PAPER TITLE

BIG PROBLEMS, SMALL SOLUTIONS
Water Management for Sustainable Tourism:
The Challenges & Strategies of The Bahamas Hotel Sector

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Submitted to:
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For consideration to be presented at:
The 12th Annual CWWA Conference & Exhibition, Paradise Island, Bahamas
ABSTRACT

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Background:
Since the 1992 Earth Summit in Brazil the public and private sectors in countries world-wide have increased their adoption of the priority items of the Summit's Agenda 21, which calls for the application of Sustainable Development principles or for the coexistence of development and environmental management. The tourism sector has by no means been exempted and under Sustainable Tourism, hotels, which are pivotal in tourism development, have been encouraged to adopt an environmental management approach to their operations so that they positively contribute to the sustainability of tourism development.

Of the areas within hotels to which environmental management applications are encouraged, water conservation and management has drawn special attention. In fact, both the International Hotels Environment Initiative (IHEI) and the Caribbean Hotel Association (CHA) have called on hotels to manage this scarce, but highly demanded resource by the hotel sector "sensitively." Sensitive management of water takes on even greater significance in The Bahamas particularly in Nassau and Paradise Island where freshwater is found in very limited supply.

Paper Overview:
This paper, therefore, focuses on The Bahamas hotel sector and its environmental management and conservation practices in the area of Water. In so doing, it notes the importance of this sector in the country's development and reviews the challenges and limitations that this sector faces in water management for Sustainable Tourism. It additionally reviews the extent to which sound water conservation and management practices are spread across the sector in both large and small hotels. Overall, the paper views the challenges of water management for Sustainable Tourism by hotels as big problems to which small but critical solutions are available.

The paper draws on empirical data from surveys of The Bahamas Hotel Sector done in 1997/1998 and in 2001/2002 on their water management practices and related issues. These surveys cover over 53% of Nassau/Paradise Island hotels and 15 Family Island hotels.

In sum, the empirical data supported that while numerous solutions or practices were in place at some hotels there was considerable room for improvement across the board in all hotels. In fact, the evidence revealed a greater tendency for large hotels to incorporate water management practices into their day-to-day operations than small hotels. The surveys additionally revealed that the major limiting factors to the water management soundness of small hotels were the perceptions that because of their small size water demand was not significant as compared to large hotels and that, in cases where well water was also used, water was free.

Given the critical water situation together with the growing water demands of tourism in The Bahamas, the paper summarises that water conservation and management by hotels is of paramount importance and recommends that it should be a necessary part of the daily operation of all hotels in the country.