other projects were planned, along with the initial circuits, which included infrastructural improvements (airports, roads and marinas), increased hotel construction and international marketing (Stonich 2000). In El Salvador and Chiapas, Mexico archeological projects were initiated and upon completion were to be included in *El Mundo Maya* (ibid). More than two million international tourists visited

Central America annually during the 1990s exceeding the arrivals from the previous decades (WTTC 2001).

The promotion of Central America as a single tourism region has become a trend in the 1990s. The joint initiative first began with the creation of *El Mundo Maya* and then in 1996 the Central American presidents signed *the Declaration of Montelimar II*. The declaration designated the tourism industry as the principal growth strategy for the isthmus and it emphasized the necessity for cooperative efforts among all the Central American countries in making the region a single tourism destination (Stonich 2000). The promotion of these initiatives has been supported financially by several international donors such as the World Bank, the International Development Bank, the United Nations, and USAID (ibid). In 1996 tourism contributed approximately \$1.6 billion to Central America's foreign exchange earnings and more than 2.6 million tourists visited the region that year (WTO 1997). 2001 estimates have suggested tourist arrivals reached 4 million and created \$3 billion in foreign exchange earnings making tourism a viable component in the Central American economy (WTO 2001).

Tourism in Honduras

The Honduran government began actively promoting tourism as a national development strategy in the late 1960s (Ritchie et al 1965). Emphasis was placed on the development of three separate physical and cultural geographical areas: the Mayan archeological site of Copán, the beaches and colonial history of the North Coast, and the coral reefs of the Bay Islands (ibid). *La Mosquitia* and the *Río Plátano* Biosphere Reserve were added as ecotourism became a popular world trend in the 1990s (Rivas 1990).

The government of Honduras, in the 1980s, established a set of laws creating special “tourism zones.” These zones helped attract foreign investments by providing liberal tax and import incentives. However, Article 107 of the Honduran Constitution prohibited foreign ownership of land 40 km from the Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Fonseca or the international borders of Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Recognizing this barrier, the Honduran National Congress, in 1990, passed Decree Law 90/90 to allow foreign property purchases in designated tourism zones, established by the Ministry of Tourism, in order to build permanent or vacation homes. Areas along the North Coast and the Bay Island were among the most popular for investment. Continued acceleration of these “neoliberal” economic policies occurred during the 1990s specifically with the creation of Tourism Free Zones in 1993 (Decree Number 98-93 1993). Tourism investors were given the same benefits as the private Export Processing Zones including; 100% foreign ownership of property, federal and municipal tax exemptions, tax free imports for any materials needed to further the industry (including boats, planes, and worn equipment)(Decree Number 98-93 1993). During the first five months of 1995 the tourism industry in Honduras generated US \$90 million which was a 62% increase from all of 1994 (Durón 1995). The Bay Islands accounted for almost one-fourth of this total (ibid). According to Maria Callejas de Durón (1995), Senior Commercial Officer for Honduras, in 1995 tourism ranked fifth in the revenue generation for the country and had not reached its full potential. Aside from the tourist attractions offered by the continuous “summer-like weather,” Durón (1995) felt that the country still lacked additional attractions in the areas where the flow of foreign visitors was greatest. However, with the institution of the Tourism Free Zone Law, ecotourism programs, and the national demand

for additional tourism projects, she felt tourism had the potential to become the country's leading industry (Durón 1995). By 1997 tourism ranked third in foreign exchange earnings (US \$ 143 million) behind coffee (US \$330 million) and bananas (US \$ 239 million) (Stonich 2000).

Following the Tourism Free Zone Laws, in 1999 the Law of Tourism Incentives was passed. The National Congress stated their intentions with this new law; it was to continue to:

facilitate the development of the nation's tourism sector by providing fiscal incentives that will encourage greater participation by private investors, both local and foreign, in the development of tourism products, thereby stimulating the creation of jobs, promoting investment, and increasing the nation's intake of currency and tax revenue" (Decree Number 314-98 1999).

The incentives granted under this law included: a ten year exoneration from income tax payments, exoneration from payment of taxes and tariffs on the import of goods and services including printed advertising materials, and exoneration from the payment of taxes, fees or any other kind of financial obligation on cultural presentations and shows (Decree Number 314-98 1999). Tourism was also considered by the Honduran government to be an economic activity that would be closely linked to the cultural and social development of the Honduran people. Projects devoted to rescuing cultural heritage and conserving natural landscapes were given an added exoneration from the payment of municipal property taxes (ibid). According to the Ministry of Tourism, all activities carried out under the stipulations of this law were to comply with the sustainable development of the entire nation (ibid). Tourism was to have only minimal impacts on the cultural and natural resources of Honduras but being of maximum benefits to the Honduran people (ibid).

In 2001 tourism brought an estimated US \$300 million to the economy of Honduras making it the third greatest financial generator of income for the country (Instituto Hondureño de Turismo 2001). According to the Honduran Institute of Tourism (2000) within an estimated four years tourism will be the number one source of dollars for Honduras. After Hurricane Mitch the tourism sector had 92% of its infrastructure intact and 90% of the country's natural and cultural attractions were unaffected (Decree Number 314-98 1999). This well surpassed the countries leading dollar producer, agriculture, which suffered severe setbacks. These figures illustrate the overwhelming resilience of the industry and its potential for the future.

Specific Aims of the Study and Methodology

The purpose of this research is to document the development of tourism on the island of Utila, Honduras and the affects this new industry is having on the social, economic, and environmental aspects of the island. Traditionally, Bay Islanders have been culturally and economically oriented to the sea (Davidson 1974). Livelihoods once depended on agriculture and fishing and, more recently, merchant sailing (Nance 1965; Lord 1975; Davidson 1974). Documenting the shift from the merchant sailing economy to a tourism economy on Utila will be a major focus. In addition, because nearly two-thirds of Utila is mangrove swamp and tourism development is expanding into this area, ecological alterations will be documented.

Being the smallest of the three major Bay Islands, Utila has historically drawn a different type of tourist. Those not interested in big resorts and lavish facilities, looking for a fairly "cheap" way to see Central America and the Caribbean, find their way to this island. It would seem that this type of tourist has determined the character of tourism

facilities on Utila. In the literature, a similar type of tourist population has been documented (Scheyvens 2002; Kottak 1999; Darcy and Wearing 1999; Hampton 1998). Kottak (1999), gives an example of this type of tourist in a small fishing village in Brazil, and discusses the affects these tourists have on the economics, society, and cultural. As a subsidiary to the core of my research documenting a similar type of tourist and their effects on the island will also be addressed. Understanding how this new tourist economy has affected and potentially will affect the island's landscape also enters the research question. In addition to the international "backpacker" phenomena associated with tourism on Utila, the component of mainland Hondurans is growing. Documentation of this growth will also be discussed.

During the summer of 1999, as an undergraduate student, I visited Utila for the first time. During this trip this project began to take shape. Although we were in the country to observe the reconstruction efforts of the Honduran people after Hurricane Mitch, the week spent on Utila lead to the realization that the Bay Islands functioned much differently than the rest of Honduras. It was evident that tourism was the primary income producer for the island. However, the type of tourist visiting Utila was quite different than on the other two major islands and led me to expand this thesis to include a chapter on this character.

Over a three month period from May until August 2001, I lived and worked on the island. During this time I came to know many of the islanders and tourists and through these personal interactions gathered much of the information for this paper. There is a definite and distinct link between the islanders and their environment that is played out in social and economic interactions. Understanding this link and the ways in

which the islanders manipulate these interactions to fit personal needs and gains is an important part of this research. Global factors, apparent during my visit on the island, continue to play a role in the economic and social lives of the islanders. Therefore, it was necessary to blend the theories of cultural ecology and political ecology in an attempt to make sense of the social, economic, and natural environmental state of the island.

Chapter 2

The Physical Environment of the Bay Islands (Resources for Tourism)

The physical geography of Utila and the Bay Islands is perhaps one of the most valuable features for the development of its tourism industry. The tropical environment, including the Caribbean Sea, provide important resources for the type of tourism that is popular today. In this chapter, I will discuss the physical geography of Utila and begin to show how these attributes are important to the continued development of the industry.

Location and Size of the Bay Islands

The Bay Islands comprise one of the fifteen *departamentos* (equivalent to a state in the United States) in the Republic of Honduras. Situated in an arc 29 to 60 kilometers off the north coast, the Bay Islands consist of three major islands, five minor islands and sixty-five cays (Davidson 1974). The largest and most predominant of these islands, in terms of land and population, are Roatán, Guanaja, and Utila (figure 2.1). Utila is the smallest of the major islands, approximately eleven kilometers long and five kilometers wide. East Harbor is the only agglomerated settlement, however, twelve populated cays are located off the southwestern end of the island. The total land area of the Bay Islands is approximated at 238 square kilometers (ibid). Roatán, the central island accounts for over one-half of the islands total.

Topography

The islands are the above water appearance of the *Bonacca Ridge*, which forms the northern edge of the continental shelf in the Caribbean. The ridge is a non-continuous underwater extension of the *Sierra de Omoa*. This mainland mountain range, located near the southern escarpment of the Bartlett Trough, disappears into the

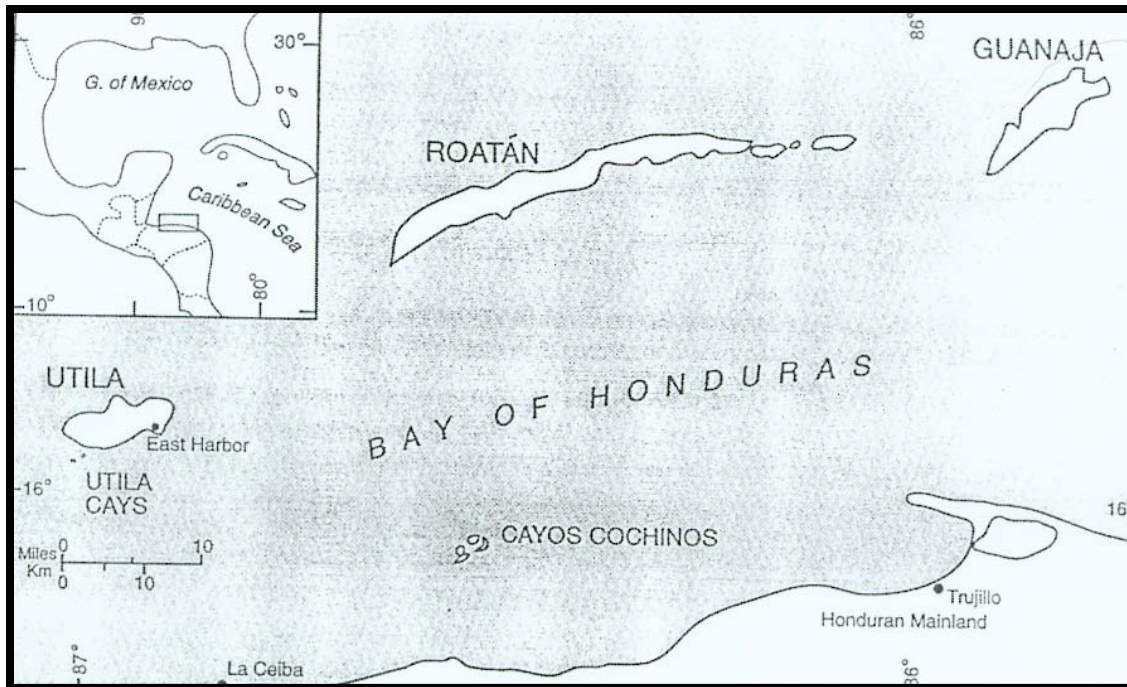


Figure 2.1: The Bay Island's of Honduras

Caribbean Sea near Puerto Cortés (Banks and Richards 1969). On Utila this geological base is capped with coralline limestone. Thus, nearly two-thirds of the island is hardly more than a swampy basin, perfect for catching rainwater and in some places this limestone has eroded to sea level. Utila is also composed of volcanic materials that make up another important part of the island's topography (McBirney and Bass 1969). Pumpkin Hill, located near the eastern end of the island is the remnant of an ancient volcano that creating the ragged terrain in this area (Strong 1935). This limestone and volcanic base has much to do with the western sloping perspective of Utila. And the creation of a cultural lingo associated with directions on the island. If one travels from the western end of Utila towards East Harbor, one is said to be going "up town"; to the west is "down."

Moving eastward from Utila the elevations of the islands generally increase, with the eastern island of Guanaja having the tallest peak at approximately 415 meters

(McBirney and Bass 1969). In addition to the increase in elevation as one moves eastward, so to does the terrain grow steeper, the vegetation and wildlife become more diverse, and the amount of fresh water resources increases.

The number of streams differs greatly on each of the three major islands. This also affects drainage patterns on the islands. Roatán has a number of run-off routes (Davidson 1974). These routes, however, do not retain water for any length of time after rain because of the steep slopes. Standing water on the island can only be found near the shoreline where the land generally becomes flat (ibid). This water is not good for human consumption because tidal variations and long-shore drift make it brackish (ibid). Guanaja has the steepest slopes and on the northeast portion of the island, two major streams carry fresh water year-round. Utila differs from the other two major islands because it is flatter and has not developed any significant gulling. Rain seeps downward into limestone caverns and into the centrally located mangrove swamps. One small stream, located in the southeast of the island, seems to play only a minor role in the drainage process. Natural deposition of sediment on Guanaja and Roatán can be found where the hills near the shoreline and the slopes become gentler. Utila's dominating swampy area also accumulates upslope sediment.

Climate

Honduras has three major climate types (Dixon 1980; West and Augelli 1989). The Bay Islands, like the adjacent mainland coast, have a humid tropical climate. In the tropics rainfall, not temperature, determines seasonality (West and Augelli 1989). Two-thirds of the islands' rainfall normally occurs between October and January (Bryson and Leahy 1958). Changing wind direction associated with North American cold fronts is a

major cause of this winter rainfall. As is expected in the tropics, temperature variation is relatively slight. Average mean monthly temperature ranges normally do not exceed four degrees Celsius (West and Augelli 1989). However, a climatic phenomenon that occurs along the east coast of Central America from the Yucatán to Colombia, called *veranillo*, brings a short early midsummer rainfall increase and a slight drop in the July temperatures (Bryson and Leahy 1958).

The Bay Islands are located in the belt of the tradewinds. Winds normally blow from the east, roughly parallel to the north coast of Honduras (West and Augelli 1989). Velocities range from thirty-two to forty kilometers per hour (Cry 1965). In August, as noted by islanders, calm periods of up to five days occur. During the winter months, North American cold fronts cause winds to shift and come from the north and west. This creates the extended rainfall characteristic of the region. Like elevation on Utila, wind direction is also important in local lingo. Winds normally blow from east to west and therefore, walking into east winds (up-wind) correlates with up slope and going “up town.”

Because Utilians are oriented to the sea ocean currents are an important part of local life. In this region, currents normally have an easterly flow along the southern portions and between the islands (Kornicker and Bryant 1969). Which makes westerly travel slower. However, during the winter months, there is a weakening of this easterly current because of the reversal of the current that flows north of the islands (Owen 1840; Kornicker and Bryant 1969).

During the last century nearly 20 hurricanes have affected the Bay Islands. How the Bay Islands are situated in the Bay of Honduras, their distances from the

mountains on the mainland of Central America, and the general northwestwardly paths of these storms, are all factors that reduce storm strengths. Davidson suggested that although the Bay of Honduras has seen developments of large storm systems only every ten years do these storms mature into hurricanes (Davidson 1974). The most destructive hurricanes that affect the islands, such as Hurricane Francelia in 1969 and Hurricane Mitch in 1998, develop in the open ocean and then strike the islands uncharacteristically from the north.

Marine Environment

In the Bay of Honduras reef systems are of two types: barrier and fringing. A barrier reef is a coral wall separated from the land by a lagoon. A fringing reef however, begins adjacent to the shore, often with only small breaks that might allow small boat passage. Many people make the mistake and assume that the barrier reef system off the coast of Belize is connected to that of the Bay Islands. This is an incorrect notion passed along primarily in tourism literature. Not only does the Bartlett Trough separate the two distinct systems, the Bay Islands reef is a fringing reef.

On the northern sides of Roatán and Guanaja the reef encloses much of the islands (Jacobson 1992; Harborne et al 1999). Only small breaks allow for passage into tidal inlets associated with stream mouths (ibid). Guanaja's reef begins about one mile offshore in places, farther than on the other two islands (Harborne et al 1999). Utila's northern reef exposes itself as iron shore that extends from the central portion of the island almost continuously around the eastern tip (ibid). Utila's north side reef is characterized by "steep escarpments and spur and groove formations" (ibid). In the

middle of the north side is a small break in the coral that has become the entrance to a canal that extends across the island into Oyster Bay Lagoon (figure 2.2)

Utila's eastern side, much like the north side, is covered by fossilized coral and low cliffs referred to as iron shore (Harborne et al 1999). This side of the island has long and shallow forereefs and large sandy areas (ibid). Additionally, the eastern end of the island faces a deep trench that separates Utila and Roatán and is one of the few places in the world where whale sharks can be seen (ibid).

The southern side of Utila, facing the Honduran mainland, is the more developed portion of the island. The southern reef is dominated by a sloping forereef that is the widest of the reef zones (Harborne et al 1999). Also characteristic of the southern reef are some spur and groove formations (ibid). The back reef consists of exposed bedrock and sand and covers a smaller area and is much less diverse in coral types and topographic features (ibid). East Harbor, located on southeastern Utila, is protected by an uplift of the southern reef. Roatán's south side reef is similar and runs almost the entire length of the island (Jacobson 1992). Guanaja also has an expansive southern reef where the two cays of Bannaca Town are located (Davidson 1974).

The western end of Utila is dominated by fringing reefs. The southwestern reef supports Utila's twelve cays. Also found in this area are patch reefs and expansive sea grass habitats that surround the cays.

Inside the reefs Utila also has a number of bays, bights, and harbors that interrupt the shoreline. These include, Spotted Bay, Carey Bay, Turtle Harbor, Rock Harbor, Jack's Bight, Swan Bay, Big Bight, East Harbor, and Little Bight, which provide

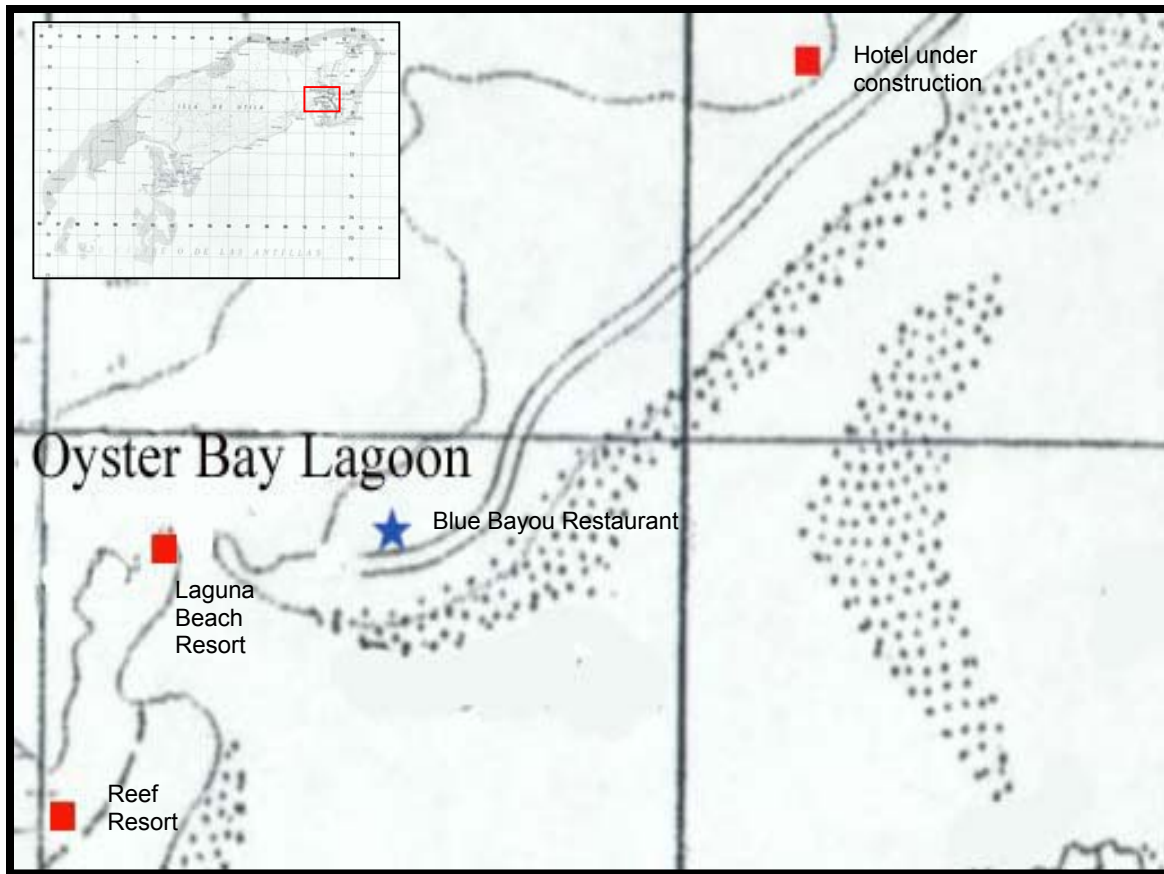


Figure 2.2: Location of Oyster Bay Lagoon
(adapted from 1:50,000 series Instituto Geografica Honduras)

anchorage for shallow vessels. East Harbor, however, is the only place on Utila where large watercrafts such as shrimpers, sail boats, and cargo and passenger ships can safely moor. These factors were probably taken into consideration when the original founders settled in East Harbor.

Perhaps because of the reefs the Bay Islands are known for their diverse tropical fish and other marine populations. These fish include porgies, old wife, black fin, wahoo, red snapper, dogteeth snapper, hogfish, and the whale shark (Harborne et al 1999). Conch, crawfish, and four species of turtles can also be found around the islands. These marine species have been historically important to the economy of the islands and recently many have become of interest to sport fishermen.

The islanders have long depended on the sea to sustain them. The reef provides a place for the abundant fish population to feed and survive. It also provides the islanders with protection from the dynamic ocean. More importantly, in recent years, the reefs have been the major draw for the developing tourism industry.

Flora and Fauna

Island vegetation has been altered drastically since first recorded by Christopher Columbus on his fourth voyage to the New World in 1502. Although Columbus and his crew did not provide detailed descriptions, they did mention the presence of pine trees on Guanaja and named the island “isla de pinos” (Columbus 1959; Columbus 1960).

Although pines are still present, they have undoubtedly been depleted since this first account because of human needs, for ship building and house construction, and environmental destruction, especially from fires and hurricanes. Today, as noted by the Bay Island Conservation Association, the main vegetation types include pine savannas on the higher ridges of Roatán and Guanaja and tropical dry forests, mangroves, and beach plant communities on the three major islands (Jacobson 1992).

In 1975 Lord noted, on Utila, that most food plants and animals were imported beginning in the 1830s. These include mango, papaya, breadfruit, plantain, banana, citrus (grapefruit, lime and orange), canop, mamey, mamea, almond, guava, tomato, melon, cassava, cocoyam, and star apple (ibid). Most of these plants are still present on the islands and still very much part of local diet. Lord named the groups that contributed to the cultivation of these plants as the Cayman Islanders, some mainland Hondurans, and the American fruit companies (ibid).

Utila is nearly two-thirds swampland leaving only one-third of the island available for settlement and farming activities. Therefore, perhaps the most important and abundant plants on the island are mangroves. Utila has three species of mangrove; white mangrove (*Laguncularia racemosa*), red mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*), and black mangrove (*Avicennia germinaus*) (Vega et al 1993). These plants have adapted to saline coastal environments in the tropics and subtropics (West 1998). They can live in a wide variety of water types, from fresh to salt, but tend to do best in brackish water (salinities from 10 to 20 parts per thousand) (ibid). Mangrove are associated with tidal zones where they form a cover that ranges from shrubs to taller trees (ibid). On Utila these plants can be found in both brackish (to the interior) and along oceanfronts protected by the fringing reef. The mangrove is important for natural land building on the island. They also act as nurseries and spawning grounds for many species of open ocean marine life (ibid). Additionally, growths associated with interior swamp and marsh areas are an important feeding ground for various species of crabs and snails. Thus large accumulations of these species can be found here and attract other fauna such as turtles and iguanas which have been traditionally important to the Utilian diet and economy. In recent years, associated with the growing tourism economy, large portions of Utila's mangrove have been destroyed. In a subsequent chapter, I will discuss the reasons behind this destruction and the crisis that the islanders might face if this destruction continues.

The Bay Islands also have an abundant wildlife population that has been suggested as an additional resource for the further diversification of the island's tourism industry (Vega et al 1993). In a conservation plan prepared by Tropical Research and

Development, Inc. the authors identified potential trials for hiking, birdwatching, and horseback riding that would allow alternatives to scuba diving which is the current draw for the islands (ibid).

One of the biggest limiting factors to human use of Utila is its size and topography. Although agriculture has become less important to Utilian life the lack of available arable land has forced the islanders to turn to the sea for survival. Recently, as tourism has become an important part of the economy on the islands, the surrounding ocean has been the strongest draw for international tourists.

Chapter 3

Utila's Cultural History

The cultural landscape is fashioned from the natural landscape by a cultural group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the result (Sauer 1925:1).

The Bay Islands, including Utila, have a distinctive and diverse cultural heritage. The mélange of ethnicities stemming from its settlement history has created the diverse population seen today. As noted by William Davidson in his 1974 publication of these past and present populations, seven distinct groups have inhabited the islands. Before European contact, Paya Indians probably occupied the islands (Strong 1938; Stone 1941; Davidson: 1974; Dixon 1980). After Contact, Spaniards, buccaneers, Garífuna, English, English-descended Antilleans, African-descended Antilleans, and North Americans have settled for varying time periods on the islands (Davidson 1974: 21). Utila was inhabited by only six of these groups because the Garífuna only settled on Roatán. In recent years, however, other ethnic groups have found their way to the island, specifically European tourists and Mainland Hondurans. As mentioned in the introduction, in the 1960s Honduras became interested in the sustainable development of its tourist industry. Since this time the ethnic make up of Utila has changed. This chapter will discuss the historical and modern populations that settled on the island.

Pre-Columbian Inhabitants

Just prior to Spanish Contact the north coast of Honduras, including the Bay Islands, appeared to be sparsely inhabited by aboriginal tribes (Davidson 1974; Dixon 1980). In Central America the pre-Colombian populations are designated as “high” and “low” cultural groups (West and Augelli 1989). Geographical boundaries that separate

these groups have some relationship to the islands. The high cultural groups included the Maya and Aztec. These people lived primarily in the southern Central Plateau of Mexico and the Yucatán, and the highlands and Pacific lowlands of Central America (ibid). They could be distinguished from other populations in the area because they lived in agglomerated settlements comparable to modern cities, their agriculture could support the large numbers of people in the settlements and was much more advanced than the low cultural groups, and their economy was controlled by social organizations and theocratic states (ibid 1989). The presence of large temples and ceremonial centers were also characteristic of these “high cultures” (ibid). In contrast, the “low cultures” of Middle America inhabited the West Indies, much of the Central American lowlands, and northern Mexico. These groups included the Chichimecas of northern Mexico, the Caribs of the West Indies, and the many tribes of the Central American lowlands such as the Paya and Jicaque. Characteristics of these groups included, smaller much less organized, dispersed settlements, simpler agricultural techniques, tubers as the primary food source, and lack of large ceremonial centers. It should be noted that these two groups did have contact with each other. Aztec and Mayan traders probably traveled throughout much of the isthmus and to many of the islands off the coast.

The Paya have been suggested as the first inhabitants of the Bay Islands. The boundaries for this group on the mainland were established as being from Trujillo to Cape Gracias a Dios (Stone 1941; Strong 1938). William Strong and William Davidson, among others, seem to believe that this aboriginal group extended its boundaries to include the Bay Islands (Davidson 1974: 20). Others have suggested that islanders were Maya (Sauer 1966), Lenca (Squier 1855), and Jicaque (Conzemius 1928). For this paper,

we will support Davidson and Strong's notion that the aboriginal population was Paya (Davidson 1974; Strong 1941).

Evidence presented alludes to similarities between the mainland Paya populations and sites found on the Bay Islands. These island sites have been classified in three categories with the addition of a fourth focusing on burials. The first of these three are residential sites. Archeologists pinpoint residential sites when the presence of kitchenware and shards are prevalent (Davidson 1974). Sites containing these items have been found on Roatán, Utila, and Guanaja of the larger islands and Helene of the smaller islands in this region. The largest of these main sites is found at "80 Acre" on Utila and encompasses forty acres of land (ibid). Locations are generally forty to sixty feet above sea level, on sloping land, a few hundred yards from the beach (ibid). Davidson suggested that these aboriginal populations located their villages at these specific elevations and distance from the shore to escape mosquitoes and sand flies (ibid). In addition, it seems reasonable to assume that these people relied heavily on the ocean therefore making site location close to the water important.

Ceremonial sites, being the second in this list of site classifications, are located near the large residential areas of Utila and Guanaja. These sites, however, are in no way comparable to the sites associated with the Maya and Aztec of mainland Mesoamerica. No large ceremonial structures, such as temples, have been located on any of the Bay Islands. However, there are identifiable artifacts associated with this type of site, such as large stone monoliths, earth mounds, stone mounds, and stone causeways (Davidson 1974). Utila had one a site located on Stewart's Hill (Rose 1904). This site is supposedly the origination point of an aboriginal paved road system on the island (ibid).

The third site classification deals with the deposition of offerings. These offertory sites, lacking the monuments found in ceremonial locations, have objects that have been placed in nature and elicit help from a higher power. Artifacts ranging from shell ornaments to clay figurines can be found in association with these sites (Davidson 1974). The largest in the Bay Islands are on the island of Roatán and the smaller island of Barbaret. Nearly every occurrence of these sites were located on tops of hills. Although a separate category, burial sites on the islands seem to be located close to and hypothetically in conjunction with offertory sites. However, on islands such as Utila, burials were located on sandy beaches (Davidson 1974). There is no archeological evidence that offertory sites were located on Utila.

Eight known burial sites exist on the Bay Islands (Davidson 1974). They have been located in three different physical settings; beach, hilltop, and refuse heaps. Utila has three of these eight sites and all of them were located on the beach (ibid). Characteristics of these beach sites include slate slab coverings, multiple burials, skulls placed in large urns, with bones and other goods nearby (ibid).

The Paya Indians apparently lived in only a few settlements with one residential area on the major islands. Artifacts and residential patterns resemble those of their mainland Paya neighbors, making it possible to hypothesize that the groups were related. Trade seemed to be occurring between these groups as well as with other aboriginal groups from the mainland, showing that the Bay Islanders were not living in cultural seclusion (Davidson 1974). It seems the Paya were the first of many ethnic populations to call the islands home.

Christopher Columbus and the *Encomenderos*

Christopher Columbus made contact with the aboriginal populations on the Bay Islands on his fourth voyage in 1502 (Rose 1904; Columbus 1959; Columbus 1960; Davidson 1974). Hence, Utila and the rest of the Bay Islands became a part of history on July 30, 1502, when Columbus and his crew anchored off the north shore of Guanaja. Columbus documented the island's appearance and subsequently called it *Isla de Pinos*, for the large pine stands located there (Columbus 1960). For nearly 136 years the Spanish crown held virtually uncontested rule over the Bay Islands (Davidson 1974).

The Paya populations on the Bay Islands were inevitably subjected to slaving raids. Queen Isabella of Spain, however, commanded her *conquistadores* to make slaves of only those aboriginal populations who were unwilling to become Christians or those designated as "cannibals" (Sauer 1966). Even though the populations of the Bay Islands were noted as being relatively peaceful (Valladares 1939) it served the purposes of the *conquistadores* based in Cuba to inform the Queen that the Bay Islanders were hostile, cannibalistic, and opposed to Christianity (Valladares 1939). In 1516, Queen Isabella allowed Diego Velasquez to remove the aboriginal populations on the Bay Islands to be used on plantations in Cuba where populations had already been exterminated (Lord 1975). Allegedly only two raids took place in the Bay Islands and according to Sauer, it was during the second in 1525 that the name Utila appeared for the first time (Sauer 1966:). Although some islanders survived slaving seeds had been planted for future Spanish settlement.

The Roman Catholic Church had little influence on the Bay Islands unlike other places in Latin America. A seemingly more important landscape and cultural change

occurred with the institution of the *encomienda* initiated in Honduras in 1536 (West and Augelli 1989). This system called for Spanish occupation of the islands where the *encomenderos* would Christianize the Indians (Chamberlain 1951). Utila obtained only one (Simpson 1966). The *encomienda* brought the islanders into constant contact with the Spanish *encomenderos*, thus changing the lifestyles of the natives.

Buccaneering, Early English Inhabitants, and the Garífuna

As the Spanish made their presence known in the New World other European explorers began to see the potential of the Caribbean and Central America as a whole. Yet another cultural group saw the opportunity to carve its name in the ethnic history of the Bay Islands. By 1536 the French had appeared in the western Caribbean and the Dutch soon after in 1594. The English, however, were the most successful in disrupting the Spanish shipping routes and appeared sometime in the 1560s (Wright 1964). The English, French, and Dutch realized that the Bay Islands were in a strategic position to loot Spanish vessels. The islands had fresh water and protected natural harbors that the freebooters valued. Although the pirate settlements had no lasting impressions on the natural landscape, they did create myths that still exist among islanders. Myths of sunken treasures draw amateur relic hunters and tourists to the islands today. Town names found on Roatán (Coxen Hole) and business names on Utila (Captain Morgan's Dive Shop and the Bucket of Blood Bar) are also reminders of the pirate presence from earlier days. Ironically, Utila was not one of the popular hideouts for the pirates and has not been mentioned in the literature as having any involvement with these scallywags (Davidson 1974; Lord 1975).

By 1639, however, the harassment caused by the pirates towards the Spanish became intolerable (Davidson 1974). Buccaneers had completely disrupted the role the Bay Islands were playing in Spanish shipping. Consequently, the Spanish Crown ordered the Indians removed so they could no longer provide for the pirates. The Spanish hoped that the removal of the natives would deter the pirates from hiding on the islands. However, the opposite occurred, and instead of leaving the Bay of Honduras, the British intensified their efforts to settle the islands. By the late 1600s however, buccaneering reached its zenith in the Bay of Honduras and Spanish shipping had been significantly disrupted. The English became the most successful in this pirating trade and eventually had the longest lasting impact on the Bay Islands. Among the most famous English pirates who took refuge on the islands were Morgan, Jackson, Coxen, Sharpe and Low. These names are still present on the islands as last names, settlement names, and business names.

The Bay of Honduras was in constant turmoil because of the many conflicts the Spanish were having with other European nations. Between 1638 and 1782 Spanish colonists constantly were hassled at the hands of the English (Davidson 1974). The Spanish and the British, for the next 150 years, struggled for control over the Bay Islands. This struggle left lasting impressions on the islands.

In the late 1630s, the first English colonists attempted to establish permanent settlements on the Islands, specifically on Roatán (Davidson 1974; Lord 1975). A Puritan-based company, Providence Company, laid the foundations for this settlement and assigned a North American colonial, William Claiborne, to Roatán (Floyd 1967; Davidson 1974; Lord 1975). The English renamed the island Rich Island after Lord

Henry Rich, Earl of Holland (Davidson 1974; Lord 1975). However the specific settlement location has never been determined. Apparently engaged in agricultural, these colonists set the stage for another ethnic transition (Davidson 1974; Lord 1975).

The first military occupations of the Bay Islands by the English began in 1742 and lasted seven years (Davidson 1974). It was the intentions of the British to take control of the entire Atlantic Coast (Floyd 1967). Fortifications were constructed on the Island of Roatán and at the mouth of the Río Negro (up the coast east of Trujillo). The forts built on Roatán were to provide a base to provoke rebellion on the mainland, so that the English could keep control of the logwood trade and that their cutters from Belize and *Mosquitia* had a place to go when the Spanish became aggressive (Watt 1973). On numerous occasions Spanish colonists tried unsuccessfully to remove the English. In 1744 negotiations began to rid Roatán of its unwelcome English guests. However, it was not until late 1749 that the English finally evacuated the island in accordance with the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle signed by Britain and Spain in 1748 (Watt 1973; Stonich 2000).

A second English occupation of the Bay Islands began thirty years later. During the period between these separate occupations little change was documented on the islands. In 1779, in an attempt to reach Lake Nicaragua, the English used the existing Fort George on Roatán as a military base (Stonich 2000). In 1782 the English were finally disposed of at the Battle of Port Royal Roatán. Fort George was burned, and the Spanish forces captured the remaining inhabitants of the island (Davidson 1974). Once again the Bay Islands were left to nature. Neither the English nor the Spanish formed permanent colonial settlements that have survived until the present.

In 1797 the Bay Islands received its first permanent settlers. Again Roatán was the site for this settlement. These permanent settlers were the Garífuna (Black Caribs). A colonial tribe, the Garífuna, evolved over 300 years ago on the island of St. Vincent in the Lesser Antilles (Davidson 1974; West and Augelli 1989). In the seventeenth century an English slave vessel shipwrecked off the island, and the African born slaves escaped (Lord 1975; Davidson 1982; Dixon 1980; West and Augelli 1989). Carib Indians already inhabited the island, and the cultures began to mix (Davidson 1974). This new ethnic group proved to be intolerable for the English settlers, and in 1797, over 2,000 Black Caribs were removed from the island and exiled to the Bay of Honduras (Davidson 1982). They were first abandoned on the uninhabited island of Roatán. The Spanish feared this was an attempt by the English to reestablish control and therefore moved the Garífuna to Trujillo. However, some managed to stay on the island and formed the settlement now known as Punta Gorda (Davidson 1974). In 1980, there were fifty-four villages along the Caribbean coast extending from northern Nicaragua to southern Belize (Davidson 1974; Dixon 1980).

The British and the Spanish continued to have sporadic conflicts until September 15, 1821 when the Central American Federation proclaimed its independence from Spain (Lord 1975). Of the two European countries colonizing in this region during this time, Spain was the weaker, thus allowing Britain unhindered expansion along the Caribbean Coast from what is now Belize to *Mosquitia*.

Utila, led a rather quiet existence during the colonial conflicts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, early in the nineteenth century, Utila began attracting “people who were basically farmers interested in good, free land that they

could cultivate for subsistence crops” (Lord 1975). It has been suggested that the quiet existence of the island, was one of the attractions that lead these new settlers to relocate on Utila’s Cays, and by the 1830s nearly a dozen people migrate to the island (Davidson 1974; Lord 1975).

Antillean Populations

In the nineteenth century the modern landscape of the Bay Islands began. Black Caribs, a few Spanish soldiers, two Americans, and two French families made permanent residences on the islands (Davidson 1974; Lord 1975). Honduras, including the Bay Islands, became a sovereign state and the official position of the English was to adhere to this sovereignty (Davidson 1974). However, the Bay Islands were still seen as strategic for the domination of the Bay of Honduras (Davidson 1974). The Cayman Islanders became important in the British quest for the Bay Islands.

Established as British colonies, the Cayman Islands had developed an agrarian economy. With this reliance on agriculture slave labor was necessary. By 1830 the Angelo-Antillean settlers of the Cayman’s were outnumbered 5 to 1 by its slave populations (Davidson 1974). The British Crown, in this same decade, began its abolition of slavery. The English on the Cayman Islands, fearing the break down of their society, decided to relocate. They resettled in Belize and the Bay Islands. Suc-Suc Cay, Utila, and Coxen Hole, Roatán where the first settlements made by these people (Davidson 1974). Lord documents the first family of Cayman Islanders to settle on Utila in his 1975 work as follows,

Joseph Cooper, his wife and nine children— two boys and seven girls— came to Utila from the Caymans by way of Belize. He was apparently one of the many land hungry British subjects of peasant or working class extraction that found the British isles too

constricting. The Cooper family and an American named Samuel Warren who had been born in Massachusetts and served with Perry in the Battle of Lake Erie formed the nucleus of Utila's future populations. Warren and another American surnamed Joshua (who early dropped out of the historical picture) were already cultivating small plantations in the cays. Cooper also settled there to avoid the clouds of mosquitoes and sandflies that infested the bush-covered main island (Lord 1975:28).

A few years later, other families such as the Thompsons, Morgans, Boddens, Diamonds (or Dimon), Howells, and Gabourels had settled on Utila's Cays (Lord 1975).

Subsequently, within a few years of the white landholding Cayman Islanders immigrating to Utila, many of the former Cayman slaves also moved to the Bay Islands. Likewise, settlers from the United States, British Honduras, Germany and Sweden took up residence on Utila (Lord 1975). As 1858 came to a close so did the British colonial era on the Bay Islands. The islands legally became a part of greater Honduras. Many of the islanders left when this change took place but their culture has lasted until today.

Twentieth Century Utila

As Utila rounded the corner of the nineteenth century and entered into a new millennium, the ethnic and cultural melting pot that the island had become with the Anglo and Afro Cayman populations, Americans and Europeans, particular social stratifications were becoming evident. In 1975 when Lord was conducting his research on the remittance system on Utila he also paid particular attention to this developing phenomenon. He pointed out two key factors in understanding the social organizations that had arisen on the island. The first was that there were, and still are, three locally recognized strata based on ethnicity and the second dealt more with gradations of prestige, that were present in these strata, based on income and lifestyle (Lord 1975).

Social Stratification

In Utilian society, social distinctions are not simply a matter of socioeconomic differences between societal sectors. Rather, these strata lie in skin pigmentations that have created ethnic prejudices and stereotyping that are basic to the ordering of Utilians social existence (Lord 1975). Lord compared these strata to the caste system of India, where a person is born into a certain caste and carries this distinction for life (ibid). However, marriage into the highest strata is allowed, but those who married in are still second class to those who were born into that class. Utila's social hierarchy, according to Lord (1975), developed in much the same way focusing on three color based classes.

At the top of the social hierarchy are the "whites" of Utila. This position is based primarily on skin color and with it comes social prestige, important local leadership roles, wealth, and occupation of prime real estate (Lord 1975). Most of this segment of society came from the British West Indies colonies and made up the original founders of the modern settlement on Utila and its related cays. In 1975 nearly three-fifths of Utila's population was considered part of this class (ibid).

The second tier of the social stratification system noted by Lord was made up of those Utilians with Afro-Antillean ancestry. In 1975, this group was collectively called "colored" (ibid). However, during my research on the island I did not hear this term used, rather the general term "black" was used to refer to this group, perhaps reflecting modern contacts with the United States.

In 1975, as Lord documented, the "white" Utilians did not feel that the "black" Utilians were "mentally or morally inferior," however, he did note that, "there was a qualitative difference between themselves [whites] and coloreds that would forever

separate the two groups even though they lived side by side” (Lord 1975:109). This attitude or these first two ethnic strata still exist on Utila maybe problematic, however there still is a geographic component related to these ethnic groups.

The third stratum, the more recent migrants from the mainland, is still very much present on the island. Since the mid 1960s Spanish Hondurans have become another part of the cultural *mélange* present on the Utila. Although native-born islanders see themselves as having no relation to these “Spaniards,” this group is nevertheless carving its niche. This group makes up the third rung of the social ladder on Utila. The term “Spaniard” denotes both an ethnic group and a derogatory epithet on the island. In the 1970s Spaniards were, “individuals of Spanish heritage (usually from mainland Honduras) who bear Spanish surnames, speak little or no English, and are common laborers recently arrived on Utila” (Lord 1975:109). This group is generally poorer than native Utilians, thus they live in the worst housing on the island and subsequently exist in some of the most extreme conditions. Locals see them as, “immoral...uncouth and uncivilized” (ibid 1975:109). Often times the term “Indian” is used interchangeably with Spaniard, not to denote differing physical characteristics but to further emphasize their perceived “uncivilized” behavior (ibid). In 1975 Lord noted little interaction between the Spaniard and other Utilians. However, in recent years many young Utilian men have married mainland women. One such marriage occurred during the summer of 2001. Additionally, Lord did extensive research focused on marriages since 1881, and noted that only two “white”/“black” marriages had been documented (ibid). He further remarked that the white men were not Utilians and had come with the merchant fleets because there seemed to be a standing consensus among islanders that “blacks” and

“whites” did not marry. Similarly, the recent “black”/“white” marriages on the island had young black Utilian men marrying young white European women. As tourism continues to grow, these isolated incidences might be expected to become more common.

Geographical Boundaries

The social stratifications of Utila also manifest themselves geographically. Lord noted this phenomenon in 1975 and it was still present in 2001. There were six ethnically derived *barrios* or neighborhoods in East Harbor and one on the combined two populated cays (Pigeon and Suc-Suc). Today, East Harbor has three more. *Barrios* on Utila were initially established for identification in official documents such as birth and death certificates and maps (Lord 1975). However, islanders began using them as geographical identifications for what kind of Utilian one was, based on the strata discussed above. In 1975 the *barrios* in order by size were, *Punta Calienta*, (the Point), *Aldea de los Cayitos* (the Cays), *Cola de Mico* (Monkey’s Tail), *La Loma* (the Hill), Main Street, Sandy Bay and Holland. In the preliminary figures for the 2000 Honduran Census, the *barrios* listed in order of size were; Sandy Bay, *La Punta* (The Point), *Cola Mico* (Monkey Tail), *Los Cayos* (the Cays), *El Centro* (Main Street or the Center of Town), Mamey Lane, *La Loma* (the Hill), *Lozano*, *Camponado*, and Holland (figure 3.1). The number of houses in a given *barrio* determines size. However, as Lord (1975) noted, size was not the important factor for these neighborhoods. Instead the ethnic composition became the dominant factor when islanders would discuss the *barrios*. In 1975, Sandy Bay was almost exclusively “black,” as it is today. A section of *Cola de Mico* was also “black.” Main Street was completely “white” with the exception of one Spanish household (ibid). The Point was made up of transplanted *Cayans* (a term used to

distinguish those who live on the Cays from those who live on Utila) with a few scattered Spaniards and “blacks” (ibid). The Cays consisted of only “whites” as did *La Loma* because this was the first area settled when the original Cayman Islanders moved from the Cays to the main island of Utila (ibid 1975). Lord also noted other landscape features that came into play in areas of mixed ethnicity such as *Cola de Mico* (ibid 1975). In this neighborhood the Bucket of Blood Bar (which is still in operation) was a reference point in the landscape. Those that lived below the bar were either white or upper class “blacks,” in contrast to those that lived above the bar who were mainly lower class “blacks” (ibid 1975). Today many of these same general ethnic distinctions exist on Utila, with the inclusion of one predominantly Spanish neighborhood, *Camponado*. However, because of the general increase in population and the new economic dependence on tourism, the 1990s the predominantly “white” and “black” areas of Utila became more diverse. For example, the Cays are no longer totally “white” but have a few Spanish and “black” families. Additionally, economics do not seem to play a major role in the original neighborhoods, rather families seem to stay in place generation upon generation with little heed to their economic situations. The biggest changes that are taking place in relation to neighborhoods have little to do with the islanders and more to do with developers who have followed the tourism industry.

Utila, and the other Bay Islands, have established themselves as a cultural hearth culminating into a distinct landscape apparent to modern visitors. From the Paya to the various European invaders an imposition of cultural identities has influenced this development. It seems that the geographic location of the islands made them more vulnerable to these landscape changes.

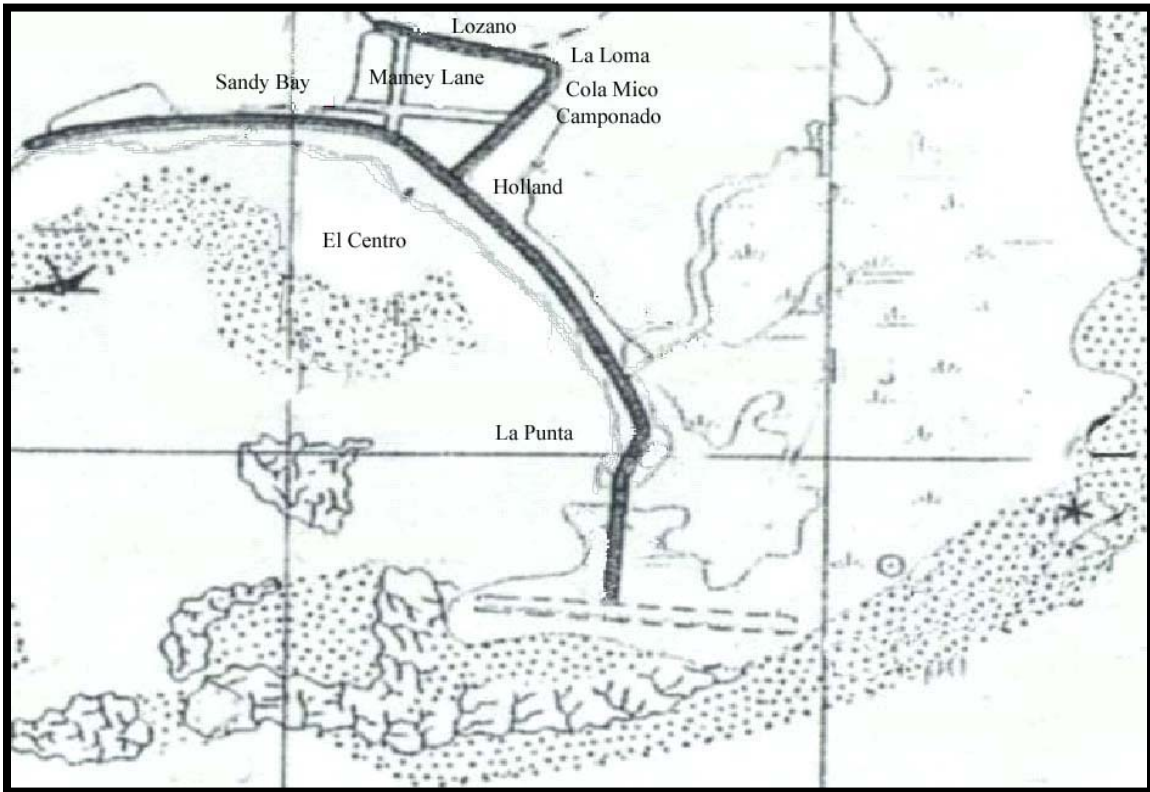


Figure 3.1: Neighborhood Locations on Utila
(adapted from 1:50,000 series Instituto Geografica Honduras)

Chapter 4

Economic History of Utila as a Precursor to Tourism

Utila has a diverse economic history. The islands' pre-Columbian inhabitants relied primarily on subsistence agriculture and, more importantly, were oriented to the sea (Davidson 1974; Lord 1975; Stonich 2000). This seaward orientation also can be linked to all post-Columbian settlers of the island. This chapter will discuss the economic history of Utila as it relates to the different cultural groups that inhabited the island. These economic escapades can also be related to landscape change on the island. The unique cultural traits associated with Utilian culture that Lord documents in his work in 1975 will be linked to the new tourism economy of the island. Tourism follows in the traditions of the other economic systems as being yet another catalyst for economic, social, and landscape change.

Underlying every culture are interfaces among economy, society, and polity. These relationships shape and direct these cultures into their respective livelihoods. Lord (1975) documented Utila's preadaptive traits that stimulated the island into a remittance system. He noted such things as, "the traditional importance of the nuclear family as the production and consumption unit, and a heritage of maritime activity in shipping and fishing" on the island (Lord 1975:6). Other important features included orientations of individualism, commercialism, and non-cooperation (ibid). He also suggested that because of the nature of a remittance system (i.e. men being absent from the island for months at a time) the men enjoyed a level of indulgence and relaxing of laws and social norms when they return from sea. Therefore, an atmosphere of "rest and recreation" developed on the island as the men participate in "heavy partying and drinking" (Lord

1975:7). These preadaptive traits formed an easy transition from an economy based in agriculture to one dependent on maritime service (ibid). These traits also helped in the development of the tourism industry on Utila today.

Pre-Columbian Economy

Only scant archeological evidence exists of the indigenous island cultures. However, documentation is available on the locations of settlement sites and the initial contact Columbus had with the indigenous people and their lands. The “80-Acre” site on Utila provides evidence that Indians lived and worked on the island. According to Columbus’s notes on Bay Islands’ vegetation and what is present today, early islanders probably hunted, cultivated local vegetation, and fished. In addition, his brother Bartholomew, who went ashore on the island of Guanaja, briefly described the local peoples and their “white grain [maize or corn] from which they made a fine bread and the most perfect beer” (Columbus 1960). From the account of Columbus with the indigenous trader it is probable that islanders had contact with their mainland neighbors as well as with the other inhabited islands. According to Diaz del Castillo, while Cortés was visiting Trujillo, twenty years later fish and turkeys were brought to him that were found in abundance on the islands (Diaz del Castillo 1970:485, cited in Davidson 1974: 29).

The archeological records and reports from the Spanish *conquistadors* suggest that the original Bay Islanders did not live in cultural seclusion. Instead, they traded with the mainland tribes close to Trujillo and possibly farther. These first inhabitants mastered the fine art of beer making as well as bread and possibly metallurgy. After Spanish Contact, for the next 136 years, the Bay Islanders were subjected to, and treated

like, many other Caribbean populations (Davidson 1974). Following the initial slave raids religious “crusades” sought laborers to transport to plantations on Cuba and the Central American mainland (Davidson 1974). For the next 400 years the Bay Islands went through many economic transitions.

Encomiendas and Buccaneering

The Bay Islanders, unlike many other unfortunate indigenous Caribbean populations, survived initial contact with the Spanish only to be forced into servitude most likely on the Spanish *encomiendas*. The original economic components of the aboriginal Bay Islands, such as fishing, farming and trading, were not abandoned. These activities, especially farming, were probably expanded to fit the inclinations of the new Spanish colonial systems. Spanish needs not related to food production, such as craft production, were also begun (Davidson 1974).

Many of the initial reports concerning the physical geography of the islands characterized them as being fertile (Davidson 1974). The Spanish, who were based in Trujillo less than twenty-five years after contact, viewed the islands as a potential source for food (Cortés 1970; cited in Davidson 1974:37). In addition, European livestock such as chickens and hogs were introduced to the islands, further diversifying the economy. This increase in diversity and eventual productivity gave the islanders prominence as the lone agricultural supporters of the port of Trujillo (Pedraza 1544; Guerra y Avala 1608; cited in Davidson 1974:37).

Some suggest that this increase in production was related to the introduction of *encomienda* system. This economic institution was initiated in Honduras in 1536 by Pedro de Alvarado and was documented in Trujillo in 1539 (Alvarado 1536; Konetzke

1953; cited in Davidson 1974:37). Early *encomiendas* were associated with significant landscape and cultural change on the islands as well as elsewhere in the New World. This system regulated all aspects of the indigenous persons' life from dwelling size and land standardization to religion and language (West and Augelli 1989). Another change that took place because of this economic system dealt with the ways in which the islands were used and seen by the Spanish. Before the institution of the *encomienda*, the Bay Islands were treated as a single unit and the islanders were closely tied to each other in terms of production of goods and services to the mainland. However, this system broke the cohesion between the islands, and Utila was no longer attached to Trujillo. Instead, probably because of its geographical location, Utila was first attached to Puerto Caballos and then to Munguiche, coastal towns located farther to the west (Anonymous 1539; Arguijo 1527; cited in Davidson 1974:38). At this time, Trujillo and Puerto Caballos were the major ports in this region and by 1582 the Bay Islands were producing sufficient foodstuffs to support the Spanish ports and ships returning to the Spanish homeland (Davidson 1974).

While the Spanish were successfully exploiting their new territories other European countries began to understand the value of the New World possessions. Spain's rivals thought that the best way to reap quick benefits would be to intercept Spanish ships of New World goods as they left their Central American ports. In 1643 the Bay Islands became a strategic point of interception because of their location in the Bay of Honduras (Galvin 1991). As the Spanish *encomienda* system was thriving, the freebooters from France, Netherlands and mainly England found refuge in the islands. Because of the pirating activities, which began in the 1600s, the Spanish eventually

called for the complete removal of the Bay Islands' population as well as any significant economic activity on the islands. For Utila, it was nearly one hundred years before any real economic activity resurfaced.

Agricultural Phase and the Cayman Islanders

Unlike the other nearby islands, Utila had a relatively quiet existence during the Spanish and Buccaneers period. Although Lord (1975) found evidence of an *encomienda* present on the island there was not much in the way of pirate activity because of the island's physical geography. Utila had fewer places for the pirates to hide and it was much more difficult for them to penetrate the surrounding reef. It has been suggested that, as England considered the abolition of slavery, plantation owners of the Cayman Islands began to look elsewhere to settle (Davidson 1974; Lord 1975). Utila and its cays were an inviting possibility. The early 1830s brought a new culture and subsequently a new economic agenda to the island (Davidson 1974; Lord 1975).

The Cayman Islanders were one of the first groups to settle permanently on the Bay Islands. The first wave of islanders chose the Utila Cays as their final destination. It has been documented that nearly a dozen people migrated here (Lord 1975). These farmers were looking for a place to go that had free land so they could cultivate subsistence crops (Lord 1975). Because these new residents were of British origin they began to create ties, mostly commercial in nature, with the closest British outpost in British Honduras (Belize). However, Utila was fairly autonomous during its first years after permanent settlement. Not until 1849 did the Bay Islands petition the Crown to be included in the British Empire (Evans 1966). Their first attempts were directed unsuccessfully towards Belize but three years later the islanders were successful. The

political compact did little to improve Utila's economy. Development began only in 1868 when the small island gained a relationship with the United States, one that lasts until the present.

About 1854 the islanders began to cultivate coconuts and bananas, among other things, to sell to a few ports around the Bay of Honduras. This growing trade relationship spurred the original Cayman settlers to relocate to Utila (now East Harbor) where land was more plentiful for plantation agriculture (Rose 1904). This new Utilian economy based on export farm production coincided with the United States agricultural import interests, especially fruit that took Utila's economy to a new level.

According to Lord (1975), economic expansion occurred in 1868 when two schooners from Portland, Maine arrived on Utila to buy bananas and coconuts for sale in New Orleans. Limes, bananas, coconuts, and other tropical fruits were also exported to New York, Tampa, and Boston (Lord 1975). As shown in table 4.1 as late as 1881 Utila was shipping goods to the United States. However by the end of the nineteenth century, the much larger United States fruit companies such as Standard Fruit and United Fruit overwhelmed the small operations from Utila.

Table 4.1: Utilian Goods exported to New Orleans, 1881

Coconut	Banana	Plantain	Mango	Lime	Pineapple
1880	1880				
950	bunches	5000	5 lbs	1 lb	16 dozen

(US Customhouse Records 1881)

The initial fruit operation on Utila was much different than that which developed later. The system that was prominent in the mid 1800s relied on "pickups" (Lord 1975: 33). The Bay Islands were just one of many tropical ports that these companies visited to support their business (Wilson 1968). However these "pickups" were time consuming

and gave the companies little control over the quality of product they received (Lord 1975). Therefore, by the early 1900s the precursors of the United Fruit in Tela and Standard Fruit in La Ceiba had clearly made themselves the new fruit ports and the “pickup” ports, like Utila and the rest of the Bay Islands, had become obsolete.

In 1872, Utila’s economy suffered another blow when the Bay Islands became a department of Honduras (Rose 1904; Valladares 1939; Lord 1975). Although the islands continued to govern themselves, Honduras wanted to enforce the Wyke-Cruz Treaty. In doing this, the Honduran government was essentially curtailing the islands’ relationship with the United States. Rose commented on the situation as follows:

...the (ensuing) change of laws gave a crippling blow, for some time, to the industries in the islands and to the hopes of the people. There was general discontent chiefly on account of the high import duties imposed under the new laws. And this discontent was perhaps excusable, because the people had always been accustomed to very low tariffs (Rose 1904:35-36).

The islanders honored the stipulations of the treaty to a certain extent, but many believed that they could continue living under English common law. This was a mistake on their part, and in 1902 the islands were visited by the H.M.S. Psyche, a vessel sent to inform the Bay Islanders that they were no longer British citizens (Lord 1975). The islands did not prosper from the fruit business that was booming on the mainland, instead, the islanders, for the next 40 years, struggled to reverse the slump they had entered into at the turn of the century.

On Utila islanders were forced to begin making concessions, both socially and economically, while trying to regain their former lifestyles (Rose 1904). American imported luxury items, which the islanders had become accustomed to purchasing, were

no longer economically possible. Specialized plantation crops that were sold during the “pickup” period were diversified to fit the available markets (Lord 1975). From 1929 to 1939, these agricultural markets declined; wage labor was scarce because little craft specialization had taken place on the island, and the shipping industry was defunct (ibid). Thus, in 1929 the “Coconut Oil” years began on Utila (ibid). Coconuts were one of the crops that had become more important after the brief fruit trade business ended and became the island’s primary income producer. The process of making coconut oil was time consuming, labor intensive, and rather arduous (ibid). The population of Utila became very resourceful during this time of economic depression and certain social and cultural traits began to form. In fact, the beginning of the next decade was a turning point for Utilian society. In the words of Lord (1975:36), “the decade of the 1940s marked a dramatic turning point in Utila’s history, and two events in particular at the beginning of this period colored the sociocultural systems in Utila today.” More importantly, for the purposes of this work, this new economic system and the cultural adaptations which developed out of it have been influential in the development of the tourism industry that dominates the island’s economy today.

The Remittance Period

Although the coconut industry on Utila did see a veritable boom period and islanders began aspiring to travel and become educated in the United States, reality struck as the price of coconut dropped to only 5 US cents each in the 1950s. Yet another economic slump ensued on the island. However, large scale merchant shipping had reached the Bay of Honduras by the 1940s, and the versatile islanders, who were already competent and experienced sailors, took advantage of the opportunity. The heritage of

Utila's men going to sea to fish and to carry products to market coupled with their attachment to Anglo-America, made the transition from farming and fishing to maritime service a logical and easy step. Additionally, the labor intensive cash crop farming in the insect-infested bush and the poor market conditions of the "post bellum" economy ensured that fishing and agriculture would never again be more than a part time income source for most Utilians (Lord 1975). Many of Utila's banana and coconut plantations by 1950 had been destroyed by disease and hurricanes (ibid). Therefore, the maritime service industry, which began during the 1940s, became the primary economic institution on the island.

In Charles Wilson's 1968 work, he discusses the beginnings of the merchant marine service in the Bay Islands (Wilson 1968). He traced its origins to World War II, when the United States, in 1940, leased some of the larger and better equipped banana ships for emergency defense duty (ibid). By 1941, the United Fruit Company began sending representatives to Utila and the other islands to sign up men to work on their steamship lines. Shortly, some of the men found themselves working in the United States merchant shipping service (Lord 1975). Neither Lord nor Wilson were clear on whether United Fruit was involved in the emergency leasing program or if they were simply training a reserve of sailors for their own use, nevertheless scores of Utilian men were acquiring marketable skills as the coconut industry dwindled (Wilson 1968; Lord 1975).

The remittance period in Utila's economic history was born out of necessity both for the Utilians and the United States. After World War II adult males ranging in age from 18 to 55, on regular basis left their island home to sail the open ocean (Lord 1975). For periods of nine to twelve months, men would work for various shipping lines,

sending their wages home (ibid). These jobs were a dependable source of income for the men and their families. Additionally, the fringe benefits while on the ships secured this occupation as a lasting economic industry for Utila. During this time, Utila again oriented itself to the United States. The USA became the land of opportunity for many Utilians. Children were sent to New Orleans for schooling and many families subsequently moved to the United States. New York and New Orleans have large Utilian communities today. As the merchant business of the 1940s took off, many locals realized that trying to make a living solely on agriculture and reclaiming the lifestyle before the introduction of the remittance system was unrealistic. This fact was reinforced in 1961 when Hurricane Anna struck the Bay of Honduras. Although the hurricane did not strike Utila directly, according to Lord, some 75,000 coconut palms were destroyed approximately one-third of the islands' total (ibid). He also reported, for nearly two years following the event not a single plantain could be found growing on the island (ibid). Subsequently, few men were inclined to repair the damage and hopes of reestablishing an agricultural market on the island were dashed. Utila settled into the remittance system that still exists in some form, but tourism has become of increasing importance.

Many traditional elements of Utila's society preadapted it for the remittance system and more importantly for this discussion, for the developing tourism industry today. These traditions include an emphasis on individualism, commercialism, and consumerism or non-cooperation (Lord 1975). Lord suggested that these preadaptations are intimately interrelated and share equal importance in motivating the islanders into economic situations (ibid). Since the Cayman Islanders first began farming on the island

a shared attitude of independent economic, social, and political action has created the basis for the cultural trait of individualism (ibid). The first farmers were generally independent of their neighbors. The lack of inter-family dependency allowed men to leave the islands to take part in the remittance system because families were so independent. As tourism began to develop as a viable industry on the island very little cooperative effort was seen and businesses started, and continue to run, as family operations. Commercialism and consumerism follow along these same lines in that it is rare to see any sort of cooperative work ventures. This attitude is still present today, and is evident in the constant price wars between dive shops and hotel owners and the general skepticism that has occurred when ideas of creating regulations on prices are introduced by foreign owners. Additionally social and political actions tend to be more self-serving. Since the time of the original settlers, one's prestige and other accomplishments have been considered a function of individual effort, thus preserving the ideas of non-cooperation (ibid). These traits can still be seen as islanders only get "up-in-arms" if their personal businesses are being effect by another's actions. More importantly for this discussion were the adaptations islanders made during the remittance period concerning attitudes of "rest and relaxation" for the men who returned home from sea. This point will be discussed further in the next chapter as I describe the development of the tourism industry on Utila. In total the economic history of Utila has had many peaks and valleys, from subsistence agriculture to commercial agriculture to the remittance period and now tourism. However, these endeavors have fostered certain traits that have helped the islanders to survive.

Chapter 5

Tourism Development on Utila

The tourist development of the Bay Islands is a forgone conclusion. No area of such beauty and such accessibility can remain undiscovered and unexploited. To yield their full potential, however, careful planning is indicated...It would be most unfortunate if the beauty of the Bay Islands was not available to all visitors to—and residents of—Central America. Nature has not created comparable attractions along the Caribbean coasts of Guatemala, Nicaragua or Costa Rica. The Bay Islands are a truly regional resource. (Ritchie et al 1965)

Before beginning a discussion of the history of the tourism industry on Utila, perhaps a note on tourist types is appropriate. Paul Fussell (1980) distinguished the tourist from three other types of people who take trips. His first classification is the explorer. Explorers seek the undiscovered and believe that no others have gone before. Christopher Columbus and his crew and the many other *conquistadors* who visited this part of the world during the colonial period are early examples. Travelers, Fussell's second type follow the explorers and attempt to learn about the newly discovered areas through study and experience. In the Bay Islands, people such as Mitchell-Hedges and his associates and William Duncan Strong, the first ethnologists and archeologists to visit the Bay Islands, are considered among this group. Travelers did not make it to the islands until early in the 20th century. Fussell's definition of the tourist differs from the others because they seek areas already discovered by businesses and publicized by the media. People who want nothing to do with the mass stereotypical tourist destinations and seek only the most remote of places that they perceive to be more authentic Fussell labels the antitourist. These people, he believes, imagine themselves as travelers, however, the days of the explorer and traveler are long past because few places on Earth

have not been visited by humans. Fussell's typology lacks a category for the scoundrels, fugitives, and scallywags who visited the islands before they were developed by the modern Bay Islanders. Further, he does not suggest where academic researchers fit into this scheme. Still, utilizing his discussion, it is possible to determine when the first modern tourist reached Utila and that travelers came to the island well before tourism become a major economic component of the world market after World War II.

The Bay Islands remained relatively remote until well into the twentieth century. Although they were accessible to wealthy explorers, scholars and the occasional fugitive, for the modern tourist, getting to the islands was difficult because the only transportation from the mainland was by small dories and fishing boats (Keenagh 1937). Travelers such as Mitchell-Hedges gave accounts that portrayed images of a rustic, savage place with extensive reefs that held ship wrecks. The possibility of pirate treasures hidden in the reefs lured the first major wave of tourists to the islands in the late 1970s. However, Utila's potential for tourism did not go unnoted by Rose in 1904, well before tourist began visiting the island. Ritchie, Davidson and Lord in the 1960s and 1970s, when an infant industry was beginning to develop on the islands, also noted the possibilities an economy based on tourism could bring to the islanders (Ritchie et al 1965; Davidson 1974; Lord 1975). Nevertheless, for Utila, it would be well into the 1980s before tourism became a significant component of their island economy.

The conclusion of World War II brought a world boom in tourism and travel world wide. The Bay Islands and much of the western Caribbean, however, did not participate in the tourism explosion. Inadequate transportation, infrastructure, and boarding facilities were among the primary reasons for this lack of participation. The

region also had acquired a reputation as being politically unstable (Nance 1970; Davidson 1974; Stonich 2000). In the late 1960s a diminutive modern tourism industry emerged in the islands as regular airline service from the mainland was initiated. In this same decade several popular periodicals suggested that the islands were perfect places for the adventuresome traveler who found sailing, diving and treasure hunting appropriate activities (Killbracken 1967; Jackson 1970). Also fundamental in development of the tourism industry on the Bay Islands were the Honduran legislative actions taken in the 1980s to help the existing economic crisis. Additionally, the political unrest during the 1970s was resolved and a perception of peace throughout Central America contributed to the growing industry (Stonich 2000).

Though a modern tourism industry emerged in the 1960s it grew fairly slowly until the 1990s (see Table 5.1) (Stonich 2000; Instituto Hondureño de Turismo 2001). Roatán had the largest number of hotels in 1960 (12), while Utila and Guanaja each had only one. By 1989 Roatán's numbers had decreased by two leaving the island with only ten hotels while Guanaja's numbers had increased to four and Utila's to three. The inhibiting factors present during the 1960s, such as in adequate facilities and accessible transportation remained unresolved well into the 1980s. A ferry service between La Ceiba and the island settlements of Utila, Oak Ridge, and French Harbor had been established but the transportation infrastructure on the islands improved very little. For example, Utila had no paved roads until the late 1990s aside from a small portion of Main Street that was paved in the early 1970s. In 1988 through international assistance, Roatán's small airstrip outside Coxen Hole was enhanced to handle jet aircraft (ibid). In that same year, Honduras's airline Tan Sahsa began offering regular airline services

Table 5.1: Hotels on the Bay Islands from 1960-2001

Year	Roatán		Guanaja		Utila	
	Hotels	Rooms	Hotels	Rooms	Hotels	Rooms
1960-1969	12	81	1	~ 4	1	~ 2
1970-1979	11		4	~ 46	1	~ 5
1980-1989	10	168	4	46	3	34
1990-2001	59	953	18	178	28	330

Source: Nance 1970; Davidson 1974; Lord 1975; Stonich 2000; Instituto Hondureño de Turismo 2001

between the mainland and the island, from several Central American countries, and from Miami, New Orleans, and Houston (ibid). Service into the United States lasted only a few years because in 1994 the United States banned the airline because of safety violations (ibid). Utila's airport is the smallest of the three islands and is currently unpaved, therefore no international flights have flown into the island (see figure 5.1). As of 2001 only two airlines service Utila, Sosa and Atlantic. Isleña Airlines recently discontinued services because the dirt runway was damaging the airplanes. Currently Utila has five daily flights, two in the morning, one at midday, and two in the early evening before dark. There are no scheduled flights after dark on the island because the runway is not equipped with properly lighted.

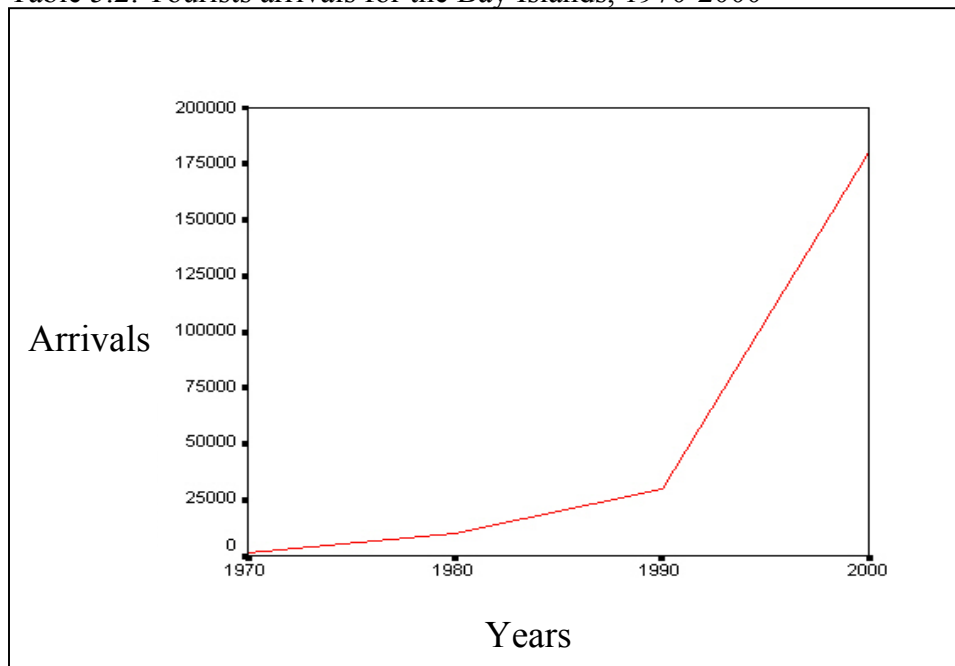
In 1974 approximately 1,000 tourist visited the Bay Islands, however by 1988 this number had risen to approximately 15,000 (SECPLAN 1989). The 1990s has been the decade for the Bay Islands' tourism industry. In 1997 roughly 93,000 tourists visited the islands (Stonich 2000). This number was nearly quadruple the islands population total in the 1988 census. In the early 1990s approximately 11% of the islands' total labor force was employed in service sector jobs (ibid). By the end of the decade nearly 80% of the



Figure 5.1: Old Airport on Utila

islands' population was directly or indirectly dependent on the tourism industry (ibid). Most islanders were employed as service personal with little or no training and those in management or executive positions were mostly foreign (ibid). The number of tourist facilities from 1985 to 1996 also grew substantially from 17 to 80 for all the islands (Instituto de Turismo de Honduras 2000). Utila's proportion of hotels increased from 18% to 30%; total number of rooms increased from 34 to 199(Table 5.2). Of course, Roatán still attracts the greatest number of tourist. Roatán also has the greatest price range for hotels; 10\$ to \$1500 daily. Guanaja has the highest mean price for daily lodging \$94.25, and as might be expected Utila is the least expensive (\$18.04). Since 1996 Utila has experienced an even greater spurt of development and continues to grow today.

Table 5.2: Tourists arrivals for the Bay Islands, 1970-2000



(SECPLAN 1998; Instituto Hondurano de Turismo 2000; Stonich 2000)

Sea, Sun and Drugs: Factors that Attract Tourists to Utila

Utila's culture history prepared it well for a tourism industry. One of the most important cultural traits for the development of the tourism industry, which began during the remittance period, was the relaxing of laws and social norms for men returning from sea (Lord 1975). Because of this, an atmosphere of "heavy partying and drinking" became a common occurrence on the island (ibid:4). These relaxed social laws have been important in drawing tourists to the island. Women are free to walk around in swimsuits and men in shorts without being harassed by locals as might occur on the mainland. Alcohol and drugs are easily accessible on the islands and local law enforcement officials rarely make arrests for public drunkenness or drug possession. When they do, however, if the suspect can pay their fine, they are released within 24 hours.

Utila has become so well known for its drug activity that an event was created to play off of this reputation. In August of 1998, Utilians hosted the first SunJam festival on Water Cay. In only four years the event has become the epitome of drinking, drugs, and partying on the island. People from all over the world visit Utila to take part in the festival. It has become so popular that the organizers feel having another in the spring could be financially beneficial for the island. There are two main organizers (one local and one local foreign) although many others on the island participate. The organizers start receiving shipments of drugs weeks in advance as they prepare for the masses of tourists who are expected to participate (personal communications). These organizers also section off the small cay to local businesses who want to set up small booths to sell food and drinks (mostly alcoholic). At the center of the cay is a large makeshift bar and D.J. booth where European “techno” and “trans” music can be heard playing well into the next day. Local boat owners ferry tourist to and from Water Cay for a small price (about 50 Lps or \$3 US). They are usually packed well over their carrying capacity as was shown the year before when a boat turned over on its return trip. Advertising for the event occurs mainly by word of mouth between groups of tourists traveling through Central America although there is an Internet site set up especially for the occasion. SunJam has become a cult-like event as many “SunJamers” return each year to take part. The festival is not solely made up of foreign tourists as many Hondurans also visited Utila, “to see if something like this really takes place in Honduras.” No matter how people came to know about the event, all informants had one thing in common, they wanted to take part in the drug activity. Because SunJam is held on Utila, and is organized by locals, it appeared to be a moderately controlled environment. For example,

it was reported that organizers had “taken care” of the police well in advance so that none were seen on Water Cay during the festival. This sense of security may also play a part in the popularity of SunJam as many informants expressed their reservation about taking part in drug activities in other places in Central America. However, on the Friday before the festival, an American military helicopter landed on the island. It was never confirmed why it had come and no one ever saw military walking around the island, but many suspected a major international drug bust. An attempt was made to determine the number of tourists on the island during this event. One local hotel and dive shop owner said that all rooms on the island were occupied so Many “SunJamers” where leaving for Water Cay the day before the event started to set up tents and hammocks. One estimate of the number of partiers was over 500. This number seems possible if all the hotel rooms were filled because at least 330 rooms are now available on the island and more than half of these are able to sleep more than one person. Additionally, a number of multiple occupant apartments are available. All included, the total occupant load of the island is well above 500. The SunJam festival makes up a sizable portion of the summer tourism economy. There was no other time during the summer of 2001 that all the hotels were full and lines would form outside restaurants. Although it last only a weekend, the financial potentials for the local industry has become an important part of the summer tourism season.

The drinking and partying atmosphere is not the only draw for Utila. In fact before drugs were a major part of the Utilian allure, small groups of people were visiting the islands to explore, dive and fish the reefs. In the 1960s the islands’ reefs and the possibility of “sunken treasures” attracted groups of American and European tourists to

the island (Nicolson 2001; Randel 2001)¹. Long before the local diving industry was established, fully equipped groups would visit the island and pay locals to take them to the reefs and lead them on underwater expeditions (Cobb 2001). On occasion these early divers initiated destructive practices when they removed objects hidden in the reefs (Nicolson 2001; Randel 2001). One diver reportedly used dynamite to reach the Spanish treasures that had been encased in the reefs. However, the Bay Islander's have also been accused of destroying the reefs. Other tourists were more interested in fishing the still plentiful waters surrounding the island and discovering Utila's "pristine" island environment. By 1980 Utila had entered into its present economic phase.

Emergence of the Present Tourism Industry

From about 1960 onward a small but relevant tourism industry was beginning to form on the island. As early as 1965, in the report by Ritchie and his associates, Utila was recognized for its inexpensive appeal. The group wrote,

"The initial development of Utila should attempt to maintain a balance between the bargain appeal (the present boarding house charges \$3 dollars per day American plan) and accommodations of quality that can be promoted by U.S. travel agencies...Design should be of high standards and in keeping with the architecture of the town. The objective is first-class comfort and housekeeping, without luxuries (Ritchie et al 1965:73)."

These first tourists were made up of recreational sailors, fishermen, and SCUBA divers along with the occasional "hippie" (Nicolson 2001). In 1971, when Davidson carried out his survey of the Bay Islands tourism facilities, Utila had only one small hotel, the Jiménez (Davidson 1974). A few years later, when Lord conducted his research on Utila he noted the presence of three local bars, including the most famous and the only one still

¹ In order to protect the identity and privacy of my informants I have replaced their names with pseudonyms.

in operation: the Bucket of Blood Bar (Lord 1975). As shown in Figure 5.2, just a handful of facilities existed before 1980. However, when the Honduran Government realized the islands' potential as a means to end the economic crisis of the 1980s, Utila, along with the other three islands, began to reap the economic benefits of new governmental legislation. The periods of the most intensive growth can be linked to the establishment of these policies. The implications of these policies for landscape and cultural change have been important in this discussion. However, in this section, I will reconstruct the emergence of the industry on the island using dates acquired from locals and other documents from local tourism facilities.

Aside from Hotel Jiménez, before 1980 Utila had one other family owned hotel, Hotel Trudy. A second hotel was begun sometime in the mid 1970s but was never finished. Its skeleton is visible on a ridge west of town (figure 5.2). Locals say that an American named Duncan began the hotel. However, he ran out of money and left the island, "never to be seen again" (Rafeal 2001). Now, the hill site is known by locals as Duncan Hill. As one of the few high outcrops of coral on the island the view is panoramic over the entire settlement of East Harbor. The hotel ruins are now home to *ladino* squatters. In addition to the two boarding facilities, Utila had one travel agency, (Morgan's Travel) (site unknown), two restaurants (site unknown), a general store (site unknown), three bars and an airstrip. As figure 5.2 shows, before 1980, tourism facilities on Utila were rare and the industry was still in its infancy. The situation changed during the 1980s.

As SCUBA diving became more popular worldwide after the 1970s the flow of tourist increased to the island (Calhoun 1996; Martin 1997). The first organized dive

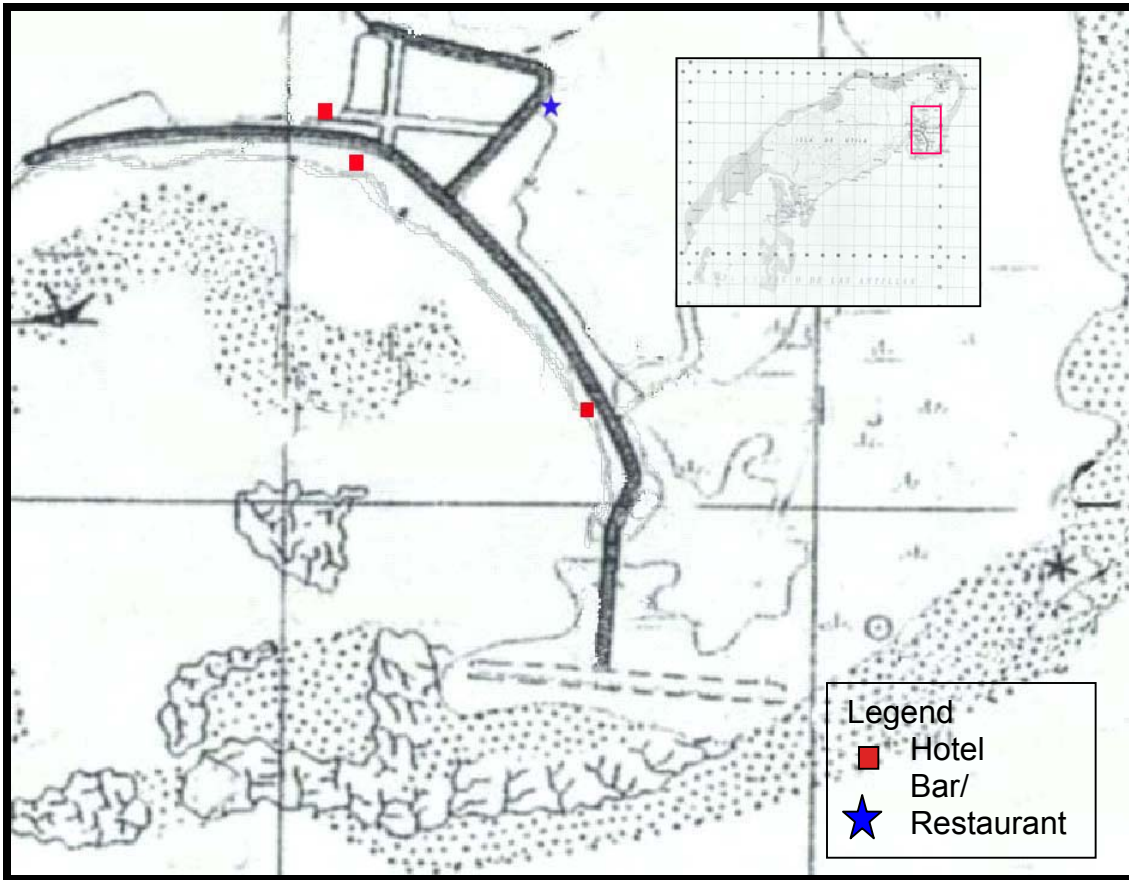


Figure 5.2: Tourism facilities on Utila before 1980
(adapted from 1:50,000 series Instituto Geografica Honduras)

schools were established during the 1980s and included, Cross Creek Dive Center, Utila Water Sports, and Utila Dive Center. Three new hotels were also built, Cross Creek Hotel, Hotel Celena, and Blueberry Hill, and the first small resort was built in East Harbor (Utila Lodge). However, Utila Lodge was not advertised as a resort until the mid 1990s. Cross Creek Hotel began a trend that has been followed in recent years, that is, dive shops build their own hotels or establish contracts with existing hotels for rooms. This arrangement allows the dive schools to advertise packages that give their clients cheaper rates on rooms. These arrangements have caused conflicts among locally owned dive shops and foreign owned dive shops. Cross Creek, along with its dive shop and hotel, also constructed a restaurant to complete its tourism complex. Other restaurants

were also built during the 1980s namely Mermaid's Corner, The Jade Seahorse, and Utila's first mainland-owned business, Las Delicias. Additionally, a second travel agency was built, as well as a bank, Hondutel telecommunications office, and two supermarkets. As Figure 5.3 shows, the decade of the 1980s began the escalation of the modern industry, with diving being its primary attraction. Utila is known worldwide for being one of the "cheapest" places in the world to dive and thus attracts a certain type of tourist. The establishment of the first dive centers and the understanding of the type of tourist the island was attracting created a more coherent industry. Local businesses focused their attention and efforts towards building on this attraction. As each new diving school was built a hotel soon followed. With the exception of the three resorts, all of the other tourist related businesses stayed within the "unspoken" price parameters.

The 1990s brought the greatest changes to Utila's tourism industry and by the summer of 2001 Utila had developed into a thriving diving-oriented tourist center (Figure 5.4 and 5.5). Today the island has 11 dive shops, reduced from a high of 14. Two dive shops, Sea Eye Dive Center and Reef Resort Dive Shop, closed shortly after opening because of internal competition. After the Reef Resort Dive Shop closed in 1997 the owners converted the building into the Reef Cinema, one of two places on the island where films can be viewed. Within an eight year period eight dive shops have opened and are flourishing on the island (figure 5.4).

As the diving industry continued to grow, an accompanying increase in the number of hotels and other related tourist facilities appeared to accommodate visitors. By the summer of 2001 Utila had 28 fully operational hotels and an addition five hotels

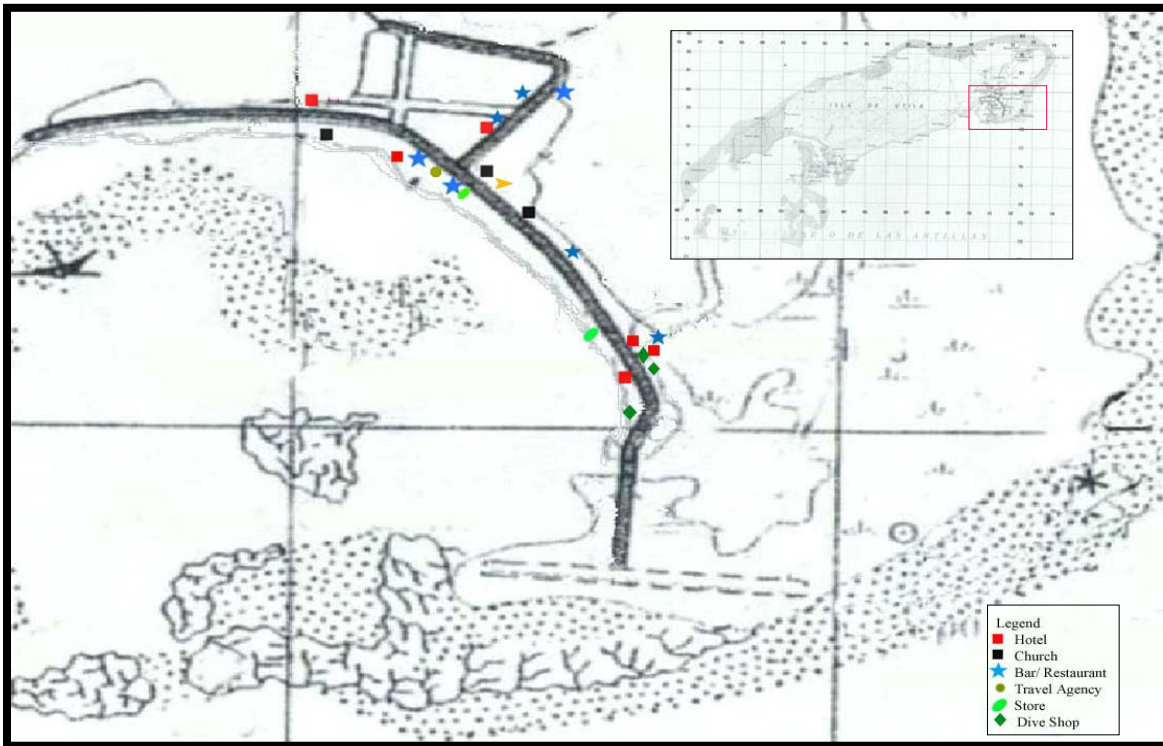


Figure 5.3: Tourism facilities on Utila, 1980-1990
(adapted from 1:50,000 series Instituto Geografica Honduras)

were under construction (figure 5.4 and 5.5). In addition, many islanders were renting extra rooms and empty houses to tourists who wanted to stay on the island for longer periods of time. Some 19 new restaurants, bars, and cafés were also constructed between 1990 and 2001. These new facilities were built especially for the growing tourist industry. In addition to the new dive shops, hotels and restaurants that were established in the last 11 years some 23 other tourist related facilities have also been built. These businesses include three internet shops, two bicycle rental shops, several souvenir shops, several laundry services, several boutiques, two community health centers, several household good stores and two bottled water businesses. The bottled water business

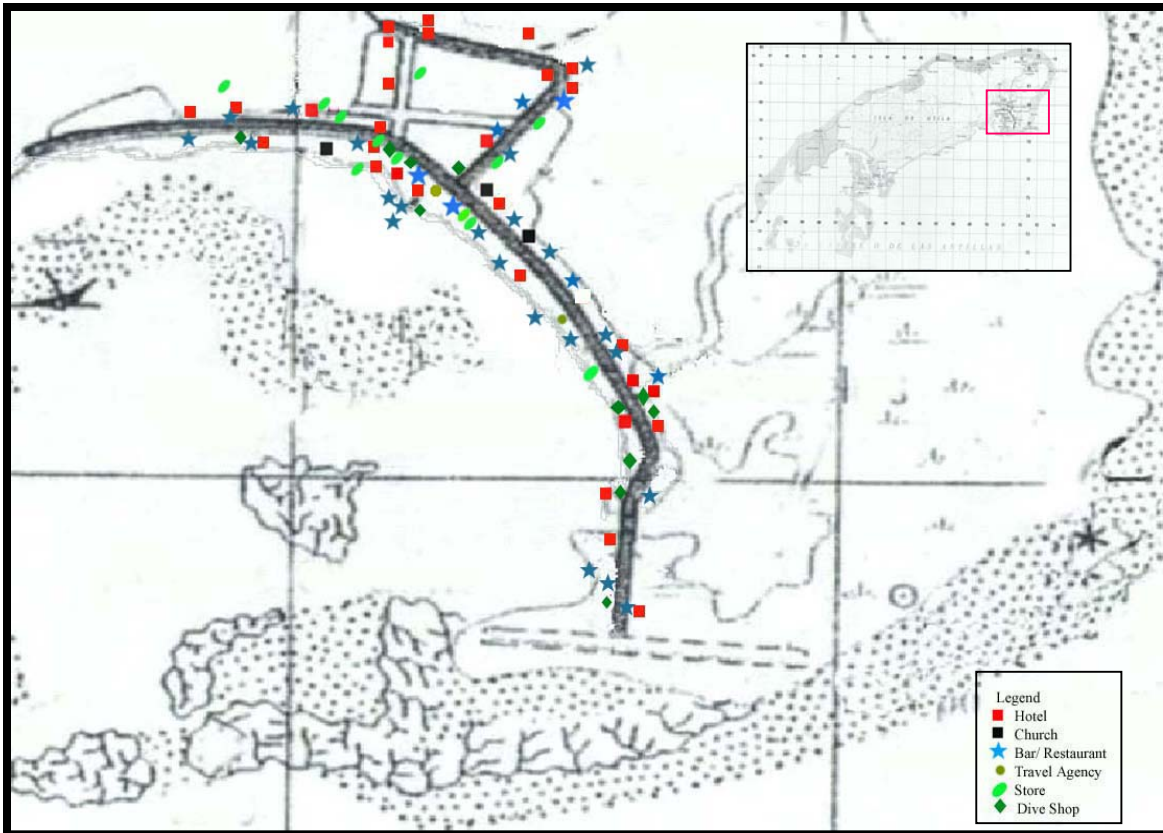


Figure 5.4: Tourism Facilities on Utila. 1990- Present
(adapted from 1:50,000 series Instituto Geografica Honduras)

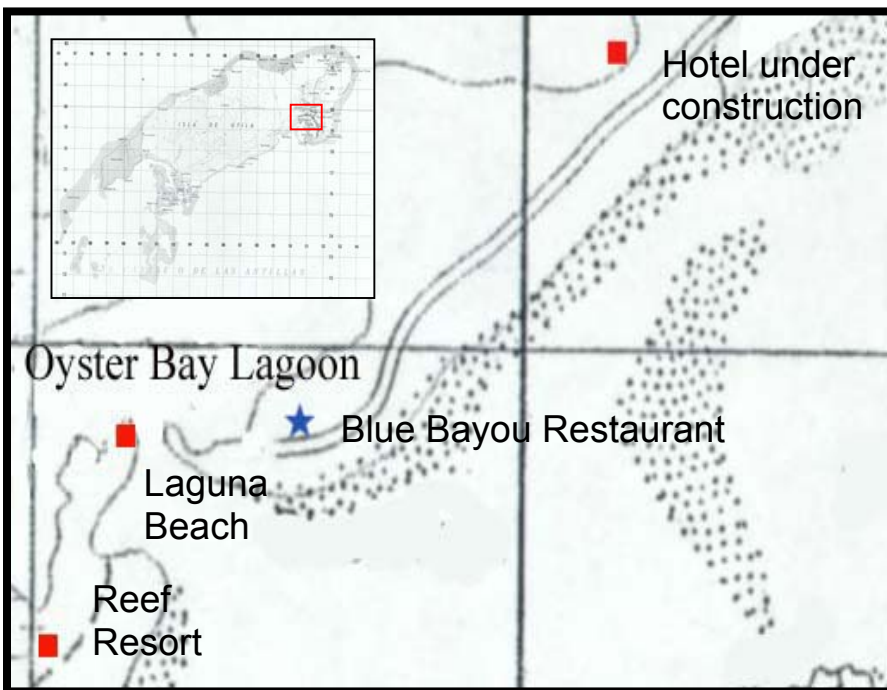


Figure 5.5: Oyster Bay Lagoon with Hotels and Restaurant
(adapted from 1:50,000 series Instituto Geografica Honduras)

beginnings are in direct correlation with the escalating numbers of tourist to the island. Before the 1990s Utilians used well water and cistern water for drinking and other related needs. Imported bottled water was available for consumption on the island, however, when large numbers of foreigners start visiting the island locals saw the potential for personal profit. Therefore the two businesses began operation.

Since 1970 nearly 49% of the tourist related facilities constructed, were built in the settlement of East Harbor on unoccupied land. While 51% of the facilities were placed in existing buildings or on land formally occupied. Of this 51%, 25% of the new facilities were housed in converted private dwellings. Although only 49% of the new buildings were built on unoccupied land the landscape and land-use patterns existent on Utila before tourism became an important economic factor were beginning to undergoing change.

Utila does not have the infrastructure that the other islands possess, such as 24-hour electricity or island-wide sewage disposal or plumbing. The island's electricity comes from a diesel powered-generator. In 1965 the generator ran only during the early morning and early evening, less than nine hours a day. Many islanders remember this time and joked that if the generator came on during the night it meant someone had died (Cobb 2001; Brown 2001; Sampson 2001). A generator still produces the power on the island. It normally runs from six in the morning until midnight. Because of fuel shortages and frequent mechanical problems, neighborhood outages often occur. Such inconsistencies required that tourist facilities have their own generators to guarantee their services.

New Trends in Development

Previous observers have noted a general pattern to the location of tourist facilities and the degree to which they alter the landscape. Until recently most of the tourist facilities that have been built on Utila have been concentrated in the settlement of East Harbor. Thus the islands' natural landscape, such as mangrove and tropical forests, had not been significantly altered. However, the new trend to locate tourist facilities and residential areas away from the existing settlement of East Harbor has caused drastic changes to the natural landscape. These new developments have been constructed to cater to higher paying clientele and provide services beyond room and board. In the 1990s Utila acquired its first two resorts of this nature, the Laguna Beach Resort and the Reef Resort (figure 5.5). Additionally, by the end of the decade two residential development projects had been started that have significantly altered the natural landscape.

There are two areas on Utila in which these developers have located: on the eastern tip of the island where the fragile iron shore is located and along the southwestern shore facing the cays (figure 5.6 and 5.7). The development underway on the eastern tip of the island incorporates four different sites, including "Rocky Point Estates," "Paradise Cove at Red Cliff," an unnamed site, and "Aquarium" hotel and residential lots. However, for the purpose of this discussion, this area will be referred to as one site. Both developments incorporate beach-front property in otherwise uninhabited parts of the island. It seems these developers bought large chunks of land for a relatively low price and then cleared the natural vegetation so that they could section the land off into smaller lots to sell to foreign tourists. I specify foreign tourists because, as many islanders

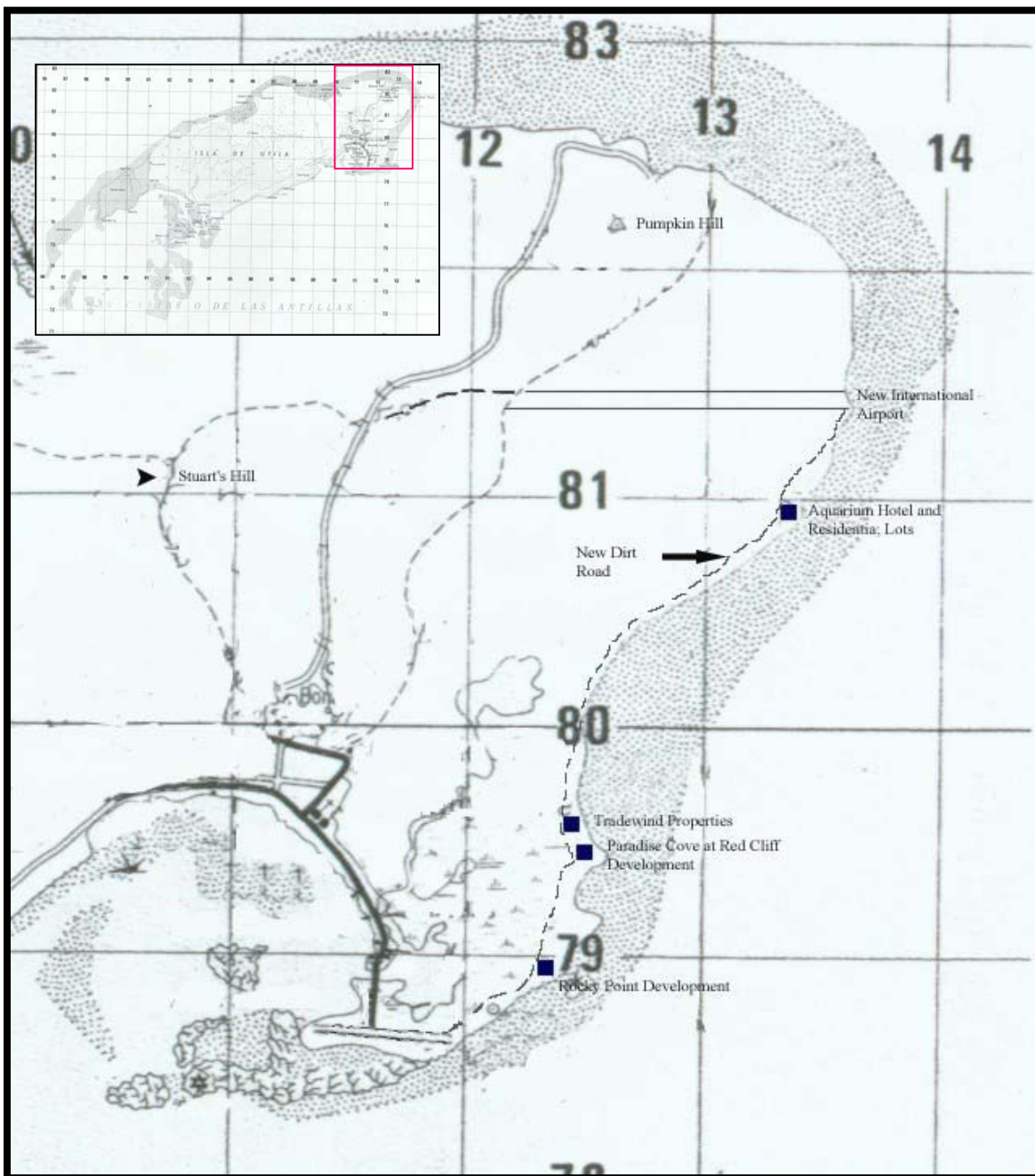


Figure 5.6: Development on the Eastern end of Utila
(adapted from 1:50,000 series Instituto Geografica Honduras)

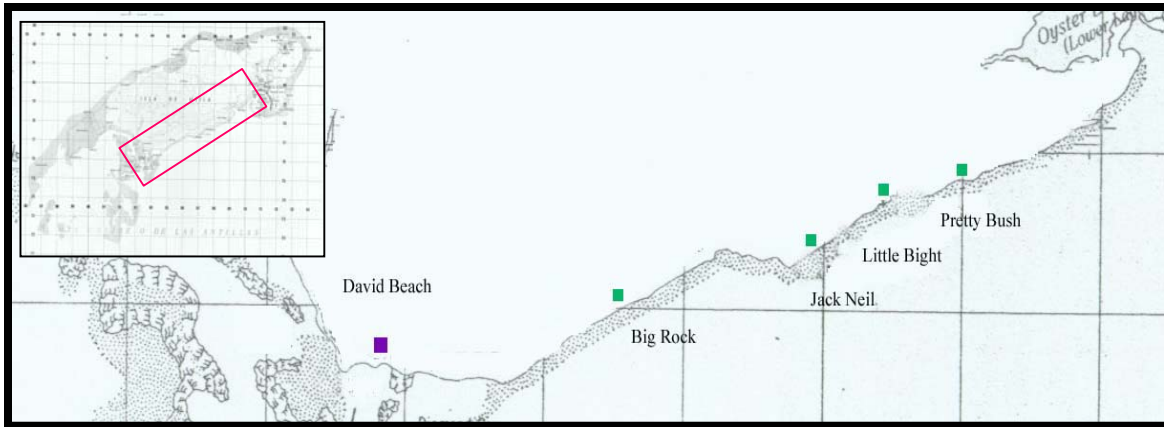


Figure 5.7: New Development on the Southwestern end of Utila (adapted from 1:50,000 series Instituto Geografica Honduras)

explained to me, they can not afford to buy these lots from the developers. An estimated price of one such lot on the eastern tip was about \$ 80,000 US dollars. These properties are being brokered through locally owned Alton's Real Estate, and American-owned Utila Island Properties.

The development on the southwestern section of the island was purchased and developed first, and already has attracted foreign buyers. Advertised prices for lots, including small houses, begin at \$100,000 US dollars. The second development, on the eastern tip, came with the construction of the new airport. When the large machines were brought to the island to be used in the airport's construction, contractors soon realized the roads in the existing community were not strong enough or wide enough to allow passage. Therefore, a new road was cut beginning at the northern end of the old airport and wrapping around the northeastern coastline of the island (figure 5.6). The real estate development began soon after this road was cut because, before, this area was virtually inaccessible except by boat. Essentially these areas will become foreign enclaves, well separated both geographically and economically, from the rest of the community on Utila. Additionally, if this development continues unchecked, a previously undeveloped

area, close to mangrove habitat, tropical forests, and the delicate iron shore, may well suffer irreversible damage.

During the summer of 2001, many locals became aware of the possible negative implications of these new developments. However, they soon discovered they had little say in the way in which land was sold and developed on the island. Therefore, fearing what had happened on Roatán, many local business owners petitioned the local government officials to create a Chamber of Commerce. This surge of local community participation was fueled by one of the owners of the sites on the eastern tip of the island. An American man had begun developing land in this area, however, his land did not have direct access to the water because of the presence of the iron shore. Additionally, he had already sold the land near the iron shore and begun cutting paths to the beach without going through the proper channels and without acquiring the proper permits. Soon after he was fined and had to replace the coral he removed but the damage had been done. Many locals hope that by creating the Chamber of Commerce, unchecked development such as this will not continue to occur. If this new trend continues unabated, previously undeveloped areas of the island, which are close to important natural resources such as mangrove stands and iron shore, may suffer irreversible environmental degradation. The populated cays southwest of Utila are another matter.

Development on the Utila Cays

The two largest cays, Suc-Suc and Pigeon, have developed into a thriving fishing community separate from Utila (figure 5.8). During the first surveys of the area in the 1970s, no tourism facilities were documented. However, since 1980 three small hotels have been constructed: Hotel Kayla, Lone Star Hotel, and Vicky's Rooms (found above



Figure 5.8: Pigeon and Suc-Suc Cay

Vicky's General Store). There is also a small house for rent at the west end of Pigeon Cay. Many Cayens² expressed that they serve as a day excursion spot for the tourists who are staying on Utila. One business owner expressed that much of her daily business comes from the diving boats. She said, "We are close to one of their favorite dive spots, so the instructors bring their divers here for lunch instead of going all the way back to Utila." Rarely, however, are the cayen hotels full. It was suggested that their tourism lags behind the main island because they lack sufficient resources. For example, no fresh water wells exist on the cays and the closest well on Utila is not potable. Rain cisterns are present on the cays, which provide minimal water for washing purposes, but bottled drinking water has to be imported from the mainland or from the main island. Allowing large numbers of tourist onto the cays, many Cayens feel, could be detrimental to their water supply. Garbage disposal, which is already a problem, would also be magnified, if

² This term is meant to distinguish those people who live on the cays from those who live on Utila. It is a term that is used by Cayens and Utilians.

tourism were to expand. Many Cayens expressed their contentment with their tourism status.

The ten smaller, uninhabited cays, however, have become popular tourist spots. These include Diamond Cay, Jack O'Neil's Cay and Water Cay. Diamond Cay, just off the south eastern tip of Suc-Suc Cay, once housed the Utila Cay's Dive Shop and Hotel. Tourists can now rent or buy the abandoned structures. Jack Neil's Cay, Morgan Cay and Sandy Cay can also be rented (house included) for about 400 Lps a day (\$27 US). Water Cay has become a favorite spot for tourists and islanders and has earned the reputation as being the "party island." To access the cay a caretaker charges one lempira a day. Hammocks are also available to rent from the caretaker's house for ten Lps.

Utila's cays did not participate in the tourism boom found on the main island. Although, they do receive some business from the tourists that visit Utila, their economy has not become as dependent on this industry. Instead, this community continues to rely on the sea for its livelihood.

Defining Utila's Tourism Source Regions

The diversity of tourists that visit Utila is increasing. While discussing tourism issues with a few locals during the summer of 2001 this subject was broached. From their statements it seemed reasonable to infer that it was no longer just North Americans who were making up Utila's tourist population (or at least those staying in hotels). This differs from documentation taken in the early years of the industry for the islands and especially the mainland (Rose 1904; Kaplan 1976). North Americans, more specifically those from the United States, have been documented as the major group visiting the North Coast and Bay Islands. However, today Europeans seem to make up

the largest group on the island. Therefore, in trying to prove this shift I looked at several hotel records to try and determine places of origin for the island's tourists.

By law each operating hotel on the island must keep a logbook that has all pertinent information about their visitors, such as, names, dates staying, place of passport issue, and where the tourist came from before arriving on Utila. I surveyed five of the local hotels ranging from the least expensive on the island to one of the higher priced hotels. It seemed important to do this to get an accurate view of the island's situation. However, hotel owners either do not keep or would not divulge records any earlier than 1999. For each hotel it was necessary to make tallies of each person according to country. From the information gathered five categories seemed appropriate to get an accurate representation. The term "other" was used to group all persons not from Europe, North American, Central American, or South American because there were so few people not from one of the other categories. However, the diversity of this group is definitely increasing. As shown in table 5.3, 5.4, and 5.5 the largest group visiting the island originated in Europe. North Americans were second. The stream of Central Americans is gradually increasing.

Table 5.3: Tourists Percentages for 1999 on Utila

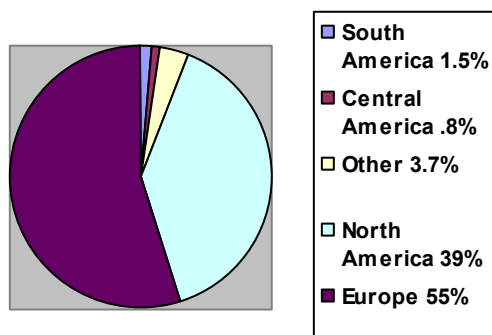


Table 5.4: Tourist Percentages for 2000 on Utila

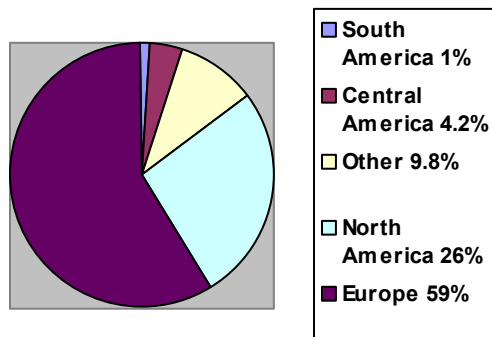
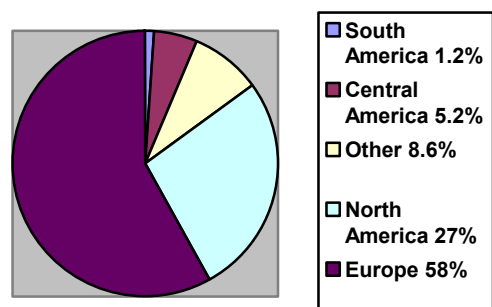


Table 5.5: Tourist Percentages for 2001 (Jan-Aug) on Utila



From the first travelers that ventured to the island, to the modern tourist, Utila's distinctive culture and impressive natural environment has spurred an economically prosperous industry. As the islanders realized this potential prosperity, tourism has become a significant economic factor. The most rapid phase of development occurred during the period from 1990 to 2001. The industry continues to grow, as is exemplified by the five hotels under construction. However, until recently, development has been confined to the existing settlement of East Harbor and minimal landscape and land-use change has taken place. At the end of the last decade, Utila entered into a new phase of development that mimics the practices in other popular tourism sites such as Cancun and Jamaica. These practices include the building of larger more lavish resorts and housing developments away from the existing local community. In conjunction with the islands

prosperity and as this new phase begins, large numbers of migrants have been flocking to the island seeking steady work. These groups bring cultural attributes that are different from those already in existence. In the next chapter, the cultural consequences of Utila's tourism will be addressed.

Chapter 6

The “Backpacker” Phenomenon and the “Spaniard”

As the previous chapter has shown tourism has grown substantially in a relatively short period on Utila. Although tourists have visited the island for nearly a century, only since 1990 has consistent, rapid development taken place. Documentation of this development by academics has primarily focused on the environmental impacts that the industry has had and potentially could have on the islands (Nance 1970; Vega et al 1993; Stonich 1998; Parker 2000; Harborne 2000). More specifically this attention has focused on Roatán because development has been concentrated there (Nance 1970; Vega et al 1993; Stonich 1998; Stonich 2000).

This chapter explores the human consequences of the expanding tourism industry on the diverse cultural heritage of Utila. Two specific tourists groups, the “backpacker” and “the Spaniard,” will be discussed. Particular questions will be addressed concerning the origin of these groups, their reasons for choosing Utila, and how they have or have not affected the local economy.

Nearly 30 years ago in the conclusion of his historical geography of the Bay Islands, Davidson questioned whether the Bay Islands British West Indian culture, having emerged from years of Anglo-Hispanic conflict, could survive the new migrations of the *ladinos* from mainland Honduras and more North-American visitors (Davidson 1974). Today these two groups come to the island for very different reasons and subsequently have different impacts. As tourism has become more pronounced on Utila, the island is also grappling with another group-the “backpacker” or “ticks” as the islanders like to call them (McNab 2001; Pederson 2001; Cooper 2001; Ramon 2001). Similar groups

have been documented in fishing-based villages elsewhere in South America (Kottak 1998).

The “Backpacker”

Utila was predestined to attract a certain type of tourist, one not looking for expensive resorts, rather, one looking for a fairly cheap place to dive and experience Central America and the western Caribbean. This type of tourist I have dubbed the “Backpacker.” This term has been used to describe young European tourists but, in this work, it will be extended to all cultural groups that travel in this fashion.

Before the development of the 1990s, Utilians were slow to construct adequate housing and other tourist related facilities. Therefore, when groups of young, budget tourists came to the island they camped on the beaches. To further reduce their costs backpackers often bought only “coconut bread and beer” (Randel 2001). Tourism in this form kept interactions with local populations to a minimum and only slight contributions were made to the local economy (Nicolson 2001; Randel 2001; Cobb 2001). Activities of this nature were documented by many locals during the early 1990s when adequate facilities had been constructed (Curtis 2001; Nicolson 2001, Randel 2001). It was apparent that the backpackers’ incentives had little to do with the lack of facilities on the island. Rather, much like Kottak (1998) noted in Brazil, backpackers activities stemmed from an economic necessity and longing for social interactions. Although Kottak called the group he observed “hippies,” they essentially began their travels for the same reasons and had similar effects on the local population in Arembepe, Brazil. For the tourists that I have distinguished as the backpacker class, many of them are young and traveling on small budgets. As they travel, they meet other backpackers and form small groups.

Through these groups and through other backpacker groups, they learn of economic and social havens. These havens establish reputations within the backpacker society because of their flexible law enforcement. The groups are able to find short-term work without acquiring expensive permits. However, as might be expected, animosity often arises between the backpackers and locals who might be competing for the same jobs. Utila has established this reputation.

The relationship between the islanders and the backpackers began to deteriorate in the early 1990s when it became clear that the visitors had little intention of changing their behavior. Many local businessmen resented these tourists because while visiting they made only minimal contributions to the newly established economy (Cobb 2001; Nicolson 2001; Randel 2001). Thus, many of the island's businessmen petitioned the *alcalde* (mayor) to make beach camping illegal (Cobb 2001; Nicolson 2001; Randel 2001). The backpackers, much like Kottak's hippies, first moved farther away from the local settlement so that they could continue staying on the island (Kottak 1999; Nicolson 2001). However, pressure from locals enforced the law and by 1999, backpacker camps had been eradicated.

As greater numbers of tourists visited Utila, a related increase in job opportunities and income levels followed. Jobs such as diving instructors and bartenders were in high demand. Diving is one of the Utila's most important tourist attractions. The island is known for being the cheapest place in the Caribbean to earn SCUBA-diving certification. During the summer of 2001 eleven diving establishments were in operation. Of these over half are owned and managed by foreigners. In most cases these owners and managers were not backpackers. They decided on Utila because of its reputation in

diving circles and its beauty. However, nearly all of the support staff are backpackers who came to the island with little intention of staying. The steady work in a beautiful, cheap place persuaded many of these backpackers to make Utila their home, at least temporarily. Most stay no longer than six months. Except for three Bay Island instructors, the rest are non-Honduran (Table 6.1). Of the backpackers interviewed many gave the same general story about how they had come to Utila and why they stayed. For most of them, they had heard about the island on the mainland of Central America and decided to “check it out.” Realizing the possibilities Utila offered for employment and general relaxation they decided to become certified divers. Most of these backpackers were not divers before they came to the island. To pay for this certification many of them worked either for the dive shops or in local bars. After becoming certified they would stay for a short while until they saved enough money to continue their travels. From my research I believe this has become a pattern for the many of the backpackers that visit Utila.

Table 6.1: Countries of Origin of Utila’s Dive Instructors

	Honduras	United States	Europe	Other
Dive shop				
Alton's Dive Shop	2	0	2	1
Utila Dive Center	0	0	4	2
Under Water Vision	0	1	2	2
Utila Watersports	0	0	1	2
Cross Creek	0	0	2	2
Captain Morgan's Dive Center	0	0	2	1
Parrot's Dive Center	1	1	1	0
Bay Islands College of Diving	2	1	0	0
Paradise Divers	1	0	0	2
Gunter's Ecomarine	0	0	3	3
Totals	6	3	17	15

Over the last five years many local attitudes have slowly changed and the backpackers have become “just another source of income and labor” (Cooper 2001a).

This is illustrated in a conversation with one such businessman:

F: So what do you think about all these foreigners on Utila now?

B: Me, man, I have no problem with the foreign guys being here. Now some do. Like those old men down there (points down the street where a group of older island men have gathered). I bet if you went down there and asked them that question they would tell you a different answer. But not me, man. Just as long as they don't take away from my business and keep giving me business I don't care how long they stay....Man, the jobs that the tourists take are the ones that the locals don't want or can't do anyway, man.

F: Even if they don't have their papers

B: Well, man, you know most of them don't, and well, man, I don't care about that either. Some do though. Just the other day some local, and I won't name names, went and complained to the police that there were lots of illegals working here. So the mayor had to crack down, but give it a couple of weeks and it will be right back to the way it was before. That kind of thing happens all the time, man, when one guy gets jealous of another guy making more money or something and then they go and tell but it doesn't last for long. Really it only hurts them because they're the ones hiring the foreign guys. Not me, man, I have no need for them.

A minority of islanders, however, still hold bitter feelings. Although “ticks” are contributing to the economy in general, by renting rooms and houses and buying food and other locally produced goods and services, some feel these backpackers are taking jobs from locals. But as shown in the above conversation, most of the jobs the backpackers take are jobs that locals, “don't want or can't do.” It must be stressed that those who dislike the backpackers are those who benefit the least from them living on Utila. Additionally, some also feel that as tourism has become the predominant industry and more foreigners are living on the island for extended periods of time, crime rates, drug use, and general disorderly conduct have increased. Proof of these accusations was never provided, nor observed. From time to time, when competition and jealousy reach a

breaking point, the local government is called in to control the illegal workers. This enforcement last only a short time before backpackers are working again.

The “Spaniard”

The Bay Islanders have always harbored bitter feelings towards the mainland “Spanish” populations. As documented by Davidson (1974) three decades ago, these feelings stem from the many feuds between the English and Spanish throughout the settlement history of the islands, as well as the many cultural differences, and the general lack of communication between the Bay Islanders and the Hondurans. As I spent time with many older Utilians it became clear that the resentment lingers as they told me stories about when they were (Bonds 2001; Cobb 2001; Curtis 200; Brown 2001). Their stories were riddled with profanities and harsh generalizations, as my informants described experiences with the mainland Hondurans. In each case, the Utilians described episodes of harassment and ridicule at the hands of the mainlanders. Many of them said they would be called, “uneducated, uncultured, thieves” by the Hondurans (Cobb 2001; Smith 2001). Perhaps it is not surprising to see similar attitudes expressed about the *ladinos* who are no living on the island. A reversal of harassment and ridicule has now surfaced against the *ladinos* who have recently made Utila their home.

The first wave of Honduran migrants came to the islands in the 1960s (Davidson 1974). This group however, preceded the economic boom associated with the tourism industry that has been blamed for the recent influx (Jacobson 1992; Stonich 2000). Davidson (1974) concluded that the initial intrusion was fueled by the favorable economic conditions on the islands associated with shipping and merchant marine industries at the time. *Ladinos* would come to the islands and start businesses selling

Honduran made goods as well as work in the other industries on the islands. In 1968, Guanaja seemed to be the island that was drawing the largest portion of *ladinos*. This cultural group made up approximately eight percent of the island's total (Davidson 1974). Surprisingly, Roatán's *ladino* population made up only three percent of its much larger total. Utila, although involved in the merchant sailing business, probably was not producing as much income because the islanders had not developed a large shipbuilding industry like the other islands and therefore, in 1968, only .8% of Utila's population was *ladino* (Davidson 1974).

As the tourism industry began to take hold on the island, the trickle of *ladinos* escalated to a steady pour. The first *ladino* owned businesses on the island, namely Comedor Dilicia, Mario's Place, Captain Jack's, Commerca Mantoya, Delco Bike Hire, Raimundo and the two banks opened during the 1990s. Previously, the only businesses on Utila that were run by *ladinos* were those whose spouses were Bay Islanders. Lord's 1975 work, as noted in Chapter 3, put Utila's *ladinos* at the bottom of the social ladder. During my surveys of 2001, businesses owned by Bay Islander and *ladino* couples were considered Bay Island establishments. These businesses included, The Sea Breaker, Covemen, and Samantha's 7-11. Nothing in their facades indicated they were owned by *ladinos*. In 1999, the first street vendors pervasive elsewhere in Latin America, appeared on Utila. "*Baliada Ladies*" selected the cross-roads of Main Street and Main Line Road (figure 6.1), where the municipal dock and municipal buildings are located, as their location. These ladies have been noted in many travel guides published around this same time (Humphrey 2000; Keller et al 2001). The "*Baliada Ladies*" only sold food and had not expanded into the market style shops located on the mainland (figure 6.1). During the

summer of 2001, however, a Latin America market structure appeared on Utila. As shown in figure 6.2, items ranging from shoes to hammocks, are sold from stalls that are essentially similar to those on the mainland.



Figure 6.1: Baliada Ladies found at the Municipal Dock



Figure 6.2: Ladino Street Vender on Utila

Many local Utilians give two reasons for the recent influx of *ladinos*, the tourism industry and the *alcalde*. Much like the perceived economic opportunities Davidson noted in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the tourism industry on Utila has given the island a reputation with many mainlanders as a place to improve their standard of living. Although, very few *ladinos* work directly in the tourism industry a few have employment in hotels as maids, on construction crews building houses and roads, and as trash collectors. They are heavily involved in the construction of the new airport, perhaps because that deal was negotiated on the mainland. Stonich noted this same phenomenon on Roatán (Stonich 2000).

Most *ladinos* cannot take part fully in the tourism industry because they do not have the extra income or personal contacts it takes to start businesses on the island. Subsequently, the jobs they do take, when they are available, have increased negative local attitudes towards them. Many islanders feel that since the *ladinos* have come to the island wages have been inflated because this group will work for much less than local

residents. Additionally, there seems to be a local attitude concerning hunting and collecting fruits from the bush that most islanders seem to follow like an unspoken law. Hunting for one's family is acceptable as well as collecting only enough fruits that can be carried out of the bush by hand. However, many *ladinos* have been caught hunting iguanas, turtles, and other local wildlife, which they then take to the markets on the mainland to sell. Many islanders also attest to seeing ladino families coming out of the bush with bags full of fruits and plants. The market in the adjacent coastal city of La Ceiba does have signs that advertise iguana and turtle eggs for sale. Whether *ladino* gathering on Utila is the source of La Ceiba's sales is unknown, but these rumors are adding to the already strained relationship between islanders and *ladinos*.

Beginning in 1997, when the present mayor came into power, he, in conjunction with the government of Honduras, began a project to offer poor landless Hondurans from the mainland affordable land and housing. Utila, and the other Bay Islands, offer an outlet to establish such a project because of the perceived availability of work and other monetary prospects. Those mainlanders, who had already come to Utila, suggested that they knew the islanders were wealthier than they, and believed the prospects for work would be better on the islands because of the tourism industry. What they did not foresee was the higher cost of living on the islands and the irregularity of work because of the seasonal aspect of tourism (Stonich 2000). Nevertheless, in 1997, an area located in the interior mangrove swamp on the eastern end of the island off Cola Mico Road behind the Bucket of Blood Bar, was cleared, separated into lots and sold at "very low prices" to mainlanders (actual prices were never discussed during my research) (figure 6.3a and b).



Figure 6.3a and b: Crude Lot Separation in Camponado Neighborhood

Camponado, the islanders' name for this new *barrio*, by the summer of 2001, had become a well populated area. In the preliminary 2000 census figures, the neighborhood contained 68 houses. Two distinct areas exist in Camponado. The older one begins behind the Bucket of Blood Bar. This area has concrete sidewalks and standard Bay Island's houses and English is still spoken. This section extends approximately 30 yards from the road and does not enter the swamp (figure 6.4). However, where the swamp water begins, concrete is replaced by wood planks and English is replaced by Spanish. This is the younger part of the neighborhood, settled by mainlanders in 1997. Land building on Utila has been a process carried out by islanders for generations. Because nearly two-thirds of the island is mangrove swamp, drying land or constructing artificial land is a common practice among islanders. New land is made from a variety of materials such as trash, fossilized coral, sand and concrete. In Camponado, land building is being carried out in a furious effort so that construction of more permanent houses can take place (figure 6.5). However, some houses have been built in areas still under water (figure 6.6). Without rules for sewage disposal, raw human refuse is deposited directly into the water. Trash and other materials are also thrown into the swamp reducing the environmental quality in this *barrio*. This type of environment is a breeding ground for many diseases such as cholera, malaria, dysentery, hepatitis and dengue fever (Stonich

2000). If regulations are not set for the continued growth of this neighborhood, an outbreak of disease will most likely occur.

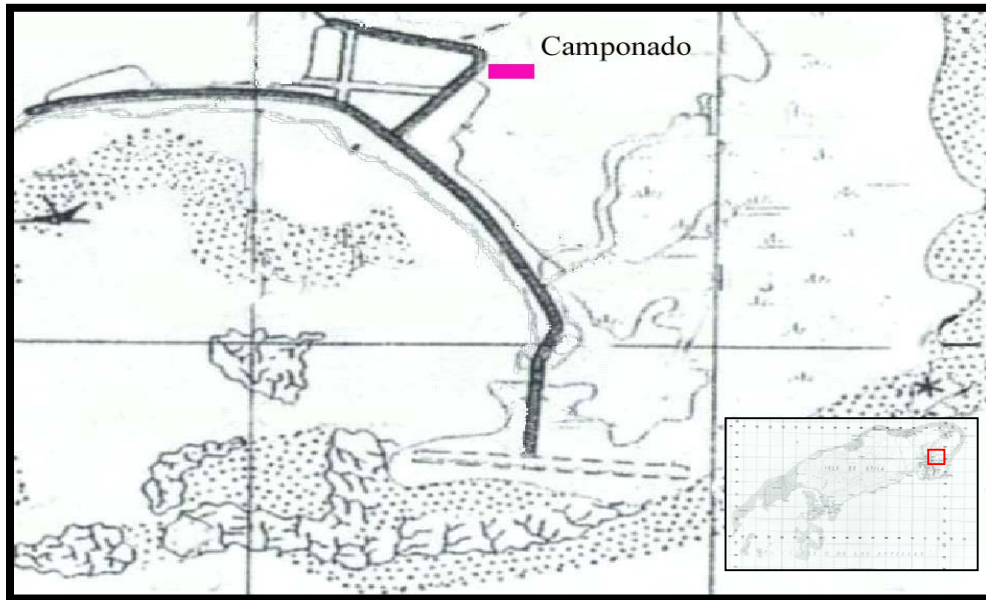


Figure 6.4: Location of Camponado on Utila
(adapted from 1:50,000 series Instituto Geografica Honduras)



Figure 6.5: Land Building in Camponado



Figure 6.6: *Ladino* House in Camponado

This barrio has become a source of contention for most local Utilians. Stonich documented such an area on Roatán, and described much the same attitudes towards the “ghetto” and its inhabitants (Stonich 2000). Not only has Utila’s natural environment

been adversely altered, the number of *ladinos* has grown significantly on the island since this *barrio* has been open. Many Utilians expressed their belief that increases in crime and drug activity have come with the increases of *ladinos*. As one islander said, “Their hands is full of glue, anything they touch they take.” (Smith 2001). Many young Utilians voiced concerns about the presence of mainland gang activity on the island. Mainland gang insignia, representative of the Diez y Ocho’s and the Salva Truchnas are now appearing on Utila (photograph 6.7) (Carter 2001). If gang members are on the island is not known for certain and some suspect the tags were copied by local children (Carter 2001). Unlike the attitudes Utilians have towards the involvement of the backpackers in the tourism industry, *ladinos* are seen as bad for the economic livelihoods of the locals.

A local man said:

“Man, those Spaniards need to go! They come here and don’t work and they just steal from us. They rape tourists and then give our island a bad name...the ones that do come to our island and work, take our jobs because they will work for less than we will. The foreigners that hire them don’t know that they do bad work and will end up stealing from them.” (Bonds 2001)

In 2001, many *ladinos* were seen working on construction crews, building houses and roads. Others were working to clear and clean the new foreign owned land developments on the island. Primarily, *Spaniards* are working on the new airport, which is being built on the eastern side of the island. Still, many *ladinos* are without work and until local attitudes change, finding will continue to be difficult. However, they continue to come to the island under the pretext that the perceived tourism industry boom will provide opportunities for them. The *ladinos* have and will continue to have an affect on



Figure 6.7: Mainland Honduran Gang Tags found on Utila

the island both culturally and environmentally and the Anglo-Hispanic conflict Davidson noted nearly 30 years ago is still very much a part of Utilian life.

Utila, like many other small island tourism destinations, is beginning to experience new cultural flows that follow its growing industry. Although there was resentment in the beginning, locals are slowly tolerating these groups. The backpackers today seem to be the most accepted group. This acceptance is not unanimous but as long as the “ticks” do not interfere with local business, they are allowed to stay. However, the new mainland families moving to the island are still under constant scrutiny. Although, today intermarriages between Utilians and *ladinos* are common place, those families that have come to settle on the island still hold the lowest place in the social hierarchy. They have become the local scapegoat for many of the problems that have occurred since tourism became the predominate economic institution on the island.

Chapter 7

Effects of Tourism Development on Utila (Conclusions)

The perceived image of Utila as a place for economic opportunity has been the major catalyst for the recent, population, economic, landscape and environmental changes on the island. The perceptions are widespread throughout Central America and coincide with larger global expectations of growth in the tourism industry. The rapid transformation on Utila, if left unmanaged, will begin to challenge terrestrial and marine resources, as well as other cultural attributes of the island and may begin to undermine any long-term economic prospects for the island's residents. In the previous chapter a discussion of two recent and controversial groups began to illustrate the potential population and cultural consequences of the developing tourism industry on Utila. These groups coupled with general visitation rates have begun to create stress on the island's resources. They have also begun to influence the island's cultural and physical landscape as well as the natural environment. This chapter will discuss changes that have occurred as a result of the developing tourism industry especially those related to population, economics, landscape and environment.

Population Growth and Composition

During the last two decades island population has increased significantly and the composition has changed drastically. Since 1980, the population has virtually doubled. This date coincides with the national decision to push tourism as a means for economic prosperity. From the mid-1800s to the mid 1970s the total population of the islands grew at about 3.5% per year (Lord 1975; Stonich 2000). This growth corresponded with the approximate annual growth on the mainland (Stonich 2000). According to the 1988

census, the annually growth rate for the Bay Islands had reached a high of 4.5% and increased to about 5% between 1988 and 1996 (ibid). The islands' growth rate differed significantly from the mainland where population increase has never exceeded 3.5% annually (ibid). According to Stonich (2000), in 1991 Bay Island population was 24,000, with Utila contributing less than 10%, or about 2,200. Preliminary figures from the 2000 census placed Utila's population at about 6,500, indicating a significant contribution from in-migration.

As might be expected with the recent population increases, population composition has also changed. According to Stonich (2000), the percentage of *ladinos* on the Bay Islands increased from 7% in 1970, to 12% in 1981, and by 1988 this group made up nearly 16% of the islanders (Stonich 2000). This acceleration of migration by this group has begun to shift the ethnic composition and distribution of settlements on the islands. Bay Islanders historically located their settlements along coastlines in a linear form (Davidson 1974). However, as the mainlanders migrated to the islands they tend to live away from the existing settlements in marginalized areas, such as Camponado on Utila. This new pattern is related to their social status on the islands. For traditional Bay Islanders, social place is related to physical space. Those who have property on coastlines or nearby the water generally hold higher social positions than those who are relegated to marginalized areas such as swamps and other interior places. Thus, as migration continues ethnic composition and distribution of human settlements will continue to change.

Economic Change

As both Davidson (1974) and Lord (1975) chronicled, the Bay Islanders have developed a type of “economic resilience” throughout their history. Utila’s inhabitants have survived throughout periods of slavery, piracy, boom and bust cycles of the fruit trade, fishing, fish processing, and remittances. Indeed this economic resilience is fostered by the adaptability of the islanders. As Lord suggested with his critique of the remittance system, the islanders developed traits that helped them create and rebound from the inevitability of economic boom and bust cycles. Although there has not been a bust cycle in the merchant sailing business *per se* there has been a world boom in tourism. Tourism, the world’s largest industry, is, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council, growing at a rate 23% faster than the world economy (WTO 2000). Although some islanders still participate in the remittance system, many are now dependent on tourism.

Susan Place (1988), in her work documenting the establishment of Tortuguero National Park in Costa Rica, identified several consequences associated with tourism expansion in this region. Among the most important she pointed out were the socioeconomic differentiation of the local population, the placement of local populace into menial jobs, inflation, and increased foreign ownership of local resources (ibid). She also recognized that those who benefited most from the local community were the wealthier residents who could take advantage of expanding opportunities (ibid). This is also the case on Utila. The gap between the rich and poor on the island continues to grow. The population of migrants from the mainland, as one might expect, make up the lower end of the spectrum. Those families who prospered most from earlier economic

systems have been more able to take advantage of the opportunities presented by tourism. However, those residents who came later to the island or those who have not acquired the monetary or land resources from past economic endeavors are relegated to menial jobs in the developing industry. Foreign ownership of land and valuable resources has also become a problem as liberal investment policies are instituted by the national government to help facilitate the growing tourism industry.

Perhaps this new economic endeavor in tourism is a continuation of past sporadic trends. However, none of these past periodic expansions had the capability to so thoroughly undermine the island's resource base or so rapidly change the availability of resources on Utila. Now the dependence on tourism is most evident and through continued policy expansions by the national government this industry will probably continue to grow. However, if tourism proceeds at its current rate and remains unregulated as it is now, the future of the island's economic and environmental landscapes might be in jeopardy.

Cultural Landscape Change

Lord (1975) suggested that the first people to inhabit Utila proper located away from the shoreline and out of the range of the sandfly. However, because of lack of infrastructure and the islanders' dependence on the sea for transportation and economic purposes they were forced to reestablished their settlement along the coastline. This pattern dictated a linear settlement formation (Davidson 1974). As such, houses were normally built on stilts out over the water, so that they could not only have unobstructed access to the ocean and daily sea breezes but also they were out of the range of the sandfly and mosquito (ibid). In 1974 Davidson noted that nearly 83% of the houses in

the Bay Islands were, “on stilts with wooden floors, lumber walls, and zinc roofs”. He also noted that most houses were built in a box-like fashion with shuttered windows and porches that extended half way or completely across the front of the structure. Rain cisterns were also characteristic of Utilian houses before water systems were installed and still can be seen today (figure 7.1a (1973) and 7.2b (2001)). Outhouses on



Figure 7.1a and b: Rain Cisterns Found on the Island used for Collecting Water

stilts with walkways that extend over the water which were sometimes used as temporary docks are also characteristic of Utila’s landscape. These structures were present on Utila in 2001 but most were in great disrepair. Family owned docks and boathouses were also an important feature to the many Utilians and remain part of the modern landscape.

Other architectural styles adopted from the British West Indian Victorian house were also present on the landscape in the 1970s as seen in figure 7.2a. Originally the structure was a family owned house, however, it is now owned by an American and houses two separate businesses (figure 7.2b).



Figure 7.2a and b: Traditional British West Indian House Type found on Utila

The initial settlement of East Harbor, in terms of architectural style, has not undergone much change because of the developing tourism industry. However, beginning in the 1970s as North American influences increased with the initial development of the industry, local response to these foreign developers created, as Davidson's put it, a "new American resident-tourist landscape" (Davidson 1974:125). Most important to this landscape was the construction of tourist related facilities for lodging and meals. On Utila the first facilities built were incorporated into local houses. New structures related to the industry were not constructed until the 1980s. However, these facilities were constructed in fashions that resemble existing buildings and houses on the island. Recently, as foreign, less expensive construction materials become more readily available, developers have shifted structures from wood (the traditional building material) to concrete blocks, brick, and cement (figures 7.3, 7.4, and 7.5). As foreign



7.3: Brick Hotel found near old Airport



Figure 7.4: Concrete Structure Located in Cola del Mico



Figure 7.5: Hotel under Construction near old Airport

capital and foreign developers become more prevalent on the island, larger and more Americanized structures have appeared in East Harbor (figure 7.6). Since 1990, a few houses have been constructed away from the initial settlement of East Harbor, in a fashion that differs from traditional local styles (7.7 and 7.8). As the new foreign developments mentioned in Chapter 5 are marketed, this trend might be expected to continue.



Figure 7.6: New Structure built in 2000 near the center of Town



Figure 7.7: House found near Blue Bayou



Figure 7.8: House found on the Southwestern end of the Island

Physical Landscape Change

In 1995 John Pigram (208) wrote, “Tourism is, to a large degree, a resource-based activity, interacting with natural systems and with the capacity to initiate far-reaching changes on the environment”. Tourism projects are not solely responsible when discussing environmental damage caused by human activity, however management of these issues has become central to tourism planning in both developing and developed worlds (Jenkins 1992). As the industry has grown in recent years, island environments

have incurred drastic development because these locations offer popular attractions for tourist. Tourism development impacts on these environments, such as Utila, are exacerbated, because these places are small and incorporate fragile ecosystems (Inskeep 1991). The Hol Chan Marine Reserve in Belize has become a popular diving site. In Carter's discussion of this site, he discussed the deterioration that over-diving has caused to the local reef (Carter 1997). Other environmental problems have been documented specifically associated with tourism such as: water pollution and subsequent decline of potable water, air pollution, waste disposal problems, ecological disruption, and land use changes (Lea 1988; Vega et al 1993; Stonich 1993, 1998, 2000). Because of the demands of an escalating human population caused by migration and the unfettered development of the tourism industry, Utila's fragile ecosystem has incurred unprecedented stress and decline. In this section I will discuss particular attributes of Utila's industry that are at the root of these problems as well as the effects of their development.

As Davidson noted in 1974, implications for the most drastic landscape change occur when developers, both local and foreign, begin constructing tourism facilities and residential areas away from the existing community (Davidson 1974). The most palpable alterations on Utila have included the clearing of vegetation, especially mangrove on the water front and along the outer edges of the interior lagoons, draining and land building in these wetland areas, the construction of larger more lavish facilities for boarding higher paying tourists, dredging canals for travel inside the reef, construction of larger docks so that the bigger dive boats can be docked, the building of artificial beaches along the northeastern shore and the planting of palms and other ornamental plants in this area, and the cutting of horse trails and hiking paths through the bush. The first major physical

landscape alterations related to tourism began in 1988 with the construction of Cross Creek Dive Center and Hotel. The facility was built on the interior side of the main road back into the eastern lagoon in an extensive mangrove stand (figure 7.9). The area had been filled with mangrove and as the business expanded landfilling projects took place as more area of the swamp was needed. Today this area not only incorporates Cross Creek Dive Center but residential houses have also been built (figure 7.10a and b). The majority of the tourism-related businesses that have developed on Utila since 1970 have been constructed on otherwise unoccupied land showing that tourism has begun to have an effect on the island's physical landscape and land-use patterns. However, these

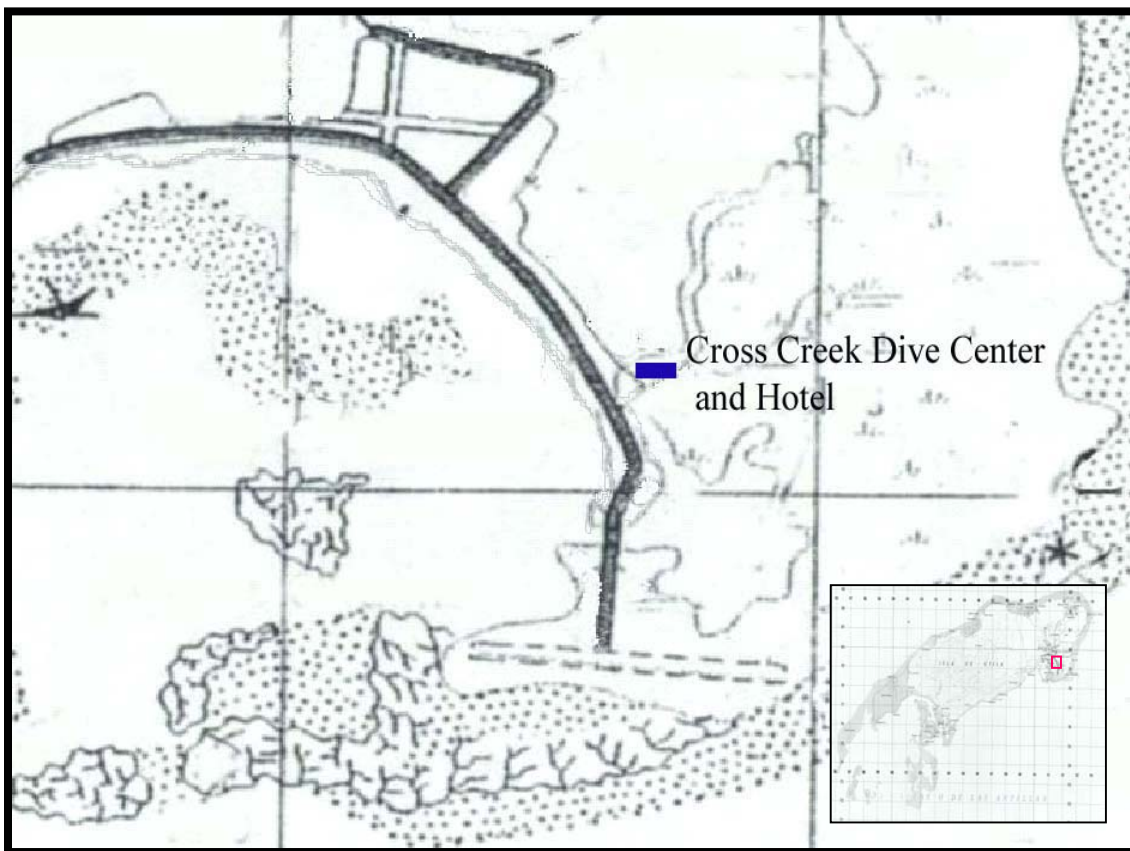


Figure 7.9: Location of Cross Creek Dive Center and Hotel on Utila (adapted from 1:50,000 series Instituto Geografica Honduras)



Figure 7.10a and b: New Development in the Interior Lagoon Associated with Cross Creek Dive Center

facilities tended to stay within the existing settled area of East Harbor until the 1990s, when expansion into uninhabited parts of the island began.

The expansion incurred during the 1990s has caused more striking alteration and can be directly linked to both the foreign owned residential developments that have appeared on the island in recent years and the building of the first two resorts. A discussion of the recent foreign owned residential developments in Chapter 5 began to describe some of the landscape alterations that have taken place. Destruction of the iron shore on the northeastern portion of the island and the removal of the natural vegetation in this area are but a few of the changes. As shown in figures 7.11 and 7.12 this area is now lined with palms and other ornamental decorations such as the coral walls and planters. Scenes such as this are a reminder of the close connection Utila has with the United States, because such landscape ornamentation is popular in beach communities in the United States. The development on the southwestern area of the island, in an



Figure 7.11: Planters Constructed for the new Development site on the Eastern Shore



Figure 7.12: Coral Walls Constructed for the new Development site on the Eastern Shore

otherwise uninhabited location, is currently only accessible by boat. Plans are being discussed to cut a canal through the interior of the island (in a seasonal swampy region) and connect it with Oyster Bay Lagoon, thus creating direct sheltered access for the residents. Ecological damage, such as salt water intrusion into the lagoon as water is siphoned out for the canal and large amounts of sediment deposition on either ends of the canal have been addressed during recent island discussions. Currently, the Bay Islands Conservation Association, along with many local Utilians, has organized to make a protected area of the interior of the island directly behind the settlement to prevent the canal from being constructed.

Along with the developing foreign residential communities, the construction of two resorts has also been responsible for physical landscape change. Davidson (1974) recognized a pattern to expanding tourism industries and noted that significant changes occur when larger resorts, which cater to higher paying clientele with services beyond just room and board are built, away from the existing settlements. As mentioned in Chapter 5 Utila has two such resorts, Utila Reef Resort and Laguna Beach Resort. These resorts were constructed in uninhabited parts of the island. Utila Reef Resort is located

near Pretty Bush, farther away from the lagoon, and has not been very profitable. In 2001 no visitors had been reported in a least a year. Because it is smaller than Laguna, very little vegetation was cleared was necessary for its construction (figure 7.13).



Figure 7.13: Utila Reef Resort Located West of Oyster Bay Lagoon

However, Laguna Beach Resort sits at the edge of the lagoon and large mangrove stands and other beach vegetation were cleared for its construction. Because it is only accessible by boat, the owner constructed a large dock well into an area where the reef is present (figure 7.14). As the resort's reputation grew, the owner wanted to be able to moor his boats in the lagoon instead of at the larger docks in East Harbor. However, the entrance to the lagoon is very shallow, less than three feet, so dredging was required for his boats to have access. Now, it seems, large amounts of sediment from the lagoon are being deposited on the reef, destroying the one of the things that brings customers to the



Figure 7.14: Laguna Beach Resort found at the mouth of Oyster Bay Lagoon

island. In addition to the two resorts that are located beyond Oyster Bay Lagoon, in 1995, a local man began constructing a large hotel in Blue Bayou. However, to construct a hotel of this magnitude in this area of Utila, extensive cutting of the interior mangrove was needed, as well as land building into the lagoon (figures 7.15a and b). The hotel remains unfinished because of lack of funds and water damage incurred during Hurricane Mitch.



Figure 7.15a and b: New Hotel Built near Blue Bayou

Infrastructural transportation improvements, such as the construction of new roads and especially the new international airport, are also having negative impacts on the physical landscape. On Utila, roads are constructed with cement and coral (figure 7.16).



Figure 7.16: Traditional Road Construction on the Island

After an area is cleared and lined with wooden two-by-fours, a layer of coral is placed between the wood as a foundation. Then cement is poured on top of the coral to make a smooth surface. The road being constructed in figure 7.16 is privately owned and funded. It leads to an area on the south side of Stewart's Hill where a foreign developer has planned a new residential community. Construction of the community had not been set as of the summer of 2001. The men constructing the road said that the coral being used came from the new airport construction site. Before the coral at the new airport site was available, or large quantities of cement were affordable, sand and gravel were taken

from Pumpkin Hill Beach along with coral from the exposed reefs and iron shore. This has caused increased beach erosion in these areas (McNab 2001). This type of impact has been noted elsewhere in the Caribbean and has had long-term impacts on the beach landscape (Patullo 1996).

The new international airport was a “hot topic” with the locals during the summer of 2001. It is located at Swan’s Bay on the northeastern tip of the island (figure 7.17 and 7.18). Before construction, this area consisted of lush secondary tropical forest and also incorporated natural fresh water wells (figure 7.19) (Vega et al 1993). It was the breeding ground for the island’s iguanas as well as the nesting area for many of Utila’s birds (ibid). In the conservation strategy prepared by Tropical Research and Development, Inc, this area was recommended to remain undeveloped because of its ecological importance to the island’s potable water and its endemic species (Vega 1993). However, in 1999 an area approximately 1,700 meters long by 250 meters wide by 2 meters deep (some 425,000 meters squared) was bulldozed for the construction of the runway. The tropical forest was split in half, causing a condition known as fragmentation. When fragmentation occurs, important resources for local species may not be evenly distributed and corridors allowing animals to access different resources are no longer available. As a result many of the birds that use to nest on Utila are leaving and the iguana’s are in decline. Construction stopped temporarily during the summer of 2000 leaving the unprotected bare soil exposed during the ensuing rainy season. Soil loss in areas of heavy construction has been documented as being as great as 490 ton/hectares annually (Wolman et al 1967). While forested area losses can be as little as .02 ton/ hectares annually (Smith et al 1965). The reefs on this side of Utila are some of

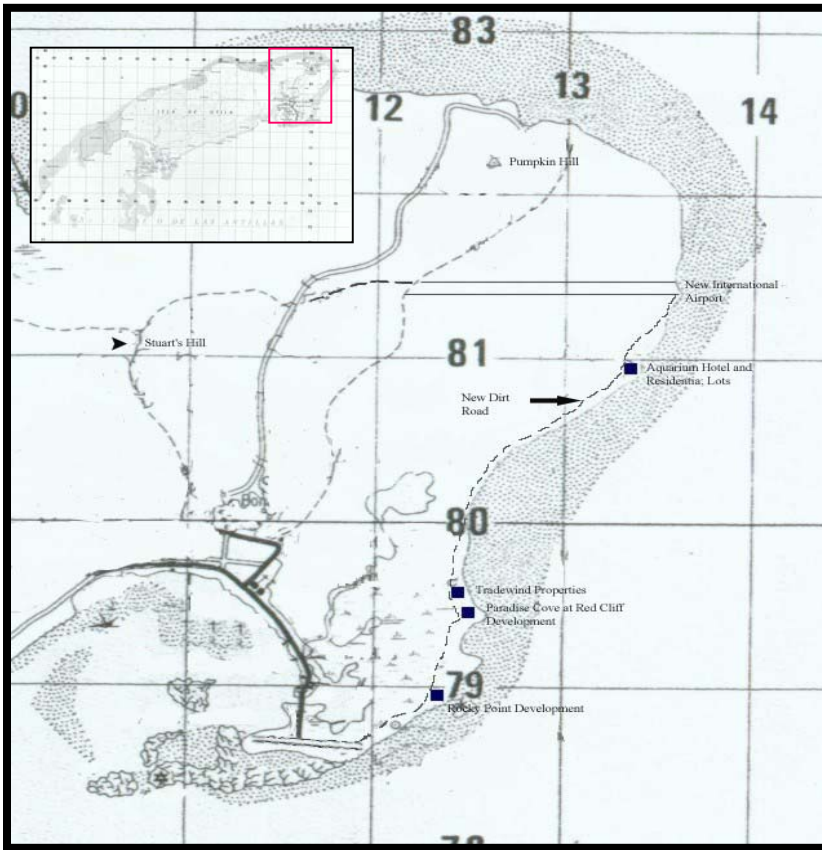


Figure 7.17: Location of the New International Airport on Utila (adapted from 1:50,000 series Instituto Geografica Honduras)



Figure 7.18: New Airport under Construction on Utila



Figure 7.19: Natural Fresh Water Wells on Utila

the most famous because of the natural caverns that line the shore and most well preserved because they have been hard to reach. Now they are in danger of being damaged by the erosion and sediment discharge from the airport. Roatán experienced similar problems when minor work was done to extend its runway, as sedimentation damage to the coral reef was documented 30 meters into the sea (Jacobson 1992). When the new airport is finished international aircraft can land on the island and bring more tourists per visit. Of course air and noise pollution associated with international airports will also be present.

When the equipment for the construction of the new airport was deposited on the island a new road was cut along the eastern coast. Large mangrove stands and tropical forest made up this part of the island. The new residential developments followed the construction of this road into this uninhabited area. The new airport has also been connected with East Harbor by the small footpath leading from Bar in The Bush to

Pumpkin Hill. However, it has been widened and paved, making it the island's first "highway." The airport road cleared a section of forest nearly 10 meters wide and several kilometers long making it the widest road on the island. According to Stonich (2000), the principal forces behind habitat destruction on the Bay Islands are related to, "deforestation, inappropriate agricultural practices, highway building, and unsound tourist-related construction." These forces have been at work on Utila and, as shown above, they have occurred in a relatively short period of time.

Land use and land cover alterations, not solely related to tourism, are also important in this discussion. In 1993 Tropical Research and Development, Inc. (Vega et al 1993), conducted a comprehensive study of land use and land cover on the Bay Islands. Twelve principal categories of land cover and land use were established by the research group for the entire archipelago. These include primary forests, secondary forests, mixed forests, coniferous forests, mangroves, wetlands, brush, pastures, permanent agriculture, annual agriculture, water areas, and urban areas. All of these specific areas have been affected by human activity on the islands. Less than two percent of the islands' primary forests remain and within this two percent many of the most desirable trees have been extracted (ibid). The mangrove and wetland areas, until recently with construction of large hotels and other tourism facilities, had not been adversely affected (ibid). As suggested by Tropical Research and Development (TRD), Inc., the two most common land cover types are pastures and secondary forests. TRD has stated that the islands have experienced most of its land cover clearing in the last 15 years because this is the time these land cover types became popular on the islands (ibid). Pastures are the most undesirable land use option for the islands because activities

associated with pastures, such as cattle and horses, yield little productivity in the Bay Islands. These activities also cause an increase in soil compaction and erosion (ibid). In table 7.1 Utila's land use and land cover categories are illustrated.

Utila, according to the above study, has high proportions of land that are poor for agriculture (Vega 1993). Therefore the TDR has suggested that eighty-two percent of the

Table 7.1: Land Use on Utila, 1993

	Area in Hectares	Percent of Total Land
Primary Forest	0	0
Secondary Forest	802.0	19
Mixed Forest	0	0
Coniferous Forest	0	0
Mangrove	741.2	17.6
Swamps	2303.5	54.6
Brush	0	0
Pasture	206	4.9
Permanent Agriculture	69.2	1.6
Annual Crops	0	0

islands become protected areas (ibid). Aside from being of poor agricultural quality these lands also are valuable for water resource conservation as well as flora and fauna conservation (ibid).

Tourism, as exemplified in this section, has caused significant change in multiple areas, for Utila. The residents of Utila, only a small island in a nation undergoing extensive global economic transformations, are faced with enormous challenges as they try to broker tensions between economic development and personal conservation. It will become increasingly necessary for Utilians to stay aware of development as the industry continues to grow. Care must be taken so that the two most important attractions to the island, its culture and its environment, are not lost and completely destroyed.

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Vita

Frances Heyward Currin was born in Anderson, South Carolina on April 13th 1977. Soon after her birth her father became a pilot in the United States Navy and she and her family proceeded to live the military life. She accredits her sense of adventure and longing for the “other” to this event. She and her family settled in Pensacola, Florida where she graduated from Pensacola High School in May of 1995. From there she went to the University of Memphis on an athletic scholarship and finished her Bachelor of Arts degree in geography and anthropology in December of 1999. She entered the graduate program in the Department of Geography and Anthropology at Louisiana State University in the fall of 2000 and plans to receive a Master of Arts degree in geography in December of 2002. She plans to continue her education in geography at the doctoral level, always learning, and keeping her “boots muddy.”