



—  
Case study:

# Pigeon Island National Landmark

**Pigeon Island National Landmark (PINL)** is an 18-hectare (44-acre) islet connected by a causeway to the northwest coast of Saint Lucia. It was designated a National Park in 1973, and renamed as the first Historic Landmark in the country on February 23, 1979 — the day after Saint Lucia attained full independence — and a National Landmark in 1992. The entire site serves as a nature reserve and includes ruins of colonial military buildings, a restaurant, a pub, hiking trails, lookout points, 3 beaches, and a jetty to welcome water craft.

Since 1983, it has been leased and operated by the Saint Lucia National Trust (SLNT), an organization established by the Saint Lucian government in 1975 “to conserve the natural and cultural heritage of Saint Lucia, and to promote values which lead to national pride and love of country.” SLNT is a full member of the International National Trusts Organisation (INTO). Her Excellency Dame Pearlette Louisy, is the Patron of the Saint Lucia National Trust. The Director of SLNT since 2005 is Bishnu Tulsie, who served as our principal contact for this study.

The Saint Lucia National Trust operates under the guidance of a board-approved, multi-year strategic plan. The most recent one was prepared in 2020 and provides the values and directions for Pigeon Island as well as other properties and advocacy programs of SLNT.



**Key lesson learned in the study of Pigeon Island:**

*Expect and embrace the unexpected outcomes arising from local engagement.*

Another important learning from the study of Saint Lucia came up during our analysis.

- NGO stewardship organizations can provide constancy through changes in governments and different development priorities. The Saint Lucia National Trust's legal agreements within the lease of Pigeon Island National Landmark with the government have provided the site with long-term stability through different eras of changing governmental priorities.

### **Brief history**

The anthropology of Pigeon Island spans over one thousand years. Artifacts like ceramics indicate that Amerindians began inhabiting the island around 1000 CE, the majority of which are of Carib origin. By the 16th century, Pigeon Island had become a haven for infamous pirate François le Clerc (known as "Jambe de Bois" for his wooden leg), as the favorable winds and excellent vantage points made it an ideal base for capturing and stripping vessels.

These advantages would eventually play an important role in geopolitics: Saint Lucia changed hands multiple times from 1660 to 1779 due to the fourteen wars waged between the British and French during that period. While both empires had settlements on Saint Lucia, neither had tried to settle on Pigeon Island until the late 18th century. Following Pigeon Island's crucial role in Britain's victory over the French at the Battle of Cul de Sac in 1778, its tactical advantages would make it a prominent military base for the following half-century. The most geopolitically significant instance was the Battle of the Saintes in April 1782, when the British surveillance atop Pigeon Island allowed them to quickly mobilize in response to French naval movements in neighboring Martinique; their pursuit and successful engagement of the French secured the era to come of British naval dominance. Saint Lucia and Pigeon Island once again changed hands many times between the British and French from 1782 to 1814, with the notable exception of 1795 to 1797, when liberated slaves fearful of the reintroduction of British slavery took Saint Lucia and largely destroyed the structures and armaments on Pigeon Island. By 1814, Saint Lucia was ceded to Britain at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. The garrisons were abandoned and the island was disarmed by 1861.

The mid-19th century to early-20th century saw Pigeon Island used as a camp for indentured laborers and later as a whaling base. The island was leased to English actress Josset Agnes Hutchinson in 1937, where she would live and develop a yachting business and restaurant for the next 40 years, with the exception of World War II when Pigeon Island served as an American communications station. In 1971, the island was connected to the mainland by a causeway, which has been developed with large resorts. In 1979 the island was named the first National Park of Saint Lucia, at which point its period of control by the Saint Lucia National Trust would begin.

*“The Trust understands that the concept of heritage is not static, that there will always be varying appreciations and understandings of it in the same society, and that it constantly evolves, especially thanks to our engagement with it. The Trust therefore contributes to that evolution by helping to shape the concept and our understanding of it.”*

Strategic Plan 2020-2030



## Preservation and conservation

As stated in the 2007 *Management Plan for the Pigeon Island National Landmark*, “The real significance of Pigeon Island comes from its historic value...and the Landmark has an important socio-cultural and economic role to play in the development of Saint Lucia.” With this in mind, the island’s most valuable physical assets are its historic buildings, largely dating from the period of 1780 to 1817. This is the era of great British and French military power, bookended by two major hurricanes which caused significant destruction. These structures include officer’s quarters and mess hall (currently used as the SLNT headquarters with plans for an interpretive center), an officer’s kitchen, a two-gun battery, the Commanding Officer’s quarters, soldier barracks, Fort Rodney, an oven, a kiln, and a water tank. The structures are in varying states of repair and conditions, ranging from stable and good in some instances to fair and poor in others. More modern structures include Josset’s 1937 house, the Jambe de Bois Restaurant originally founded by Josset, a gate house, and public restrooms.

## Changing nature of tourism

Pigeon Island is the second-most visited site on Saint Lucia, having recorded just under 100,000 visitors each year from 2012 to 2019. In 2019, 80% of the visitation came from adult visitors to the island, 13% were adult residents of Saint Lucia, and 7% were children. This is in comparison to total island visitation figures of 500,000 in the busy season of January to March, 2019. Both Saint Lucia and Pigeon Island itself have sustained growth in their visitation numbers. SLNT attributes this latter growth to a number of factors including better marketing, outreach to cruise lines and resorts, connections with ground handlers, and the increase in total visitation to greater Saint Lucia.

PINL has also seen improvements to its fitness and health amenities, including completion of a trail loop, hosting a scuba diving concessionaire, collaboration with local hotels and organizations to allow for rock climbing and yoga, and maintenance of beaches for relaxation and recreation. In addition, Pigeon Island is the site for private and local cultural events, such as the annual Saint Lucia Jazz Festival.



## KEY CHALLENGE:

Differing uses of space between tourists and local communities on the beaches of Saint Lucia led to conflict.

## KEY LESSON LEARNED:

Expect and embrace the unexpected outcomes arising from local engagement.

## Challenges. Responses. Lessons learned.

The Saint Lucia National Trust is dedicated to “[placing] heritage at the centre of human development at national, community and personal levels, with a focus on the places (landscapes, natural and historic sites, monuments and buildings) that constitute that heritage.” A key value of the organization’s voice comes from its independence.

*“The Trust was designed and created as an independent organisation, and this independence must be retained, so as to ensure that the Trust can continue to speak out on national issues and play its role as Saint Lucia’s conscience in relation to the nation’s heritage, and also ensure that it can do so in a balanced and non-partisan manner.” (Strategic Plan, 2020 – 2030)*

As we learned in our study of the tourism challenges in Saint Lucia, that independence is critical to the long-term conservation and responsible management of the site. For this case study, we will focus on the efforts to engage the local business community in a way that supports the local economy, provides positive interactions between that community and visitors, and offers opportunities to take advantage of the evolving interests of tourists favoring more local, cultural, and “real” experiences as well as the challenges and opportunities that come from NGO relationships with changing governments.

Bringing all stakeholders to the table can help deliver unexpected resolutions which benefit both the local economy and a quality experience for visitors.

The beaches on Pigeon Island provide an instructive example of how creative thinking around common goals can turn conflicts between locals and tourists into mutually beneficial opportunities. When schools of fish would enter Rodney Bay, Saint Lucians would fish in the immediate vicinity of the beaches on Pigeon Island. This presented a situation where both paying visitors and fishers wanted to use beach space for their relaxation and industry, respectively. The greatest conflict around this contested space came when the fishers would leave their nets on the beach overnight, meaning visitors were unable to use the beach on the following day.

As part of its strategy to facilitate collaboration, the Saint Lucia National Trust met with the fishers and the Fisheries Department to negotiate, beginning with the common goal of supporting the livelihood of the local fishing community. The fishers and the Trust reached a solution of agreeing that the fishers could always pursue their fishing, with the request that they stop leaving the nets on the beach overnight. Since this solution, the conflicts between tourists and the fishing community have largely abated, and watching the fishers has actually become an attraction of interest for tourists: there have even been instances of tourists helping the fishers bring their nets ashore.

This change speaks to the evolving interests of tourists favoring more local, cultural, and “real” experiences: here tourists can see something unique and engage with Saint Lucians outside the realms of the carefully curated all-inclusive resort or cruise ship experience. Watching fishers at work on the beach connects the Saint Lucian cultural heritage central to the visitor experience at Pigeon Island with the happenstance encounters of today’s Saint Lucia. Instead of reflecting poorly upon the Pigeon Island National Landmark and the Saint Lucia National Trust, the coordination between the organizations, the fishers, and the Fisheries Department has turned a perceived liability into a mutual advantage.

### **ADDITIONAL CHALLENGE:**

Changing governments and their policies toward tourism, conservation, and sustainable development can put public assets such as heritage sites at risk.

### **OTHER IMPORTANT LEARNINGS:**

NGO stewardship organizations can provide constancy through changes in governments and different development priorities.

This lesson also offers potential learning opportunities for how other organizations and corporations can act as partners in uplifting the local community and safeguarding treasured public assets which provide myriad benefits to visitors and residents alike.

The Saint Lucia National Trust's legal agreements within the lease of Pigeon Island National Landmark with the government have provided the site with long-term stability through different eras of governmental priorities. That stability provided by SLNT has also kept the focus on benefitting the smaller businesses and local communities.

The long-term lease has preserved the site's wellbeing through numerous governmental administrations with differing visions for the role of tourism in Saint Lucia, most notably in the prioritization of traditional mass tourism models. The lease's lack of an exit clause with the government has ensured that the site's greater interests are not pitted against any agenda emphasizing short-term revenue and profits.

This is a notable advantage for the site and for the local community, as there are other examples of private entities gaining access and use of other public assets for profit in the country. One such instance comes in the Queen's Chain, or the 186.5 feet (56.58 meters) of publicly owned land inland of the high-water mark encircling the nation.

Over the past four decades, segments of the Queen's Chain have been leased to private entities, including the all-inclusive resorts along the coast. While public access to the entire Queen's Chain is technically a right, many resorts have taken to installing security guards at the beginning of their leaseholds to restrict public access to the beachfront in front of the resort. Regardless of intent, the aggravating of members of the public has degraded the experience for those who have not paid the private entity as guests.

In October 2020, the Saint Lucia National Trust issued a position paper on the Queen's Chain which argued against the privatization of this public asset. Among the directions for the use and preservation of the Queen's Chain, SLNT included "Lessees shall have an obligation to create and maintain a public access way and allow public access to the coast through the Queen's Chain. This requirement shall automatically apply to those places where the public has traditionally accessed the sea for economic or recreational purposes."

The independence of SLNT has given it the position and authority to advocate not only for the conservation of important sites, but also for the interests of the local community and broader public use of assets such as Pigeon Island and the Queen's Chain. There are other examples of how the government has prioritized multinational businesses through the years, such as the opportunity to buy their food and supplies duty-free, leaving local businesses and restaurants at a disadvantage in their purchasing power.

A core principle of the SLNT is sustainability. The Trust — as stated in its strategic plan — believes that development must be sustainable in environmental, economic, social and cultural terms. Because it is committed to making its own interventions and operations sustainable and environmentally responsible, SLNT also works to contribute to the sustainability of its partnerships and to sustaining the local community.





## Expect and embrace the unexpected: Other voices and views

Beyond the efforts of SLNT at Pigeon Island National Landmark, we uncovered others involved in finding value in the unexpected outcomes that arise from work with local communities, and the need to embrace those opportunities as they present themselves.

For a growing number of the world's tourists, the changing nature of travel can be summed up as moving from the "exceptional and ephemeral in people's lives" to a point where "tourism — and mobility in general — is considered a dimension fundamental to everyday life." The change comes in part due to the shift to an experiential economy in what has been called "creative tourism" by some who study the field. Antonio Paolo Russo suggests that "creative tourism relocates cultural tourism as an encounter, relationship, and negotiation within the cultural-symbolic sphere in tourist destinations." Thus, development practices based on a commercial vision — such as places and products that are significant for tourists and attract tourist consumption — are to be avoided as they "inevitably lead to a banalized landscape and stereotypical experiences." Tourists in Saint Lucia moving outside the confines of the all-inclusive resort fall in this creative tourism space. This change in the nature of travel can bring unexpected challenges and opportunities to the stewards of heritage sites.

For the world of heritage tourism, such shifts broaden the places considered as a potential destination beyond those internationally-recognized World Heritage Sites, historic city centers, and architectural icons. The broadening of what piques the interest of a growing number of travelers may produce mixed outcomes from the point of view of those responsible for stewardship of major sites and for local residents, as seen by the fishing industry in Saint Lucia. SLNT can be celebrated, however, for recognizing that its area of interest is more expansive than a conservation focus on Pigeon Island.

Dame Fiona Reynolds, Chair of INTO, also spoke to the changing nature of tourism and how it interacts with local residents and communities. "Discovering the world's living cultures has become one of the main reasons we travel for leisure, with tourists keen to experience the global variety of performing arts, oral traditions, handicrafts and cuisines."

A potential flashpoint for conflict between resilient and equitable communities in the tourism context is the different cultural use of urban space. Dr. Nasser writes that "Private space, such as those associated with residential areas, as well as religious space are the most sensitive to tourist insensitivity." The increasing intrusion on private space by visitors comes from the growing trend in tourism toward "authentic" and "unscripted" activities. Russo notes that the very nature of the modern tourist is in flux. "The contemporary traveler is a connected, empowered, conscientious, proactive, expert traveler and capable of breaking the strict rules of the vacation model of yesteryear." That raises opportunities and challenges for local communities.



- The pandemic of 2020-2021 also changed the nature of travel in significant ways. Benjamin Carey of Carey Sustainable Tourism, has worked with INTO and the Petra National Trust. He noted this shift when he wrote, “City breaks are going to have a tough time over the next few years. People are not going to go off for a short break somewhere that might be interesting, might not be. People are going to be traveling increasingly with purpose. They are going to be seeking places that are different, distinctive, memorable. Where they can really have encounters with the local heritage, local people and experience local crafts, local everything.”



- The National Trust found people were using its mansion properties increasingly as somewhere for young children to learn to ride a bike safely. At some sites the Trust has created new bike paths or even reinstated lost carriage drives to accommodate cyclists. They took a similar approach with *Parkrun* and now host regular 5K runs which bring a different, local audience on to the property at off-peak times. One can now even earn a National Trust badge on the running app Strava. And you're encouraged to donate £5 towards tree planting when completed.





- Similarly, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, owners of the Farnsworth House, have extended their outdoor offerings as a result of Covid-19. Kayaking, canoeing and outdoor family activities, as well as meditation and yoga, are now popular options for the local community, set against the backdrop of Mies van der Rohe's famous glass house.



