Seaside Resorts in the Dominican Republic: A Typology

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Since the early 1970s, the growing attraction of beaches has led to a proliferation of seaside resorts along the Atlantic and Caribbean shores of the Dominican Republic. The distribution of beach resorts reflects a combination of quality and quantity of natural resources, proximity of urban centers and/or airports, and intensity of development efforts exerted by private entrepreneurs and/or government agencies. Both domestic and international tourism are responsible for beachfront urbanization in the Dominican Republic. At least five discrete types of coastal resorts may be identified: 1) the urban balneario, 2) the domestic destination resort, 3) the "integrated" domestic/international destination resort, 4) the "interactive" enclave resort, and 5) the "self-contained" enclave resort. Each of these resort types is characterized by a particular tourist clientele and a distinctive urban morphologic pattern. Although overlap between types may occasionally blur the distinctions, this typology is presented to better understand evolving touristic landscapes. Key words: tourism, resorts, coast, Caribbean, Dominican Republic.

Introduction: Tourism and Tourists Defined

To define tourism is no easy matter. The term "tourism" originally developed from the Grand Tour, a journey through the principal cities and places of interest in continental Europe considered obligatory for young Englishmen of good birth or fortune in late Medieval times (Towner 1985). With the popularization and diffusion of "touring" throughout the world in subsequent centuries, tourism has become equated with the act of traveling. In recent decades the definition of tourism has expanded to include what one does in one's leisure time so long as travel, be it international or within one's own country, is a component and at least one night is spent away from home.

Under a broadened view of the term "tourism," the differences between the primary modes of filling leisure time recreation and tourism become blurred. Recreation is by definition a refreshment of the strength and spirits after toil, and it traditionally implies active participation in an activity such as sports, hiking, and fishing near the home. Tourism, although dynamic in terms of the travel involved, traditionally is considered more "passive" than recreation because the object was to observe and learn in a distant and usually foreign milieu. By the mid-twentieth century, it had become apparent that 1) recreationists were travelling ever farther from home and 2) tourists were becoming less interested in the act of travelling than they were in the act of recreating, either actively or passively, in an exotic locale. This blurring of recreation and tourism has led to refinements of the definitions by certain agencies whereby either distance factors or time factors are used to distinguish the terms.

Although types of tourism conveniently may be divided into categories of domestic tourism and international tourism, the wide range of "tourists" rendered such a classification too simplistic. In a 1972 study for the airline industry, a continuum of travelers, ranging from allocentrics who prefer adventure and individual exploration to psychocentrics, who travel by automobile or in organized tour groups and prefer a familiar environment, was identified by a psychologist (Plog 1974). Most tourists as well as most people were found to be mid-centrics who fell in the middle of the continuum and they would venture to places where touristic facilities had been established. Transitional tourists types included near-allocentrics and near-psychocentrics (Plog 1974). A similar typology of international tourists was proposed by a sociologist who identified two categories of travelers, each of which could be further subdivided into two classes: non-institution-
alized travelers such as "drifters" and "explorers" and institutionalized travelers which included individual mass tourists and mass tourists organized in tour groups (Cohen 1972). Like Plog, Cohen saw the character of the tourist destination as a reflection of the demands of the class of travelers attracted to it. A cultural anthropologist, demonstrating the inverse relationship between touristic impact on a culture and the host culture's perception of the visitors, expanded Cohen's typology to seven tourist types: explorer, elite, off-beat, unusual, incipient mass, mass, and character (Smith 1977).

Geographic investigations of tourism have included the study of resorts and tourist destinations, but surprisingly few attempts have been made to classify or typecast resorts (Pearce 1989). Although the geography of resort landscapes is recognized as a major theme within the subdiscipline of tourism geography, most geographic research has focused upon resort morphology, resort evolution, resort distribution, and spatial linkages (Mathieson and Wall 1982; Meyer-Arendt and Wall 1990; Mitchell and Smith 1989; Pearce 1987; Roehl and Van Doren 1990). Lavery (1974) identified eight general resort categories for Western Europe: capital cities, select resorts, spas/watering places, and day trip resorts. Subsequent typologies were organized on the bases of spontaneous versus planned development as well as rates of growth (Pearce 1989). Recognizing the role of domestic tourism, a study of beach resorts in Malaysia identified four types: large-scale planned resort complex, medium-scale individual resort of international standard, medium-scale individual resort of national/local standard, and small-scale accommodation unit of local standard (Wong 1986). Several studies have been made of tourist enclaves (equivalent to Wong's large-scale planned resort complex), but classification was not a key aim of these case studies (Pearce 1989).

This article seeks to contribute to the literature on resort classification by proposing a typology useful not only to tourism scholars but also to a general audience with an interest in landscape interpretation. Based upon both previous investigations (Kermath 1991; Kermath and Thomas 1992; Sambrook et al. 1992) as well as a 1991 field survey by the authors, a "resort continuum" somewhat analogous to the aforementioned "tourist continuum" is recognized whereby a combination of historical patterns and variable preferences by domestic and international tourists delineates five types of seaside resorts.

Tourism Development in the Dominican Republic
Although little is known about pre-1930s seaside tourism in the Dominican Republic, a pattern of "spontaneous" resort evolution based on the European experience is inferred. A revival of hydrotherapy ("taking the waters" at mineral springs and spas) in Europe during the Middle Ages eventually led to the thalassotherapy (saltwater therapy) fad that first became popularized in eighteenth-century England. Resort infrastructure soon appeared at both inland springs and sites of sea bathing (Gilbert 1939). Rapidly spreading to continental Europe and overseas colonies, the fad of sea bathing is traced to 1780 in northern Mexico (WPA 1940). Elite resort landscapes developed along the north Yucatán coast following the 1880s henequén boom in that area (Meyer-Arendt 1987). Perhaps the greatest early boost in seaside recreation took place in the economic boom years of the late 1920s when well known resorts such as Acapulco and Havana as well as lesser known resorts experienced their significant tourism infrastructural development (Cerruti 1964; Hinch 1990; Meyer-Arendt 1990; Passariello 1983).

Historic spontaneous seaside resort development typically took place at a suitable site, such as where a sand beach was easily accessible to an urban hinterland that supplied the "tourists." International tourism was not a factor in this incipient resort development stage because of constraints in accessibility, but there existed a strong linear correlation between the size of the urban hinterland and intensity of tourism at the beach resort. This correlation weakened with increasing distance between the urban area and the resort. A small beach resort containing perhaps only a bathhouse and a restaurant could indicate either a small, proximate urban hinterland or a large, distant urban hinterland. This illustrates the geographic principle of "distance decay" wherein decreasing numbers of tourists would travel increasing distances to frequent a beach resort (Pearce 1987). In the Dominican Republic, Boca Chica, 30 kilometers (19 miles) east of Santo Domingo, is one of the oldest and the most frequented of the domestic seaside resorts, dating to at least the 1920s (Figure 1).

The first concerted, yet ill-fated, efforts at planned tourism development in the Dominican Republic took place during the Rafael Trujillo era (1931-1961), when government hotels were built in both mountain and seaside settings (Sambrook et al. 1992). Initially built to promote both international and domestic tourism in the affluent post-World War II era, these monolithic resort hotels, all of which were completed in time for the 1956 International Fair in Santo Domingo, served more to showcase the modernity of the country than stimulate tourism. With the exceptions of the Santo Domingo's original Hotel Jaragua (not to be confused with the New Jaragua, completed in 1989) and the Hamaca Hotel (now incorporated into the brand new Hamaca Beach Resort) at Boca Chica, hotel occupancy rates remained low (Sambrook et al. 1992). The low levels of tourism in the 1950s and 1960s may be explained by several facts, including: 1) in terms of location, most of Trujillo's showcase hotels were sited far from international airports and urban hinterlands, and distance-decay factors precluded high visitation levels; 2) the shutdown of the Cuban tourism industry in the late 1950s diverted tourists to Jamaica and the Bahamas rather than to the Dominican Republic as had been hoped; 3) increasing political instability in the late 1950s and 1960s kept tourists away; and 4) because of a preference of beaches over mountains, the "alpine" hotels never became very popular.

Seaside tourism remained the primary form of tourism for Dominicans and international visitors alike during the 1960s and 1970s. Along the Caribbean coast, Boca Chica attracted recreationists from Santo Domingo and the Gulf and Western-owned Casa de Campo complex at La Romana...
A typology of seaside resorts

At present over 96 percent of all hotel rooms in the Dominican Republic are located along coastal sites (Figure 1). Given the predilection for bathing and beaches by domestic and international visitors alike, one may surmise that future tourism development will continue to concentrate along the seashore until saturation (carrying capacity) levels are reached. As once-pristine physical landscapes become converted to cultural (touristic) landscapes, it becomes important for geographers and other students of landscape to understand the resultant forms of tourism development.

Because of the various tourist profiles such as Plog’s allocentric vs. psychocentric, Cohen’s institutionalized vs. non-institutionalized, and Smith’s explorer vs. charter, different types of seaside resorts have been developed in the Dominican Republic. A June 1991 survey by the authors identified resort types ranging from simple balnearios serving domestic tourists from small nearby urban centers to multiple-hotel tourist enclaves catering to mostly international visitors. Organized on the twin bases of domestic vs. international tourism and degree of interaction between tourists and native (non-tourist) Dominicans, a typological framework of five discrete seaside resort types is proposed.

1) The Urban Balneario

The most basic of all seaside “resorts” in the Dominican Republic and other parts of Latin America is the balneario, usually translated as “bathing resort.” Balnearios are almost always associated with an urban area, and both the intensity of tourism (demand) and amount of infrastructural development (supply) is a function of a combination of the population base of the urban hinterland and its distance from the beach. Usually occupying a site containing a beach, small bay or estuary, and shade vegetation, a balneario’s structural components may consist of as little as a bathhouse (changing quarters), a modest restaurant, and a few thatched shacks (Figure 2A). Balnearios close to a larger urban center will contain more restaurants, bars, and bathhouses. Peak periods of visitation will coincide with leisure time, such as weekends, Semana Santa (Holy Week), summer vacations, and Christmas (Passariello 1983). One notable feature at urban balnearios are day use tourists only, although tent campers are frequent during the peak holidays. If demand for overnight stays is high enough, small family-owned pensiones will appear to serve this clientele.

Geographically, balnearios are normally located at the most convenient point of beaches access to the respective urban hinterland. Coastal cities normally have balnearios at one or both ends of the urban area. If the population base is high enough to sustain competition for tourism pesos, additional balnearios may develop beyond the initial point of beach access. However, with distance from the point of initial beach access, the principle of distance decay quickly may erode the touristic base. Small urban balnearios may be found throughout the Dominican Republic, such as Playa de Bani near Bani, and a good example of a “mid-sized” balneario is Playa Matancitas immediately southeast of Nagua. Perhaps
originating as the balneario for Nagua, the location of Matancitas near the eastern end of the Cibao Valley insured a developing role as balneario for Cibao cities as far inland as San Francisco de Macoris. For reasons including overcrowding and high noise levels, most international tourists generally do not frequent such localized urban balnearios, except perhaps as short stops on sightseeing tours.

2) The Domestic Destination Resort
With sufficient recreational demand, an urban balneario may evolve into a domestic destination resort. Levels of both visitation and infrastructural development are higher, and vacation periods such as Semana Santa are characterized by crowding and prolonged music- and merry-making (see Passariello 1983). In response to seasonally high demand, pensiones and modest hotels comprise a greater portion of the resort landscape (Figure 2B). Beachfront eating and drinking establishments are contiguous in the resort “core,” and numerous vendors peddle food, drink, and assorted beach sundries. This category of resort attracts all classes of Dominican society, particularly the middle classes, and the resort atmosphere during weekends and vacation periods is often one of crowdedness and noisiness. International tourists in search of a quiet tropical beach hideaway normally are not attracted to this class of resort, and fancy medium- to large-sized hotels are a rarity.

The best example of a domestic destination resort in the Dominican Republic is Boca Chica, which began as the urban balneario for Santo Domingo. High demand from the nearby rapidly urbanizing national metropolis has turned Boca Chica into a virtual “honky-tonk” with nonstop entertainment as theoretical “carrying capacity” limits are approached. There are smaller, quieter, and more specialized domestic destination resorts in the country, such as the fishing resorts at Boca de Yuma and Monte Cristi and perhaps bathing resorts such as Sosúa prior to the opening of an international airport on the north coast, but the “discovery” of such places by allocentric international tourists is moving, or already has moved, these resorts to the next category of the resource typology. Even crowded Boca Chica is witnessing record levels of hotel construction as more and more action-seeking international tourists, mostly Germans, spend their vacations there.

3) The “Integrated” Domestic/International Destination Resort
As a domestic destination resort with a reputation for either high-quality natural resources or a “place where the action is” becomes discovered by international tourists, a new type of resort develops. On the basis of both social and urban morphological patterns, this resort type may be labelled the “integrated” domestic/international destination resort (Figure 2C). It should be noted, however, that because international tourism has developed in and around an existing settlement and is therefore “integrated,” the international tourism infrastructure often comprises a structurally isolated “tourist ghetto” within the settlement, such as El Batey in Sosúa.

Socially, there is a high degree of mixing or “integration” of foreign tourists with both domestic tourists and local residents. Although the size of the “informal sector” catering to the tourists, including vendors, bar girls, and “beach boys,” may occasionally lead to civic friction, this social mixing is a key characteristic and indeed a key attraction of this type of resort (Kermath 1991; Sambrook et al. 1992). While social “integration” between foreigners and locals is important, “segregation” in other social situations such as dining and sleeping persists.

Morphologically, the “integrated” domestic/international destination resort is distinguished from the domestic destination resort largely by the more numerous lodging facilities. Usually mid-sized (less than 100 rooms) or smaller, the hotels represent a combination of local investment by native Dominicans and investment by expatriate foreign nationals who are making the Dominican Republic their home. Although there may develop a zonation of urban land uses, such as residential and business zones, discriminatory exclusionary provisions restricting access to certain social sectors are usually minimal or difficult to enforce. With sustained popularity of the resort, greater investment, often foreign as well as corporate, may lead to higher rise, more socially isolated hotel development on the fringes of the urban area (see Figure 2C).

The best example of an “integrated” domestic/international destination resort in the Dominican Republic is Sosúa, although the windsurfing center of Cabarete and historically the city of Puerto Plata, especially the beachfront boulevard, or malecon, area qualify also. Although the high degree of social integration is a key attraction for foreign visitors, rapid increases in international tourism during the 1980s was accompanied by perhaps an even more rapid growth of the informal sector. The resultant proliferation of hustlers, vendors, and petty thieves has led to both a levelling off of the international tourism growth rate and also increasing controls.
by local officials on the informal sector at both Sosúa and Puerto Plata (Kermath and Thomas in press; Sambrook et al. 1992).

4) The "Interactive" Enclave Resort
The fourth type of resort found in the Dominican Republic may be labelled the "interactive" enclave resort (Figure 2D). This type of resort generally is developed on the outskirts of an existing settlement where domestic tourists or perhaps even allocentric foreign tourists have already recognized the tourism potential. Targeted for international tourism development by the government and/or private, usually foreign and corporate investors, empty peripheral often agricultural lands become occupied by hotels which singly or in multiple numbers form a "semi-insular enclave." For a discussion of enclaves, see Pearce (1989). Although the infrastructure is established to allow tourists to easily sample native culture, the interaction between foreign visitors and native Dominicans generally is very limited.

Although the tourism enclave is enclosed by gates and fences and entrance is by security personnel, interaction with the local settlement is encouraged. Often the natural resource attraction, the sand beach, for example, is shared between the settlement to sightsee and purchase souvenirs. Likewise native Dominicans might be allowed into the enclave to frequent hotel restaurants and shops. A public beach area may even be designated to foster interaction between tourists and natives. Vendors and other members of the informal sector, banned from the enclave premises except perhaps on a limited concessionary basis, are encouraged to set up souvenir stands along major access highways near the enclave boundary perimeters (Sambrook et al. 1992).

A good example of the "interactive" enclave resort is the government-owned Playa Dorada complex just east of Puerto Plata. Built on 150 hectares (370 acres) of former sugar plantation land, the complex contains 11 major hotels with a total of 2,720 rooms (SET 1991). While the tranquility of tropical island vacation is preserved for the international tourist, the degree of interaction with the town and informal sector of nearby Puerto Plata remains relatively high. Similarly "interactive" enclave resorts include Juan Dolio on the Caribbean coast, now containing the country's second highest number of hotel rooms, and Las Terrenas, on the northern coast of the Samaná Peninsula, where the "enclaves" are restricted to individual hotels rather than a hotel complex as at Playa Dorada. At both Juan Dolio and Las Terrenas, the combination of small original native settlement and high degree of tourism development accounts for the "interactive" classification. If the original settlement had been larger and levels of tourism development smaller, "integration" rather than "interaction" would be prevailed. Such is the case at Samaná, where the Dominican government in the 1970s attempted to establish an "interactive" enclave resort by constructing the Bahia Beach Hotel nearby (Yunen 1977). Because of the lack of success of this government effort, Samaná in 1992 still fit best into the "integrated" domestic/international destination resort type.

5) The "Self-Contained" Enclave Resort
The final category of resort type in the Dominican Republic is the "self-contained" enclave resort. This type of resort, containing one or more hotel complexes, is one in which tourists are completely shielded from the native population except for members of the Dominican upper classes. Often located at considerable distance from urban centers, such resorts provide everything that a tourist could possibly need. Likewise, neither the Dominican general public nor members of the informal sector are easily admitted into the complex. Hotel staff members are usually trained and brought in from outside the local area, and tourists arrive at an airport specifically built for charter flights. The lack of integration with the larger community is not just a function of policy, including discouraging guests from leaving, but also a function of relative isolation (Sambrook et al. 1992).

The classic example of the "self-contained" enclave resort is Gulf and Western's elaborate Casa de Campo complex near La Romana. Containing over 1,000 hotel rooms, an airport, sport villages, a reconstructed Medieval Spanish village, and extensive residential (vacation home) neighborhoods, this enclave resort, which dates to 1973, has come to serve as a blueprint for other Caribbean enclave developments. Smaller, yet functionally similar, "self-contained" enclave resorts also are found at Bayahibe, Punta Cana (Club Mediterranean), Playa Bávaro, and Luperón.

Summary
The aim of this proposed seaside resort typology is to clarify the landscape imprint of coastal tourism development, a process of urbanization that often appears to have little organization. By incorporating previous tourist typologies into modern resort morphologies, different types of resorts may be identified. Proposed primarily as a conceptual device, and hopefully useful as a pedagogic tool, the typology is not without its limitations. First, resort landscapes are highly dynamic, and many resort areas have progressed through the various stages. Likewise, resorts may be in the process of changing from one stage to another, as in the case of Boca Chica, which is presently undergoing an internationalization phase. Second, the distinction of "integrated" and "interactive" is often difficult to make. If tourism development becomes absorbed into a relatively large preexisting settlement such as Sosúa, the tourist/native relationship is much closer and thus more "integrated." If tourism development takes place in and around small preexisting settlements such as Juan Dolio, tourist infrastructure such as bars and restaurants often become built into the hotels, thus reducing but not eliminating the extent of the tourist/native relationship. In this case, the term "interaction" is more appropriate than "integration." In spite of these shortcomings, it is hoped that the proposed resort typology remains useful for the interpretation of seaside resort landscapes not just in the Dominican Republic but along shorelines of other portions of the world's "pleasure periphery" as well.
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