

Center for Community-Based Resource Management (CBRM)

Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba

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Case Study Name:	The Power of Place: Tourism Development in Costa Rica		
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Region:	Latin America and the Caribbean		
Country:	Costa Rica		
Ecosystem Type:	Tropical Forest		
Social Characteristics:	Urban Communities		
Scale of Study:	National		
Resource Type:	Tourism		
Type of Initiative:	Research Driven-Project		
Community-Based Work:	Development Planning		
Keywords:	Place, Tourism, Sustainable Development, Authenticity, Costa Rica		
Summary:	In this paper, I question how representations of tourist destinations color and are colored by		

development. Presenting the results of ethnographic fieldwork conducted on the southern Caribbean coast of Costa Rica, I find that the authenticity of portrayals of place is important not for its veracity, but for the social work it performs. Authenticity is not merely socially constructed but expressive of social relations which value people and places. Tourist perceptions of the caribe sur as genuinely underdeveloped—gauged by an analysis of photos and guidebooks as well as surveys—produce an approach to resource use within the community that is limiting. Because the value of the place is its underdevelopment, development itself constrains the possibility of sustaining further growth. Ultimately, reading development via place can be a guide for critically appreciating contemporary patterns of tourism and sustainable development in the caribe sur and elsewhere.