

Rastafari Indigenous Village

Generating income from tourism



CASE STUDY

The Rastafari Indigenous Village (RIV) is a shining example of how small-scale attractions can become market-ready, meeting the expectations of customers as well as generating income and protecting culture.



The RIV community set up the village as a visitor attraction, but were unsure of how to develop it to generate income. They wanted tourism to provide long-term funding, as well as a way to preserve, celebrate and communicate Rastafari traditions.

As part of our wider programme, aiming to encourage tourists to explore Montego Bay, the Travel Foundation saw this as an opportunity to cultivate a truly unique experience and support a local community. This, and other attractions like it, will support a unique and authentic tourism offer for Jamaica, as well as enabling the industry to benefit local people.



The Situation

Established in 2007, the Rastafari Indigenous Village (RIV) was set up as a sustainable, agro-artisan community to showcase the history, traditional practices and lifestyle of the Rastafari movement, started in Jamaica in the 1930s.

Visitors can learn about the Rastafari lifestyle, music and practices, and visit a living herb library, a meditative maze, a museum dedicated to Rastafari history, wellness centre, print shop and music studio.

The attraction was being visited by local residents and school groups, and by holidaymakers travelling independently or on tours with small ground agents.

As a community enterprise, the village was seeking to use tourism as a vehicle for forward movement. In the first year of operations, RIV obtained a Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB) operating licence and secured a government grant.

However, whilst the village had a lot of potential, the building

of some areas was incomplete, and the team struggled to meet the demands of the tourism industry, such as health and safety standards, contracts and marketing.

Despite significant interest in their cultural product, fuelled

by the popularity of Rastafari reggae music and RIV's hands-on, marketing efforts, they were unable to meet the requirements to renew their JTB licence and meet mainstream tour operator standards. The overall message also needed to be more clear.



“The Rastafari Indigenous Village is about sustaining culture and protecting traditional knowledge, tangible and intangible heritage and intellectual property.

It had an enthusiastic working team and governance structure, plus a vision to raise awareness, encourage sustainable goods production, transformative education, healing, wellness and community empowerment.

When the project began, RIV was a cultural repository on a path to becoming a visitor destination, in need of financial resources and strategic guidance.”

Arlene McKenzie
General Manager, RIV





The Project - our approach

To enable RIV to access the mainstream tourism market, the Travel Foundation supported the community to refine their business concept and pricing, to meet mainstream UK tour operator standards and customer expectations.

The village was also aided in developing suitable mechanisms for accounting, and for capturing and analysing customer comments.

Partners included

- TUI UK & Ireland
- Nexus Tours



Meeting mainstream tour operator standards

The Travel Foundation made use of its industry links to harness the expertise of senior managers from a mainstream tour operator (TUI). Subsequent visits to the village provided essential feedback on what RIV needed to do to meet standards and customer expectations.

Members of the village also tried out 'taster tours' at other

attractions, to experience existing excursion opportunities and compare them with the RIV tour offering.

The Travel Foundation arranged for 19 RIV members to receive Team Jamaica training and certification, so the attraction would meet the tourism licensing requirements of the Jamaica Tourist Board.

Making the village 'ready for business'

The community received training on developing their vision and group cohesion, as well as business planning and visitor expectations. The Travel Foundation arranged for a TUI Retail Manager to lead a training workshop on creating an authentic customer experience, plus pricing and contracts.

The tour was carefully developed, in terms of what it should include (such as drumming, gastro experiences etc), its length and structure. The Travel Foundation also worked with RIV to develop a pricing structure that was suitable for the mass market. We helped the village improve their product and marketing materials, including the quality, variety and display of authentic Rastafari craft and products made at the village.

The Tourism Product Development Company (TPDCo) ran training which led to certification in tour guide skills for all RIV members. This improved the quality of the guiding, and ensured that guides to the village stayed 'on message'.



Connecting with tour operators

Familiarisation tours were organised and delivered to obtain tour operator feedback and suggestions for improvement, and several pilot tours for mainstream customers were arranged through TUI UK & Ireland.

RIV then developed different versions of their tour to suit various target audiences (tour operator groups, cruise groups, student/school groups, walk-in customers, etc) including itineraries and scripts for a longer (2.5 hrs) and a shorter (1.45 hrs) tour.

The Travel Foundation provided guidance for presenting the tours on the RIV website and Tour Operator/Visitor information booklets. A set of sales brochures were designed that met mainstream tour operator guidelines.

“The Travel Foundation opened our eyes to the business of tourism. We thought we knew what we were doing until we got into partnership with them. They showed us how to price our business and provided training, financial and other support for us to now sign a contract, for the first time, with a major tour operator.”

- Firstman, RIV

What were the benefits?

Standards

By the end of the project, RIV were in possession of the Jamaica Tourist Board licence they needed to be an official tourist attraction.

Customer satisfaction with the excursion has also increased, and on Tripadvisor it is rated 4.5 out of 5 stars. It has also established standards for tourism attractions off the beaten track in Montego Bay.

Income generation

Following our work with RIV, a contract was signed for the excursion to be sold as part of a tour by mainstream operator TUI. It is now being sold through other companies.

With increased revenue for the village, the Rastafari culture is being conserved and promoted for the benefits of national and international visitors, and the RIV community.

It is now an excellent example for other indigenous communities who may be looking to tourism as a way to generate sustainable livelihoods.

Unexpected benefits

During the course of the project, RIV was selected under the Ministry of Tourism & Entertainment and Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF) World Bank project for further support in gaining market access. This led to various collaborations and a presence at events which raised the village's profile, such as the Tourism Enhancement Fund (TEF) sponsored Boot Camp for Community Tourism Enterprises in June 2015.

As a direct result of being fully licensed with the Jamaica tourist Board, RIV is on its circuit for journalists, bloggers and film crews.



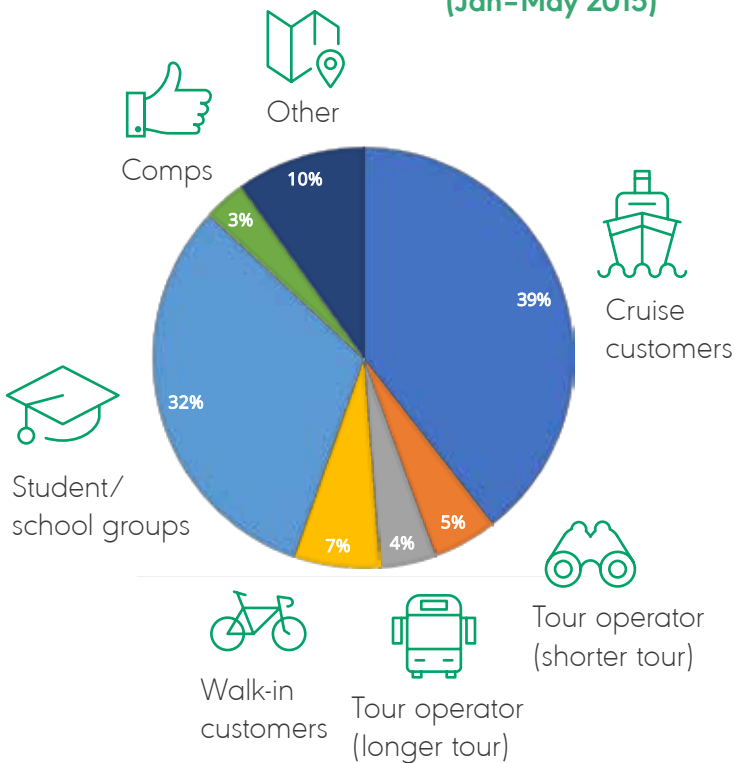
In Numbers



Following our work with RIV, visitor numbers totalled...

1,723

(Jan-May 2015)



Three years later...

x2 
visitor numbers have doubled

x3 
three times as many tour operators are working with the village (from 3 to 10 approx)

96% visiting for the first time

Where are they now?

What next?

RIV has plans to develop further as an attraction, including the following:

- Taking the education on the road – eg a lecture series, talks, presentations
- Strengthening the museum and facilitating more self-directed learning
- Broadening the range of items being produced in the village – eg chocolate, breadfruit flour, tonics, farm produce, soaps, drums, crafts
- Introducing more technology and signage into the tour

“The Travel Foundation provided invaluable training on how to price up RIV as a marketable tourist product. The knowledge and skills gained from this training has continued to be of use for members of the community as they have developed their individual and unique businesses selling hand-crafted products such as soaps, tonics, chocolate, wooden carvings and drums.”

- Firstman, RIV

Three years on

In 2018, RIV were still running successfully, and due to expanding operations they are now employing people for the first time. In the three years following the project, visitor numbers have increased by 100%.

The number of tour operators working with RIV has roughly tripled. The village is featured as an Airbnb ‘experience’ and has links with several tour operators and cruise companies, including Fathom Tours, Caribic, Viator and Amstar, as well as Tourwise and Jamaica Tours for events.

The village was still using the Travel Foundation’s pricing structure, and via training this has also filtered down to individual sellers. The experience has now been arranged into five ‘stations’ for visitors, ranging from chocolate-making and tonics, through to traditional drum-making.

Wider impacts

Through involvement in the TEF-sponsored ‘Boot Camp’, the Travel Foundation was able to contribute to Jamaica’s Ministry of Tourism community tourism policy, which sought to develop a portfolio of local micro-enterprises better able to obtain income and livelihood opportunities through increased access to tourism markets.





To find out how the Travel Foundation can help you develop sustainable excursions, please contact us at partnerships@thetravelfoundation.org.uk or Tel: +44 (0)117 9273049 thetravelfoundation.org.uk