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New Honduras port seen as 'next evolution' in W. Caribbean

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Banana Coast, Honduras' first major mainland cruise port scheduled to open in 2012 in the town of Trujillo, is beginning to get noticed as a potential destination to diversify Western Caribbean itineraries.

'It's the next evolution of this area of the world,' said Michael Pawlus, director of revenue planning for The Yachts of Seabourn who, as an executive with Norwegian Cruise Line years ago, was an early proponent of the island of Roatán.

Though he was not versed in the particulars of the Banana Coast project, Pawlus noted a mainland port would open the interior of the country and continue a trend of Central America development.

'People are going into Belize and Guatemala, and Roatán has come along so this is another port in the region that gives cruise operators options,' he told Seatrade Insider, adding that Mexico's Costa Maya is also relevant to the area.

The \$20m Banana Coast development project, led by Grande Trujillo Autoridad (GTA) — a partnership between the Municipality of Trujillo, local landowners led by Life Vision Properties and Miami-based Global Destinations Development — is scheduled to receive its first cruise passengers in 2012. Discussions with several lines are under way.

The destination has launched its official website at www.bananacoast.com with information about the project, the town, its history and culture, things to do in the region and a photo gallery.

Randy Jorgensen, ceo for Life Vision Developments and GTA board member, said Banana Coast will create 'a sustainable landside tourism industry coupled with a custom-built cruise port infrastructure in a destination that combines ecotourism and soft-adventure opportunities.'

Creation of a cruise port at Trujillo has been under discussion since 2004. Global Destinations Development conducted a Cruise Destination Fitness Test to assess the area's feasibility as a cruise destination. The test analyzed the major factors that constitute a successful destination, including geographic location, docks, condition of the town, marketing attractiveness to cruisers and travel agents, maritime operational costs, on-board revenue potential and predicted guest satisfaction.

Banana Coast aims to combine the natural attractions of Trujillo, a town with a population of 30,000 located on Honduras' northern coast, with high-quality passenger facilities and amenities. The project will feature Banana Coast Landing, a themed retail destination with approximately 50,000sq ft of shopping, a restaurant and an excursion marina, all framed by the town's tropical setting.

Trujillo is located on Trujillo Bay, a natural, protected deep-water harbor visited by Christopher Columbus in 1502. While ships initially will anchor and tender passengers, GTA plans eventually to build a dock capable of accommodating two post-Panamax vessels simultaneously near downtown Trujillo.

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