

Tourism Development and Nation-Building: The Case of Aruba

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Introduction

A destination's tourism development can be connected with its nation-building process, with possible elemental roles for branding and heritage. This study investigates the relationship between tourism development and nation-building in the context of a Caribbean destination (Aruba), which transitioned its economy in the mid-1980s to become a successful tourism player. In this chapter the intermediation effects of branding and heritage on the two investigated constructs are also examined. The findings indicate that Aruba's tourism has benefitted from the "one happy island-mentality" that prevailed despite the many socio-economic and environmental changes accompanying the tourism development process. At the same time, there is recognition that the current unsustainable tourism development model threatens the happiness feeling needed to remain a preferred destination. Branding has been critical to the island's tourism success and portrays a much-shared vision of a happy island, but the alignment of heritage with Aruba's tourism is complementary. At the same time, its non-inclusive conceptualisation seems to dilute its role in supporting the national identity.

Tourism comprises visitor activities at a destination. A visitor is "a traveler taking a trip to the main destination outside his/her usual environment, for less than a year, for any main purpose (business, leisure or other personal motives) other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited."¹ Tourism has become a significant sector, generating, among other things, economic growth, jobs, income (taxes), foreign exchange earnings, and the development of ancillary industries, such as transportation, retail trade, food, attractions, and recreation.² At the same time, tourism can lead to the destruction of flora and fauna, put pressure on the destination's natural resources (e.g., water), and risks eroding cultural identity.³ Tourism has also been associated with increases in crime, traffic congestion, and prices (inflation). Still, many countries continue to focus on tourism for their development.

The tourism product is not a conventional one, because it is a bundle of goods and services (e.g., transport, accommodation, food, etc.), often indivisible and partially intangible, where tourists are generally required to consume tourism at the

destination. It is, thus, impossible to consider the tourism product as a single item, and the conventional product-price relationship discussed in the microeconomic literature does not work for tourism. The tourism product is conditioned to the demand each individual (or groups of people) has for goods and services at the destination. Tourism demand is “a decision of travelers to buy goods and/or services based on different factors (e.g., price, tastes, information, cost of alternatives, and income) at a destination outside their natural environment, where they travel for less than a year for business, leisure, and/or other personal purposes.”⁴ Tourism demand is vital for the success of all tourism-related businesses, including airlines, tour operators, hotels, cruise ship lines, and recreation facilities, and understanding tourism demand prospects is critical to reducing relevant businesses’ operational risks.⁵

Tourism demand is also a fundamental construct of tourism development, and the latter has been acknowledged for its relevance to developing countries’ nation-building process.⁶ In this regard, tourism can contribute to creating a country’s identity, with essential roles for the nation’s history, internal social dynamics, and connections with neighbouring countries. Branding is used to create an image of a unique destination and to promise quality and value to the tourists if they experience the destination.⁷ Simultaneously, branding establishes a destination’s stakeholders’ co-responsibility to guarantee the nation’s brand. As such, branding can assist in defining the identity of a destination’s residents, contributing to the nation-building process. Heritage can function in a specialised role to attract a specific type of tourist (heritage tourists) but can also be incorporated as part of the overall package offered to tourists. Heritage can also help a destination’s residents preserve their national identities through influential symbols such as historic buildings and monuments.⁸ As such, a destination’s branding and heritage are potentially relevant for tourism development but can also serve as ingredients to the nation-building process.

Investigating the link between tourism development and nation-building, with mediating roles for branding and heritage, can enlighten the workings of specific destination-related supply factors on tourism development while offering insights into the development and maintaining of a common identity among the destination’s residents. This study provides an in-depth case study of these relationships for Aruba, an island with ample experience with tourism. The comprehensive approach will allow for an enriched analysis and an understanding of the symbiotic link between creating a thriving tourism destination and achieving a collective feeling of unity.

This chapter is organised as follows. From the literature perspective, section 2 will discuss the roles of tourism development, branding, and heritage in nation-building. Section 3 will introduce the reader to the Caribbean as a region where differences are more dominant than similarities and where context is likely to play a crucial part in understanding tourism development and its connection

with the islands' nation-building process. The fourth section describes Aruba's tourism development and the different ramifications that influenced the island's nation-building process. The last section provides some concluding remarks.

Tourism, Nation-Building, Branding, and Heritage

Nation-building aims to create a collective capacity to achieve public results and pursue a shared future vision.⁹ Developing countries have often used tourism as a tool in their nation-building process.¹⁰ Nation-building with tourism development involves creating an identity for the outside world to see, using deliberate representations of the destination's history, internal social dynamics, and relationships with neighbouring countries. Tourism branding is key in the nation-building process because it allows for differentiating a destination's product from its competitors and represents a promise to tourists that they can rest assured and rely on the quality and value of experiences offered by the brand every time they see it.¹¹ Branding can also be used to establish co-responsibility of the destination stakeholders (e.g., businesses, the government, employees, and other residents) on achieving and maintaining the promise made by the brand.¹² It can also be used as a deliberate process to shape a country's image and reputation on the global stage.¹³ However, Hoeffte and Veenendaal contended that the success of branding depends on a country's historical, demographic, cultural, and socio-economic conditions.¹⁴ They argue that nation-branding can be promising for countries with colonial legacies, heterogeneous societies, and weak economic foundations. Some countries may have limited opportunities for nation-building because there is barely any (historical) bond for shared national identities and price, making them unattractive for investors or tourists. So, the success of branding on nation-building is not automatic and guaranteed, and depends on the country's specific conditions.

Heritage is another essential condition for identity-creation in tourist destinations. In its broader form, heritage is associated with the word "inheritance," which is transferred from one generation to another. Heritage attractions include places, structures with historical and cultural relevance, which are generally unique to the destination, making their attractiveness contingent upon the desires and expectations of tourists. Some authors also consider natural places as heritage.¹⁵ Some destinations with world-renowned heritage, such as Machu Picchu in Peru, the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt, or the Roman Colosseum in Italy, have the advantage of specialising in heritage tourism. Heritage tourists visit these destinations specifically for their historical importance, including built environments and urban areas, ancient monuments and dwellings, rural and agricultural landscapes, locations where historical events occurred, and places where exciting

and important cultures stand out. Tourist places with fewer inheritances could incorporate heritage as part of the overall package offered to tourists. Heritage can also assist the nation-building process as it helps countries' residents maintain their national identities, where historic buildings and monuments can be essential and influential symbols of a nation's aspiration and identity.¹⁶

From the previous analysis, we can distil that branding and heritage can mediate the tourism development-nation-building relationship. However, given branding's differentiating goals and the heritage uniqueness in each destination, it is likely that the workings of both factors in tourism development and nation-building are based on the circumstances surrounding each place. The discussion in the next section will explore some contextual features of Caribbean destinations.

The Caribbean and Tourism

Caribbean islands share a common region but are geographically dispersed between North and South America (See Figure 1, Map of Caribbean region). The islands are all considered Small Island Developing States by the United Nations, except for Bonaire, Saba, and Saint Eustatius, which are special municipalities of the Netherlands.¹⁷ They have varying constitutional statuses and differ further in their size, population (density), language, and dependency on tourism development (Table 1). Caribbean tourism began with travel, particularly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as Europeans crossed the Atlantic to visit their Caribbean colonial possessions for exploration, scientific discovery, and investigation.¹⁸ Tourists were initially not attracted to the sea and sand of the islands but by the "invigorating climate and balmy air ... recommended by the medical faculty."¹⁹

In the late nineteenth century, tourism became gradually more organised as Europeans and North Americans from the upper classes spent some time per year in Jamaica. Cuba dominated as the top destination in the Caribbean in the first quarter of the twentieth century, maintaining that position until the late 1950s. As of the 1960s, more Caribbean destinations became popular, thanks to commercial aviation, with tourists seeking sun and beach destinations. Tourism helped Caribbean islands reinvent themselves into flourishing service-oriented economies in the 1970s, with increasing government intervention. Mass tourism followed in the early 1980s when air travel became accessible and economically feasible for the North American and European middle class.²⁰

Nowadays, all Caribbean islands have experience with tourism, and some have become highly dependent on this activity. For example, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism accounted for 43.4 percent of Anguilla's economy and 51.1 percent of the island's employment (Table 1). Barbados's pre-COVID-19 tourism reliance was, respectively, 29.6 percent (economy) and 37.2 percent (labour). Tourism took

up 69.2 percent of Aruba's economy, while travel and tourism's contribution to employment reached 85.6 percent in 2019. Dependency on tourism was also often correlated with over-concentration on a single market, as shown by Ridderstaat and Nijkamp.²¹ The effects of tourism vulnerability became more than evident in 2020 when the Caribbean islands suffered badly from the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tourists generally see the Caribbean as a sun, sea, and sand opportunity, and destinations have not deviated much from that purpose.²² The role of heritage seems rather a complementary part added to the tourism product, which might explain why many destinations have no registration of their tangible and intangible heritage with UNESCO (Table 1). The latter is a lost opportunity to integrate the role of heritage in the tourism product, which could benefit tourism development.²³ Many countries have incorporated heritage as part of the show to tourists, often portraying a simplification or deviation of actual conditions. As put by Wong, heritage tourism sometimes has been reduced to a fake performance for tourism revenue:

In this pursuit of maintaining and expanding classical tourism, many ... indigenous cultural and environmental attributes are purposely corrupted for touristic entertainment values. [The] [t]hematic framework of tropical-paradise tourism often mimics past colonial regimes ... Exploiting 'rich agriculture heritage' to tourism has also been proposed to establish distinct branding of the preferred destination ... However, in this approach, the brutal hardship and suffering endured by slaves during the colonial era would need to be conveniently omitted. The enjoyment and amusement of tourists are paramount.²⁴

There are, of course, some exceptions to the described view of the role of heritage in tourism, such as the case of the Saint Lucia Heritage Tourism Project, an initiative by the local government to establish heritage tourism as a viable and sustainable component of the island's tourism product.²⁵ The Saint Lucia heritage initiative may be more of an exception than the rule. It is more likely that heritage has a diluted part in the tourism product of Caribbean destinations, considering the fierce competitive environment and where tourism demand has been historically tied to sun, sea, and sand.

The previous analysis portrayed Caribbean islands as sun, sea, and sand destinations with an ambiguous role for heritage, where differences among the islands are the rule rather than the exception. Context is likely to play a crucial part in understanding the connection between Caribbean islands' tourism development and nation-building. It implies that a one-size-fits-all analysis may not be appropriate, and a circumstantial approach may offer better results. Considering the latter, the subsequent analysis will contemplate the case of Aruba, an island that experienced a constitutional change in 1986, coupled with an all-important transition of its economy to become a key tourism destination in the Caribbean.

Table 1: Similarities and differences among Caribbean islands

Island	Constitutional status	Area (in km2)	Population	Population density	Official language
Anguilla	United Kingdom	91	15.003	164,87	English
Antigua and Barbuda	Independent	442	97.929	221,56	English
Aruba	Kingdom of the Netherlands	180	106.766	593,14	Dutch/ Papiamentu
Bahamas	Independent	13.943	393.244	28,20	English
Barbados	Independent	430	287.375	668,31	English
Bonaire	Kingdom of the Netherlands	294	21.745	73,96	Dutch
British Virgin Islands	United Kingdom	151	30.231	200,21	English
Cayman Islands	United Kingdom	264	65.722	248,95	English
Cuba	Independent	109.886	11.326.616	103,08	Spanish
Curaçao	Kingdom of the Netherlands	444	164.096	369,59	Dutch/ Papiamentu
Dominica	Independent	751	71.986	95,85	English
Dominican Republic	Independent	48.671	10.847.910	222,88	Spanish
Grenada	Independent	344	112.523	327,10	English
Guadeloupe	France	1.628	400.124	245,78	French
Haiti	Independent	27.750	11.402.528	410,90	French/ Haitian Creole
Jamaica	Independent	10.991	2.961.167	269,42	English
Martinique	France	1.128	375.265	332,68	French
Montserrat	United Kingdom	102	4.992	48,94	English
Puerto Rico	United States	8.870	2.860.853	322,53	Spanish

Travel and tourism travel contribution to economy (2019), in %	Travel and tourism travel contribution to economy (2020), in %	Travel and tourism travel contribution to employment (2019), in %	Travel and tourism travel contribution to employment (2020), in %	Key tourism market (pre-COVID-19)	Number of registrations on UNESCO's World Heritage List	Number of registrations on UNESCO's intangible Cultural Heritage List
43,4	15,7	51,1	37,7	United States	0	0
40,5	23,3	90,4	75,1	United States	1	0
69,2	44,0	85,6	73,9	United States	0	0
44,4	20,0	50,2	45,1	United States	0	0
29,6	17,9	37,2	34,4	United States and UK	1	0
N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	The Netherlands, Aruba Curacao, Saint Maarten, and United States	0	0
38,6	13,4	68,8	50,7	United States	0	0
21,0	9,7	36,8	31,8	United States	0	0
10,2	5,7	11,0	8,9	Canada	9	4
N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	Netherlands	1	0
32,6	13,5	35,9	30,1	Caribbean	1	0
15,9	7,5	17,1	14,5	United States	1	4
40,7	16,6	23,8	15,9	United States	0	0
9,5	4,3	11,1	8,7	France	0	0
9,8	3,6	10,1	7,2	United States	1	0
28,2	11,9	29,4	22,4	United States	1	2
7,5	4,7	8,4	6,7	France	0	1
N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	Caribbean, United States and UK	0	0
5,0	1,8	10,1	9,1	United States	0	0

Island	Constitutional status	Area (in km2)	Population	Population density	Official language
Saba	Kingdom of the Netherlands	13	1.918	147,54	Dutch
Saint Barthélemy (or Saint Barts)	France	21	9.877	470,33	French
Saint Kitts and Nevis	Independent	261	53.199	203,83	English
Saint Lucia	Independent	539	183.627	340,68	English
Saint Martin	France	54	38.666	716,04	French
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Independent	389	110.940	285,19	English
Saint Eustatius	Kingdom of the Netherlands	21	3.142	149,62	Dutch
Saint Maarten	Kingdom of the Netherlands	34	42.876	1261,06	Dutch
Trinidad and Tobago	Independent	5.130	1.399.488	272,80	English
Turks and Caicos Islands	United Kingdom	948	38.717	40,84	English
United States Virgin Islands	United States	347	104.425	300,94	English

Sources: Agence de développement touristique de la France, Central Bureau of Statistics of the Netherlands, Tourism Analytics, United Nations, Wikipedia, Worldometer, World Travel & Tourism Council, and author's calculations

Travel and tourism travel contribution to economy (2019), in %	Travel and tourism travel contribution to economy (2020), in %	Travel and tourism travel contribution to employment (2019), in %	Travel and tourism travel contribution to employment (2020), in %	Key tourism market (pre-COVID-19)	Number of registrations on UNESCO's World Heritage List	Number of registrations on UNESCO's intangible Cultural Heritage List
N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	United States, Aruba, Curacao, Saint Maarten, The Netherlands	0	0
N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	Saint Maarten	0	0
52	22	58,6	41,6	United States	1	0
68,1	28,7	79,7	59,6	United States	1	0
N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	Guadeloupe	0	0
41,7	16,4	44,8	38,2	Caribbean, United States and UK	0	0
N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	Aruba, Curacao, Saint Maarten, The Netherlands	0	0
N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	United States	0	0
7,4	4,2	8,9	6,8	United States	0	0
N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	United States	0	0
53,6	27,1	71,3	53,0	United States	0	0

An Island Embracing Tourism Development: Materialism Overcoming Idealism

Aruba's economy had long depended on an oil refinery, the Lago Oil & Transport Company, Ltd. (Lago), which brought material prosperity to the island. Lago's economic contribution was generally considered secure, thanks to its long-lasting presence on the island. Idealism was more prevalent than materialism, as Aruba was involved in a decades-long struggle to separate itself from the Netherlands Antilles, particularly from Curaçao. The latter was perceived as too dominant within the Netherlands Antilles and an obstacle to Aruba's prosperity and progress. Many names have been synonymous with the separation movement, but it was Betico Croes and his *Movimiento Electoral di Pueblo* (MEP) party who channelled the will of many on the island.²⁶ Of course, not everybody seemed happy with the notion of separating from Curaçao. For example, behind the scenes, Lago's management had become sceptical and critical of the MEP party and Betico Croes:

Those people [MEP] are totally irresponsible. This island can't stand alone. Our taxes and the tourist income aren't enough to float this island. We've supported the introduction of new industries, but they just never paid out. We support the growth in the tourist industry, but it'll take years before that will lessen the dependence of the people on us ... Now, if Aruba actually does separate from Curaçao, they will become even more dependent on Lago.²⁷

At the 1983 Round Table Conference in The Hague, Betico Croes successfully negotiated Aruba's partial separation from the Netherlands Antilles on January 1, 1986, with complete independence to follow ten years later.²⁸ Only a few cared about the full implications of the agreement. What was important was that Aruba would divorce itself from Curaçao, which was the only thing that mattered for many. The joyous moment was reflected in an overwhelming election outcome (April 29, 1983) for the MEP and Betico Croes (thirteen seats out of twenty-one in Aruba's Parliament). Unfortunately, the celebrations did not last long. What seemed like a bright and cheerful future suddenly became sour grapes when Exxon, the parent company of Lago, decided to close the refinery in 1985. While the official reason was economics, the impending constitutional change may have also played a role in Lago's decision to end activities on the island. Aruba was left with an immediate loss in tax revenues of 40 percent and an unemployment rate close to 20 percent.²⁹

While being the architect and man of the hour of the *Status Aparte*, Betico Croes would not become the man reigning in the *Status Aparte*. The MEP and Betico Croes suffered a disastrous loss at the Island Council election (November 22, 1985), losing the party's majority in Parliament (from thirteen seats to eight seats). The refinery's closure proved to be too much for many voters and prompted one of the last memorable statements by Betico Croes on election night: "Materialismo a vence idealismo"

(materialism has overcome idealism). Betico Croes would also not see the Status Aparte become reality, as he fell into a coma after a car accident, hours before the constitutional change. He never regained consciousness and died on November 26, 1986.

A New Era with Tourism Development

Lago's closure prompted Aruba to explore other economic sources, and soon it became evident that tourism development was the way forward. Aruba's history with tourism did not start with its Status Aparte in 1986, but it received a vital impetus with the constitutional change. By leaving the Netherlands Antilles and becoming an autonomous nation in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the island gained more sovereignty in decision-making. Tourism would become the new economic mainstay, and there was a new visionary in town. Henny Eman became the first prime minister of Aruba on January 1, 1986, and is also credited with Aruba's economic reform after the departure of the Lago refinery. He replaced the founder of the industry, Juan E. Irausquin, whose vision of tourism began with the construction of the first luxury hotel (Aruba Caribbean Hotel) in 1959, but who also died too young to see many of his ideas completed.³⁰



The tourist industry in Aruba (photo Jorge Ridderstaat)

Table 2: Main purpose of visiting Aruba (in percentages)

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Vacation	90,6	90,3	90,3	90,4	90,2	90,2	90,5	93,0	92,9	94,0
Honeymoon	2,8	2,6	2,5	2,7	2,2	2,2	1,3	0,9	0,9	0,3
Visit Friends/ Relatives	3,6	4,4	4,7	4,5	4,8	5,4	4,6	4,0	4,0	3,8
Business and leisure	1,0	0,7	0,6	0,7	0,5	0,4	1,0	0,7	0,7	0,8
Other	1,0	0,9	0,9	0,8	1,1	1,0	1,8	0,8	0,8	0,7
Business Only/ Convention/ Conference	0,3	0,6	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,1
Wedding	0,3	0,4	0,3	0,4	0,4	0,4	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,2
Events/Festivals	0,5	0,1	0,1	0,0	0,2	0,1	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,1
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0

Source: Tourist Survey - Central Bureau of Statistics - Aruba

By early 1986, Aruba had about two thousand rooms, and the International Monetary Fund recommended a fifty percent increase by 1998, projecting that economic growth would resume in 1987. However, the island authorities were ambitious and pursued a doubling of room capacity,³¹ a decision with repercussions for later (see the discussion in the next segment). Soon, new hotels, shopping malls, and other commercial buildings were being constructed. The government offered fiscal incentives in the form of reduced profit taxes, tax holidays, and substantial government guarantees to stimulate foreign investment in the tourism industry.³² The number of hotel rooms more than doubled to 4,789 by 1990.³³ The fruits of tourism development soon became evident. Tourist arrivals increased from 181,211 in 1986 to 432,762 in 1990. Cruise tourism also grew significantly, from 73,338 arrivals in 1986 to 129,969 in 1990 (+77.2 percent). The island's economy grew annually on average by 17.3 percent (nominal terms) and by 12.7 percent (real terms) in that period.³⁴ The economic growth was also stimulated by the reopening of the refinery (Coastal Aruba Refining Company N.V.) in 1990,³⁵ propelled by new Prime Minister Nelson Oduer.³⁶

Tourism development continued in subsequent years. The number of visitors to Aruba grew steadily as new hotels were constructed. After more than thirty-five years of tourism development, the number of hotel rooms more than quadrupled compared to 1986, surpassing eight thousand units.³⁷ By 2019, the island welcomed

1.1 million stay-over visitors, more than sixfold the number of 1986. Aruba welcomed 830,000 cruise visitors that same year, eleven times the level reached in 1986. It is safe to say that the island had successfully transitioned its economy to become a key tourist destination in the Caribbean. Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics indicate that Aruba remains a vacation destination, as indicated by more than ninety percent of surveyed tourists (Table 2).³⁸ The island's holiday reputation has not changed much compared to the early years of Aruba's tourism in the 1960s. However, a deeper analysis reveals that all that glitters is not gold, and there are more aspects to consider behind the veil of a seemingly successful tourism development process.

Benefits and Costs of Aruba's Tourism Development

The transition of Aruba into a tourism destination was reflected at both the macro and micro levels. At the macro level, we have seen significant improvements in GDP and employment. More people found work in hotels and restaurants over time, generating income for consumption and investment (e.g., purchasing a home). Balance of payments data from the Central Bank of Aruba also reveals growth in travel spending by Aruban residents when going abroad, indicating that more locals were profiting from the tourism development by becoming tourists themselves. The greater number of visitors also made it attractive to establish larger supermarkets, where Aruban residents could benefit from more extensive product choices. The island also introduced general health insurance (AZV) in 2001, allowing relatively easy access for Aruban residents to medical care.³⁹ Improvements in the tourism product over time, such as the introduction of the Linear Park and the beautification of the beaches, have also benefitted residents who use these amenities.

At the micro-level, Aruban residents experienced the benefits of the tourism transition. A study by the Central Bureau of Statistics in 2016 reveals that 69.5 percent of respondents were satisfied with their standard of living.⁴⁰ Furthermore, 70.1 percent were satisfied with their job, 88.9 percent with their family, 73.3 percent with their leisure time, 66.2 percent with their health, and 60.9 percent of the employed respondents were satisfied with their work-life balance. Studies by Ridderstaat, Croes, and Nijkamp showed that tourism development directly impacted Aruban residents' quality of life (often positively), validating the relevance of tourism for the islanders' well-being.⁴¹ However, the influence of tourism on society may be waning. A study by Croes et al. (2017) revealed that in 2017, seventy-nine percent of respondents indicated that they were happy, and seventy-six percent were satisfied with their lives.⁴² However, compared to 2011, the study showed that tourism was no longer responsible for people's happiness but only reflected an impact on their



Nature reserve Ari Kok in Aruba (photo Jorge Ridderstaat)

life satisfaction, a potential sign of the increasing disconnect of tourism development with Aruban society.

Sustainability of Aruba's Tourism Development

Aruba's tourism development has been historically synonymous with land use. New tourism business establishments generally meant replacing nature or old buildings with new ones. Some examples in the early years: the shallow sea in front of Wilhelmina Park was filled up and developed into a hotel property, and the old and historical Police Station in Oranjestad was torn down to make a multiple-story hotel.⁴³ The government soon became aware of the unsustainable practices and took two crucial construction-halting measures in the 1990s. In 1994, the government instituted a moratorium on hotel construction to deter any new hotel projects. In 1997,

authorities created Arikok National Park, which covered almost nineteen percent of the island, to protect Aruban animal and plant life, geology, and cultural-historical heritage.⁴⁴ While the national park was an effective policy for creating a no-building zone, the moratorium proved ineffective at halting the construction boom. This was because the moratorium covered neither certain types of accommodation, such as condominiums, nor reconstruction and renovations of existing hotels, which could continue undisturbed.⁴⁵ Ironically, the government eliminated its moratorium in February 2010, when it announced the construction of the Ritz Carlton (opened in late 2013). Without a moratorium, the building of other hotels soon followed (e.g., Radisson Blue and Hyatt Place), and others are now in the pipeline.⁴⁶ Hotel construction seemed to have become more political prestige than economic necessity. It is politically attractive because a building provides tangible proof of political achievements and because of the positive (shock) effect such a project has on Aruba's GDP—which is all good campaign material for the next election.⁴⁷ Paradoxically, the government enacted a State Ordinance on Spatial Development in 2006, providing legal instruments to achieve an orderly system of regulations for spatial development,⁴⁸ which led to the Spatial Development Plan approved in May 2009 and an updated version in July 2019. However, much construction has already materialised, making these efforts seem too little too late. Regardless, the institution of spatial regulation is still vital for orderly construction development in the future.

Meanwhile, many Aruban residents have become fed up with over-construction on the island. Residents protested the continued construction of tourist accommodation. The construction of the Ritz Carlton near the Fisherman's Hut, an area used by local fishermen for many decades, is a good example, which was met by notable protests.⁴⁹ An organisation called Stimaruba protested against plans to build a hotel near Arashi.⁵⁰ The Aruba Birdlife Conservation won court cases to stop the destruction of Aruba's Bubali Wetlands.⁵¹ Many people are no longer pleased with how large buildings populate the island. There is also a growing consciousness among younger generations that Aruba's future tourism development needs to be sustainable. There is agreement that tourism will likely remain Aruba's central economic pillar for the coming decades, but there is also a need to transition toward a sustainable tourism model and curb over-development.⁵² The government has endorsed these ideas, but the proof is in the pudding, and the execution will determine the government's willingness to put words into action.

Persistent Immigration

In the early stages of the second wave of tourism development, the economy became overheated⁵³ and, coupled with increasing employment opportunities, caused labour shortages. Authorities were initially facing a dilemma of whether or

not to open the labour market to foreign workers. The excessive demand for labour was reflected in the inflation rate, which reached close to six percent in 1990. With some initial hesitancy, the island authorities opened the market to foreign labour, particularly from surrounding countries (e.g., Venezuela, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Peru, etc.), and by 1990, some 2,000 foreign workers reinforced the labour force in Aruba.⁵⁴ The decision to allow foreign workers to participate in the tourism development process marked the beginning of a second immigration wave,⁵⁵ one that has outlasted the tourism boom (1986–2000).⁵⁶

Immigration has good, bad, and ugly sides. For Aruba, the good side was that foreign workers managed to cool the overheated demand for labour on the island and helped mitigate wage pressures. Together with locals, foreign workers allowed Aruba to achieve the tourism destination status it has today. Foreign workers also helped rejuvenate the Aruban labour force⁵⁷ and are generally seen as having enriched Aruban cultural identity.⁵⁸ Many immigrants and their families have integrated into Aruban society and genuinely contribute to the island's future.

The bad side of immigration is that it is still an ongoing process tied to tourism and other economic developments. The increased economic activity requires the import of foreign labour, and according to International Monetary Fund calculations, more foreign workers will be needed to sustain the continued growth of the aging population.⁵⁹ The resulting increase in the population has also added further pressure on housing,⁶⁰ infrastructure, health, and education, indicating that immigration imposes significant costs.

The ugly side of immigration in Aruba has been, so far, not so ugly, probably because immigration has become embedded in societal thinking, and many Arubans had immigrant blood from their elders, following the first immigration wave in the first half of the twentieth century. Fiery anti-immigrant protests, like in many other countries, did not materialise in Aruba, fortunately. There is, however, anecdotal evidence of frequent complaints of too many immigrants on the island (“No hay cama pa’ tanta gente”⁶¹), or that they are stealing jobs or husbands from locals or refuse to speak Papiamentu. Immigration often does not occur only through legal channels, and Aruba has also been experiencing its share of illegal aliens living and working on the island. Aruba remains a magnet for people from certain Latin American countries (e.g., Venezuela and Colombia) and some Caribbean islands (e.g., Haiti and the Dominican Republic). Recent (gu)estimates indicate that about twenty thousand undocumented aliens were living on the island at the end of 2021,⁶² a development that has become more pronounced with the political and economic unrest in Venezuela.⁶³ The government has announced its intention to implement an amnesty policy, and it will be interesting to see how this would work on the economy and residents’ feelings toward immigration.

Productivity, Vulnerability, and Resilience of Aruba's Tourism

Despite the ongoing pursuit of new tourism projects, there is also evidence that Aruba's tourism industry may have landed in a saturation zone, where every additional expansion effort produces a diminishing return.⁶⁴ According to the IMF, the limited availability of still-to-be developed land and the constant need for immigrant labour further support the ongoing "exhaustion effect" in Aruba's tourism development. The latter may also explain residents' growing dissatisfaction and protests against further construction.

There is also evidence that the island is becoming more vulnerable to tourism-related shocks. In the past, Aruba was able to withstand the effects of several international shocks, such as the Gulf War (1991), the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington (2001), the Natalee Holloway case (2005), the global financial crisis (2008–2010), and the collapse of the Venezuelan tourism market. Overcoming these crises was possible thanks to the coordinating efforts of many key tourism stakeholders, including the Aruba Tourism Authority (ATA), the Aruba Hotel and Tourism Association (AHATA), and Aruba's population itself. For instance, in the case of Natalee Holloway's disappearance, U.S. media attention in part led to fewer U.S. tourists.⁶⁵ The island's image took a hit, mainly because of boycott calls from the missing girl's family and Alabama officials who pressured Aruba's judicial system.⁶⁶ Back then, the ATA and the AHATA were primarily busy correcting inaccurate perceptions of the island.⁶⁷ The case also touched the Aruban community, who saw all kinds of biased and unfair statements and assumptions made about the island every day on their television screens. Many saw the need to protect Aruba's tourism (the bread and butter of many) and volunteered to help search for Natalee Holloway. The case, which remains unsolved, dragged little Aruba into the (wrong) spotlight but revealed the unity and willingness of Aruban residents to step up together to counter a national crisis.

So far, the island has successfully weathered several global shocks, but the COVID-19 crisis could become the mother of all crises. For the first time in many decades, the island was confronted with (almost) zero tourists due to border closures. By July 2020, tourists started to come back to Aruba as the island started to open again for the U.S. and other countries (e.g., Canada, European countries, Bonaire, and Curaçao). However, the arrival numbers were only a tiny fraction of what they had been and could not economically support the more than one hundred thousand people living on the island. Mass firings and furloughs followed. The government provided a socio-economic package to help many people who lost their job and/or other income due to COVID-19. On the other hand, the government curtailed the salaries of civil servants and those in similar positions to mitigate

growing government fiscal deficits. The salary reduction was unbalanced, as not every employee saw a reduction in their payslip, creating perceptions of inequality in the solidarity process. The latter may explain the protests of some workers against the salary reduction measure.⁶⁸ The overall effect of the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing, and its consequences on Aruba's tourism remain to be seen.

Mediating Role of Branding and Heritage

Aruba's strong tourism brand has helped the island transition itself to the tourism destination it has become today. The brand also helped the island overcome several crises. The brand is the result of decades-long development, and the underlying message has been refined over time. Like many (Caribbean) destinations, we can follow the island's branding process through vehicle licence plates. Until 1976, plates incorporated no slogan; only "ARUBA, N.A.," appeared, a monotonous message presumably intended to help tourists remember the island's name.⁶⁹ Between 1976 and 1982, plates incorporated the island's carnival tradition in the form of the slogan "ISLA DI CARNAVAL", pinpointing a single Aruban custom. Perhaps the best-known brand name was introduced in 1983, i.e., "ONE HAPPY ISLAND," which continues to be used nowadays and emphasises the happiness factor tourists can find on the island.⁷⁰ The happiness factor should be interpreted broadly: Aruban residents are generally characterised as being friendly, happy, warm, and welcoming.⁷¹ They are also responsible for the safety and well-being of tourists, as the government website states: "The people of Aruba look forward to greeting you on One happy island with warmth, gratitude and, above all, your safety and well-being as our most important priority. Now is the time to relax, renew, refresh and rediscover Your Happy Place in Aruba."⁷²

So far, Aruban residents have met the One Happy Island condition, and the branding success is reflected in its ability to connect the tourism industry with the Aruban residents. However, the increasing dissatisfaction with Aruba's tourism development model could threaten the resident happiness level necessary to remaining a preferred destination.

Heritage Contribution to Tourism Development and Nation-Building

In the context of Aruba, heritage is generally exclusive, rather than inclusive, considering folkloric traditions, national symbols, and the Papiamentu language while omitting conceptualisations belonging to younger generations and ethnic and cultural minorities.⁷³ The lack of an inclusive concept of heritage may also explain the emphasis of Aruban stakeholders on preserving and enhancing monuments,

Table 3: Places visited by tourists while in Aruba (in percentages)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Visit Museum	3,2	3,2	9,0	5,0	4,7	8,7	13,7	5,8	3,2
Visit Historical Buildings	14,7	17,9	22,4	24,6	25,6	27,5	28,8	29,5	32,9
Visit Historical Sites	18,8	38,7	39,4	42,5	38,7	44,7	39,1	35,9	40,9
Visit Art Galleries	1,4	1,4	3,7	3,3	2,3	2,8	2,5	1,0	0,5
Took Cultural Tour	2,2	1,4	2,6	3,2	3,6	2,7	1,7	1,6	0,4
Attended Festival	11,4	14,3	22,7	21,8	22,1	22,6	21,5	17,1	10,6
Visit Beaches	95,1	95,8	96,5	96,9	96,2	93,4	91,3	91,7	95,5
Visit Center Oranjestad	91,4	91,8	85,5	92,9	93,4	94,5	96,0	96,7	97,4
Visit Franse Pas	9,3	12,6	17,7	15,6	17,0	17,3	19,0	22,4	22,9
Visit Restaurant Outside	67,8	60,1	59,0	62,5	64,9	67,5	74,1	70,5	65,1
Saw Hotel Shows	13,1	19,0	23,4	19,7	22,5	32,4	38,8	49,4	49,8
Made Island Tour	46,5	61,9	62,6	60,3	57,5	61,9	57,5	58,0	59,5
Visit National Park	38,3	36,1	37,1	29,5	28,0	29,2	32,3	40,0	44,7
Visit North Coast	47,1	58,4	61,1	59,6	59,4	58,2	60,1	58,7	58,3
Architecture	10,0	9,1	37,0	40,1	34,4	32,8	36,1	33,1	39,0
Visit Rock Formations	36,2	44,5	46,3	38,7	37,9	35,6	38,7	40,3	45,3
Visit San Nicolas	40,3	55,5	62,3	56,8	50,5	53,2	62,8	67,5	64,3
Visit Shopping Malls	86,8	93,0	89,7	89,9	91,8	92,9	96,4	97,9	98,8

Source: Tourist Survey - Central Bureau of Statistics Aruba

historic buildings, and natural landscapes, forgetting that everyday life is also a shaper of Aruban identity (Arubanness).⁷⁴ From the perspective of nation-building, the role of heritage in maintaining national identity seems suboptimal. Heritage seems part of the tourism product but has not been a key reason for visiting Aruba. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, around ninety percent of all responding tourists have visited Aruba's beaches when on the island, validating the sun-sea-sand motivation mentioned earlier (Table 3). The surveyed tourists also seem to like visiting Oranjestad and the shopping malls. Although not a key reason for visiting Aruba, tourists also are interested in the island's heritage. About forty percent of respondents visited historical sites or rock formations (Table 3). There was also interest in historical buildings, but tourists deemed visiting museums or taking a cultural tour less important. Many tourists were also interested in visiting

San Nicolas, but the reasons are not clear from the data. It is also unclear whether tourists have dined in restaurants serving local cuisine. Overall, the contribution of heritage to tourism development is likely to be a minor part of tourists' activities while on the island.

Concluding Remarks

Aruba's second tourism development wave, initiated in the mid-1980s, has made the island what it is today, i.e., a tourism destination. Tourism development has competently formed a symbiotic relationship with the island's nation-building process. Arubans can quarrel about anything, but there is general agreement that tourism is still the way forward. They also largely identify themselves with the "One Happy Island" feeling, which has worked well in the branding strategy to distinguish Aruba from its competitors and attract more tourists. It is safe to say that Aruba's brand is essentially a representation of how Arubans feel, and Aruba's promise to take care of tourists is secure. While branding has worked well in the tourism development-nation-building interrelationship, Aruba's heritage has been complementary to the tourism product and suboptimal for nurturing national identity.

However, promises can be broken; happiness may not be in the DNA of Aruban residents, contrary to what the Aruba Tourism Authority has suggested.⁷⁵ The island's tourism development risks losing touch with what residents deem essential. Also, what has worked well in the past may not necessarily continue to work for future tourists. Tourism demand can change over time, and new travellers may see the world differently and have different lifestyles and views about sustainable destinations.⁷⁶ The island is in dire need of a sustainable tourism development model, where it can continue to outshine its competitors, satisfy residents' needs, and provide tourists utility beyond sun, sea, and sand. There is an opportunity to preserve Aruba as a happy place for everyone if stakeholders work together towards a new tourism development vision. The Aruba Tourism Authority has already recognised the need for an innovative and sustainable tourism development model,⁷⁷ and there seems to be a similar agreement among other stakeholders and the government.⁷⁸ The regulations for spatial development are also in place. The next and perhaps most challenging endeavour will be the execution, which includes determining policies to untangle Aruba's tourism development from its current unsustainable conditions, including a reorganisation of building and immigration policies. It may be difficult, but it's not impossible if the vision is clear. Aruba's tourism has already experienced visions of change in the past, and it is time for the next visionary architect to step forward.