

Concept paper for the establishment of eco-tourist facilities on Gluck Island



Introduction

Gluck Island is located off Rockstone (Region 10) at the shores of the Essequibo River. The island is about 11.2 km long (8 m; north-south) and 4.8 km wide (3 m; east-west) and avails of a very rich bird population (140 species have been counted during a rapid assessment) and a number of interesting animals to watch in their natural habitat (giant otters, turtles, howler monkeys, caimans, etc.). An abundance of sweet water fish makes Gluck Island a paradise for fishing activities, too. Furthermore, the national flower – *Victoria Regia* – has been discovered in a lake on the island.

The wealth of fauna and flora within a reach of 2 hours from Georgetown makes Gluck Island in combination with the Rockstone landing area an **ideal destination for eco-tourists** (bird / animal watching) **and weekend relaxation**.

Recent developments

The development of Gluck Island as a tourist destination needs to be analysed in conjunction with the recent development in Rockstone. The first Rockstone Fish Festival has been successfully held in September 2006. It was organised by the “Region Ten Tourism Development Association” (RTDA) in collaboration with the Rockstone Community. LEAP has provided substantial assistance to this event (rehabilitation of an old dilapidated LINMINE guest house, toilet facilities, set-up of a bleacher, etc.) which will be developed into an annual festival. RTDA has accessed funds from the EU Micro Project Programme to establish a guesthouse with five rooms at the Rockstone landing area facing Gluck Island. This facility will offer overnighting possibilities for low-budget travellers.

The Rockstone Tourism Association (RTA) has been founded in December 2006. It prepares at present for a monthly “Family A-Fair” event at the Rockstone landing area targeting parents and children. Special educational (nature walks, guided bird watching tours, aquarium fish display, etc.) and relaxation offers (boat trips to beaches and Gluck Island, sun downer cruises, swings for children, see-saws, angling, cow- or donkey riding, etc.) are being prepared.

It is suggested to establish a permanent tourist resort for higher income tourists on the island at one of the highest points (northern tip of the island) hence facilitating access for bird and animal watchers, nature lovers and tourists searching relaxation in a peaceful environment. Gluck Island fits ideally into the Government’s efforts to enhance tourism in general and bird watching as a promising niche in particular¹.

¹ The “Guyana Trade and Investment Support” (GTIS) Project currently focuses its assistance on the expansion of bird watching facilities and birding guides’ capacities.

Planned infrastructural works on Gluck Island in 2007

From an environmental perspective, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has provided permission to LEAP (November 09, 2006) to carry out some preparatory infrastructural works meant to attract potential investors for the island in future while also improving the quality of the recreational weekend offer of the Rockstone Tourism Association. The following preparatory works are envisaged:

- Marking a North-South trail on the Island
- Building a platform into the Victoria Regia lake and a stilted walk-way leading to a landing (the latter to be constructed later!).

In order to keep the island in its undisturbed shape, not a single tree may be cut; all wood required for the construction work has to be transported from outside the island. These measures do not anticipate any entrepreneurial decision by a future investor because they are neutral in nature facilitating the access to interesting spots (Victoria Regia Lake) and the movement on the island to watch birds and animals.

Future prospects

A tourist resort on Gluck Island targeting (inter)national bird watchers and ecotourists (high-income group) will complement the Rockstone activities to create regular weekend events (Family A-Fair, Fish festival) at its landing area. Camping- and low-budget overnight facilities will attract Guyanese nationals and turn that area into a major tourist destination.

No matter where the tourists resort will be finally built on the island (sole decision of the investor with permission from EPA), the lives of the Amerindian Community will be positively affected to a great extent. A large number of employment and self-employment possibilities will provide substantial income (see next chapter). In order to make all these effects more predictable and harmonious, the above mentioned "Rockstone Tourism Association" has been established. The community involvement will play a key role in developing the tourism potential. Potential investors on Gluck Island are required to submit a land use plan and a concept paper spelling out their plans; the involvement of EPA is a basic requirement.

If you are interested in making a tour to the Island to collect more information, please, contact Mr. Conrad Jonas (President of the Rockstone Tourism Association, Telephone: 663-2104, or 444-9288 <communal telephone, leave your number, he will call you back) or Mr. Torsten Striepke (444-4059, Extension -29 or 641-1822).

Employment generation

A total of approximately 25 jobs (employed and self-employed) will be created.

Direct employment:

Posts essential for the high standard running of the resort such as qualified cook, reception personnel and manager will most probably recruited from among experienced employees. Other jobs such as boat captain (ferry service to Rockstone landing, boat tours on the Essequibo), island rangers (and later island guides), cleaning personnel, kitchen assistants or maintenance workers (for construction and trails) will be recruited from among the locals. Local birding guides will have to be trained; however, organised tours from Georgetown-based tour operators may bring their own specialised bird watching guides. The number of employment created on the island is estimated at 10-15.

The lodge at the Rockstone will employ at least 3 people. During the construction phase of all infrastructures an estimated 20 locals will find employment for several months.

Self employment:

Local guides (for island and bush tours but also for tourists accompanying fishermen on their hunt for aquarium fish), additional boat tour operators from the Rockstone landing, car park watchmen, small restaurants and vendors (e.g. handicraft articles), logistic support for the resort, and other complementary works offer an additional employment opportunity for another 10-15 people.

Supporting agencies

The Gluck Island development project is supported by all agencies contacted. The present Tourism Minister has visited the island and promised support. The Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA) and in particular the "Guyana Trade and Investment Support" (GTIS) Project have signalled their interest to include Gluck Island into the destinations for their bird-watching programme.

The Regional Democratic Council of Region 10 is presently elaborating a "Regional Development Strategy" in which tourism development and Gluck Island / Rockstone play a pivotal role in attracting more visitors to the Region which would translate into job creation and increase of income.

Procedure

LEAP as development project with a limited life span (June 2009) can only prepare the ground to attract local or foreign investors for Gluck Island. The latter will have to undertake the necessary steps regarding lease for tourism purposes, the environmental impact assessment and a contractual arrangement with the Rockstone community. LEAP is willing to accompany this process.