

Voluntary Code of Conduct for Saint Lucia's Tourism Sector (TS VCoC) with Species Reference to Invasive Alien Species (IAS)

An output produced by the public and private partners attending the workshop series
***Mitigating the IAS Threat to our Off-Shore Islands whilst Improving
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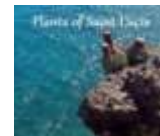
The Beacon, Coloumbette, Soufriere, 4 July 2012, under the project

Mitigating the Threats of Invasive Alien Species in the Insular Caribbean

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Anse Les Sables with the Maria Islands. Maria Major (foreground) is home to five endemic reptiles. One of these, the Saint Lucia racer was declared the world's the rarest snake in 2012 and is only found there. The Saint Lucia National Trust offers eco-tours of Maria Major.



**Saint Lucia
National Trust**

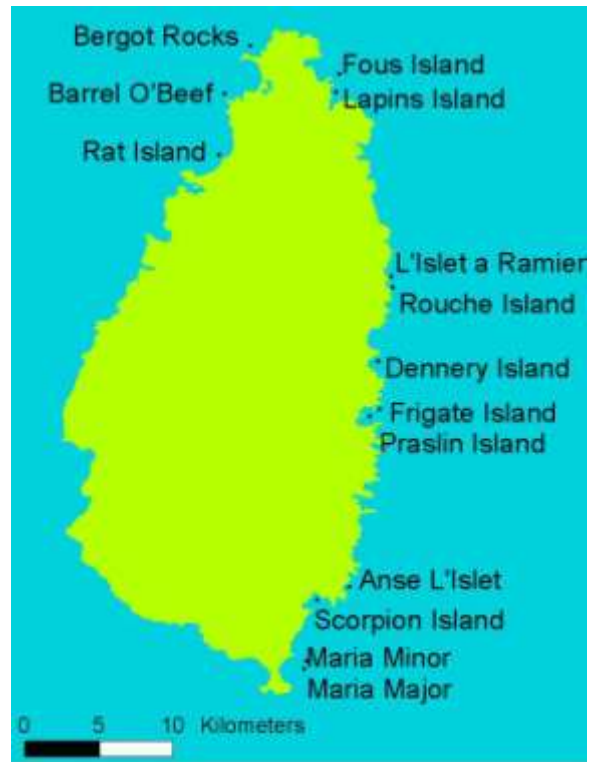
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1. Scope

Saint Lucia is surrounded by 14 off-shore islands and islets (see map on right). Saint Lucia's off-shore islands are a unique asset, principally for the endemic and rare biodiversity encountered there. They should be enjoyed and used by locals and visitors alike in a responsible manner with emphasis on conservation of Saint Lucian national heritage and indigenous biodiversity. This will involve changes in management and marketing of these islands as a tourism product locally as well as abroad. Encouragement to visit the islands needs to be accompanied by public education and awareness-raising on both their value and vulnerability.

This *Voluntary Code of Conduct for the Tourism Sector (TS VCoC)* intends to promote visits to Saint Lucia's off-shore islands as a unique

experience in a safe and clean environment. The proposed "edutainment concept" relies on interesting and reliable information being provided by qualified, authorized guides. This TS VCoC provides guidelines for ecologically sound business practices for stakeholders involved in out-door tourism (hoteliers, tour operators, guides, wardens, dive instructors, drivers, watersports, beach and grounds personnel, etc.), with particular emphasis on invasive alien species (IAS). The TS VCoC complements the previously developed *Voluntary Code of Conduct for Saint Lucia's Ornamental Plant Sector (OPS VCoC)*. Awareness of and compliance with existing laws and regulations is assumed for all those who adopt this TS VCoC.



Saint Lucia's off-shore islands

What are Invasive Alien Species?

Invasive Alien Species "IAS" are exotic (not Saint Lucian) species, whose introduction and/or spread threaten biodiversity, livelihoods or health. In the Caribbean, the tourism sector interfaces daily with IAS.



Sargassum seaweed in front of a resort in Mamora Bay, Antigua (Photo: www.antiguaobserver.com)

Saint Lucia's National Invasive Species Strategy (NISS) stipulates a hierarchical management approach: (i) Prevention, (ii) Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR), (iii) Eradication, (iv) Mitigation and Containment, and (v) Restoration, combined with Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) at all levels. Since prevention is particularly crucial for conserving globally threatened and rare species on Saint Lucia's off-shore islands, prevention and CEPA are given priority in this TS VCoC, while the other management approaches are summarized under "mitigating measures".

2. Preventative Measures

Preventative measures against invasive alien species should start with informed business practices. Hoteliers, owners of other tourist destinations and their ground managers, who adopt this TS VCoC will:

- Familiarize themselves with the *Voluntary Code of Conduct for Saint Lucia's Ornamental Plant Sector (OPS VCoC)*, adopt its principles and aim to beautify their property grounds with native plant species
- Not keep or exhibit exotic pets in mini-zoos anywhere in Saint Lucia, thereby leading by example

Fisher folks, boat owners and captains should take measures to reduce the risk of introducing alien species hitching rides to off-shore islands. Boat operators should:

- Control rats at boat departure points by eliminating litter and hiding spaces.
- Ensure that all watercrafts, cooler boxes, bags or any other items to be transported are free of non-native species. If any are found, they should be removed. Rats are of special concern, but other non-native species could include lizards, plant seeds or insects. This needs to be done for every visit to an off-shore island before embarking at the watercraft departure point.
- Keep boats clean and free of litter, particularly fish and food residues or packaging
- Refrain from transporting any construction material, such as lumber, wooden poles, or sand, to the islands

Clients of boat operators visiting off-shore islands should screen their bags, clothes, shoes, etc. Clients should select conscientious captains, who observe the above guidelines. Furthermore, clients should personally screen the boats used to travel to off-shore islands for signs of garbage and hitchhikers, such as rats.

Hoteliers, tour operators, guides and visitors should be vigilant of persons visiting the off-shore islands as they may be harbouring exotics. Thus, these users will:

- Screen visitors and their day-baggage for hitchhikers, e.g. on muddy boots or palm frond hats
- Not allow or take any pets or livestock to off-shore islands

- Report any suspicious behaviour promptly to authorities, i.e. Saint Lucia National Trust: 454-5014 or 452-5005; Marine Police: 456 3700; Forestry Department: 468 5635/8 (office), 713 4308 or 519 8229 (IAS hotlines)

When reaching an off-shore island, boat operators should secure boats on sandy landing places. Boats should not be tethered to support on the islands themselves, as ropes can serve as rat ladders. On the island, visitors and their guides will not:

- Interfere with rat sentinel bait stations
- Litter - even organic picnic waste, such as discarded seeds, can give rise to alien plants
- Construct any building, shelter or structure. The authorities may erect and maintain jetties, hand rails and benches according to biosecurity guidelines

3. Mitigating measures that minimize impact on the native biodiversity

All users of the off-shore island who have subscribed to this TS VCoC will:

- Respect the environment - “take nothing but photographs, leave nothing but footprints, kill nothing but time”
- Comply with existing management plans and those that may be established in the future
- Not harass, attempt to catch or hold any of the wildlife on off-shore islands
- Not cut any vegetation
- Not remove any plants or animals from the island
- Not light any fires, including smoking, campfires, *etc.*
- Be aware of and follow official regulations and guidelines for catching fish and other seafood, such as observing opened and closed seasons as announced and not fish, touch or walk on coral reefs in Marine Reserve
- Not anchor at reefs or dive sites

Visitors should always be accompanied by a qualified and approved guide or dive master.

- They should never stray from the tour
- Land tours will stay on established trails or access zones to help minimize impacts on site
- Visitors should wear adequate attire for their activity to prevent injury, accidents and damage to the environment

Guidelines for tour operators (including organizers, guides, dive instructors, *etc.*):

- Only authorized persons/tours may visit the island. The permission of the Saint Lucia National Trust will be sought to go to Maria Major. Similarly, only authorized dive guides must lead divers into the Marine Reserve

- Ensure tours are well organized and informative, i.e. the tour guides must be properly trained and equipped with education materials provided by technical experts
- Maintain the group sizes and frequency of visits to numbers the islands can bear without harm. This will involve (a) documentation of the number of trips and participants to each site and (b) coordination between different companies/agencies, where more than one licensed operator exists. Maximum numbers may be determined according to impact thresholds

Property owners & managers and their staff will:

- Plant more native plant species on their properties, on beaches, along trails, at meeting & view points, and adjacent to other ecologically sensitive sites, such as the Forest Reserve or the Pitons
- Be observant and responsible by regularly monitoring the off-shore islands, other sites of tourist interest and, where possible, also natural habitats for signs of exotic species and other potentially damaging man-made alterations (e.g. garbage, make-shift construction, signs of fire or hunting)
- Participate in early warning systems by reporting sightings of exotic animals and plants to the relevant authority, i.e. the Forestry Department of the Ministry of Sustainable Development, Energy, Science and Technology, the Fisheries Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Production, Fisheries and Rural Development and/or the Saint Lucia National Trust
- Similarly, unusual sightings should be reported to the authorities. Such observations could include dead animals or the partial remains of dead animals, signs of digging on the beach or elsewhere, animals you would not expect to see there, tampering with bait stations or signage, or wild fires
- Collaborate with authorities in routine monitoring, stock-taking and identifying potential invasive risk factors on private property to facilitate Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR).
- Actively participate in clean-up initiatives, e.g. the removal of IAS, and restoration programmes

4. Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA)

Stakeholders adopting this TS VCoC will actively participate in this educational process by:

- Informed marketing of off-shore islands as an ecotourism destination and as serene and pristine escapes for a specialized niche market
- Leading by example. Stakeholders will be shown how sustainable behaviour is financially beneficial, so they are motivated to follow this lead
- Becoming informed on native Saint Lucian flora and fauna, including native alternatives to exotic ornamental plants. Participants who want to keep and exhibit native wildlife will first obtain the necessary training and permits from the Wildlife Unit of the Forestry Department

- Seeking and promoting reliable information on which species are invasive or potentially invasive in Saint Lucia. Take advantage of continuing education opportunities to learn more about the invasive species issue. Encourage your staff members, clients and business partners to do the same. Consult experts to determine what species are invasive or show invasive potential when in doubt; refer others to experts you know
- Passing their knowledge to employees, local residents (starting with school children), visitors, fishermen, drivers, community residents etc., so that they shall be better informed about our native flora and fauna as well as the risk presented by alien species so that they can further disseminate this information
- Making the public aware of the unique experience being offered by Saint Lucia's off-shore islands – their exceptional and irreplaceable biodiversity – but also of their vulnerability to stochastic events, such as storms, droughts, fire, introduction of predators, parasites or pathogens etc. This includes encouraging and, as far as feasible, facilitating educational field trips for community residents and the wider public.
- Briefing users on the guidelines of the Saint Lucia National trust for visiting Maria Major and on the practices defined in this VCoC for off-shore islands, all beaches and connecting water bodies, including safety aspects
- Displaying and distributing educational information material that is being made available by technical agencies. Proactively promote adoption of the TS VCoC among colleagues and business partners
- Hosting events and presentations on environmental education for employees, guests and community members
- To the extent possible, assisting financially with the production of educational materials, including on-site signage and tree labels, and organization of events or field trips
- Keeping up-to-date with any existing and future biosecurity recommendations

5. Regional collaboration and knowledge exchange

- Exchange experiences with invasive species management at trade shows. Exchange of info and personnel with other islands to see successes and failures. Partner with regional/global organizations in the management of invasive species
- Increase interaction with other professionals to identify cost-effective solutions to invasive species issues. Collate and share this information in a manner that is accessible to all. Assist experts in up-dating global databases and, if approached by such initiatives, the creation of regional lists of concern or acceptable species
- Become informed about the invasiveness of species beyond Saint Lucia. Be aware that our native species could become invasive elsewhere and consider the consequences of distribution of Saint Lucian life forms outside national territory. Be sensitive to the laws in potential importing countries and encourage clients to comply with them. Do not knowingly provide clients with access to Saint Lucian planting material or wildlife if you suspect them of breaking laws in their countries

- Be sensitive to multilateral conventions and treaties that deal with the issue of invasive plants or their pests and diseases and encourage clients and business partners to do the same, whether these agreements are legislated locally or not

6. Management Guidelines

- Participate in the development of management plans for individual off-shore islands and their up-dating as appropriate. Respect and comply with management plans once they have been established
- Lobby for the sustainable co-existence of development and conservation. Demand from our politicians that development must be sustainable
- Assist, to the furthest extent possible, in the establishment of a regular presence on off-shore islands of knowledgeable wardens
- Work towards sustainable finance mechanisms, e.g. by charging visitors a fee or asking for voluntary donations that are fed back into local conservation action, i.e. to employ wardens and guides, restoration initiatives and public education