

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE REPORT ON THE REGIONAL POLICY DIALOGUE ON TOURIST SAFETY AND SECURITY

Port of Spain: July 5-7, 2007

Visitor Safety and Security in Context

The context within which this project was implemented reflected the fact that not only is the Caribbean the most tourism-dependent region in the world but it also markets itself as a safe destination. However, of concern to industry practitioners are the negative, residual impacts on the region's tourism sector resulting from external forces and factors. For example, global tourism's performance over the past few years has been mixed due in part to a number of factors, including but not limited to, the following developments: the war in Iraq, the "SARS" and Avian Influenza (Bird Flu) health concerns, terrorism. When combined with the events of "9/11", these developments have combined to impact negatively on outbound, and moreover, long-haul travel. One of the residual effects of these developments is that tourist arrivals to the Caribbean region declined 2 per cent in both 2001 and 3.4 per cent in 2002. These developments speak to the fragility and susceptibility of the tourism industry to external forces, a reality that confronts the industry now more than ever, and which is indelibly printed on the minds of industry practitioners.

Critical to the survival of the industry in the region is the maintenance of the image of the Caribbean as a safe haven. However, threatening to tarnish that image and, consequently, threaten the industry, are increasing levels of crime in a number of countries, including crime against visitors. These incidents range from petty harassment by vendors to robberies and on to more serious and violent crime. Some 660 reports of crime against foreigners were recorded in one well-known Caribbean destination over a five-month period. In addition, a recent exit survey of tourists to another destination revealed that 50 per cent of those surveyed indicated experiencing some type of harassment, with first-time visitors reporting about 15 per cent higher rate of harassment than repeat visitors.

Crime against tourists can cause foreign governments to announce travel advisories, thereby inducing their nationals to alter their vacation plans, which might include choosing alternative vacation destinations. Even isolated incidents can produce a ripple effect throughout a country when victims warn their friends and family and/or are encouraged to tell their stories to the media. Among the immediate impact of such decisions are loss of revenue for airlines, hotels and the industry as a whole. However, the longer-term impact may include fewer repeat visitors and permanent damage to the image of the destination as a location for tourism investment. Additional areas and issues of concern include, but are not limited to, crime and visitor victimization, as well as the quality of the following: food; health and health-care delivery systems; accommodation and facilities; crisis response/disaster management systems; transportation and infrastructure; and harassment. Current legislation governing the packaged holiday business in the United Kingdom and Europe holds tour operators responsible for the acts and omissions of their hotel suppliers. However, while tour operators will investigate complaints carefully, they are also only willing to partner with those hotels that comply reasonably with visitor protection, health and safety standards.

In light of the foregoing, the following issues are of fundamental importance to investors and visitors alike: the nature and types of initiatives being implemented to address crime; the ways in which law enforcement responds to incidents; the measures, processes and procedures used by hotels to balance visitor safety and security with the needs of visitors to experience the local culture; the

nature and level of recourse that visitors have after having become victims of crime; and the efficiency and efficacy of the court system in resolving crime and compensating visitors. While some broad-based, regional probing into aspects of visitor safety and security has already been undertaken, the time has come to move towards more action-oriented, policy dialogue and action plans to inform the establishment of a Visitor Safety and Security Network (VSSN). This Network will conduce to better management of these negative outcomes and thus preserve and enhance the region's image as a safe destination for tourists and for tourism investment. This new direction calls for, among other things:

- More systematic and coordinated approaches to managing visitor safety and security issues throughout the tourism/hospitality and ancillary sector, including streamlined legislative/judicial protocols;
- Strategic and policy-making modalities for capacity building within national tourism agencies, including more uniform methods of data definition, collection, and management; and
- Implementation of industry best practices.

This project represents a critical step in the attainment of these goals.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The broad objective of this project is to maintain and enhance the image of the Caribbean as a safe and highly rated location for tourism investment. The strategy to be pursued is the establishment of a VSSN for the Greater Caribbean through dialogue, specific action plans, and strategic interaction between governments, and national and regional tourism and hospitality stakeholders. The terms of reference called for a) a ***physical safety gap analysis*** of tourism establishments and tourism sites in five representative Caribbean tourism destinations; and b) a ***personal safety gap analysis*** of the mechanisms and modalities for managing and mitigating the level personal safety and security in five representative, Caribbean tourism destinations.

The Physical Safety Gap Analysis was conducted to:

- Assess the level of risk to visitors at three (3) categories of hotels (1 large, 1 medium, 1 small) and one tourist attraction in each of five (5) selected countries (Antigua and Barbuda, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago);
- Develop a rating system and rate these countries and establishments in terms of their levels of visitor safety and security;
- Develop and provide *tools of assessment and risk analysis* for the managers of tourism, properties and sites; and
- Develop a training plan to ensure that managers are able to use the tools of risk analysis.

The Personal Safety Gap analysis was conducted to:

Assess the level of risk to visitors to Antigua and Barbuda, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago by evaluating the mechanisms and modalities for managing and mitigating the risk of visitor victimization.

A specific objective of the project was to convene a 3 day Regional Policy Dialogue for key tourism stakeholders (Public & Private sectors) to:

Examine the issues related to Tourist Safety & Security in general as well as those specific to the sub-sectors.

Day three of the Workshop and Policy Dialogue brought together representatives of government and stakeholder groups, including the Association of Caribbean States (ACS); Association of Caribbean Commissioners of Police (ACCP); Caribbean Hotel Association (CHA); Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO); CARICOM IMPACS; Central American Association of Police Chiefs; Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA); Organization of Caribbean States (OECS); Caribbean Regional Security Association (CRSA); Organization of American States/Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism (OAS/CICTE); Bahamas Ministry of Tourism; St. Kitts Ministry of Tourism; Belize Commissioner of Police; who, informed by the issues discussed during the working group sessions of both day one and day two, discussed the strategic vision and the modalities for establishing a regional Visitor Safety and Security Network.

The Working Group set the following agenda:

- Prioritize the key issues emanating from the Dialogue into those which require attention in the immediate, short, medium and long term;
- Identify agencies and organizations and their respective roles;
- Provide the ACS Sustainable Tourism Directorate with some guidance on the strategies for cooperation among Member States.

AREAS FOR PRIORITY ATTENTION

Following spirited discussions, there was a consensus that the following critical issues required immediate attention, given that they summarily and interactively captured the essence of what will be needed in the immediate and near term in order for the Regional Network to be agreed upon, established, and become operational these include:

- Communication
- Industry Standards
- Community Involvement
- Legislative Framework
- Policy Development

Communication

There was consensus that communication among national as well as regional stakeholders is a critical issue that must be addressed immediately if the Regional Network is to be established and functioning.

Communication—Regional

Ratification of ACS Agreements since the ACS will be the focal point of the Regional Network

Communication—National

- Stakeholder groups must understand each other's role in promoting safety and security;
- Establish dedicated focal points to facilitate this dialogue;
- Support and promote data collection for sound safety and security decision making; and
- Establish national networks as multi-sectoral units.

Standards

The consensus was that the Network must be guided by international industry standards. Consequently, Tourism industry standards must:

- Reflect a regional-level approach and incorporate tourist safety and security initiatives and mechanisms;
- Be developed and maintained through inter-sector agreements; and
- Include services and personnel matters such as training and be broadly communicated.

Community Involvement

Another area of consensus was that a low level of awareness of the importance of tourism can be found in most host countries and that to remedy this immediately, Member States must:

- Involve members of the community appropriately in aspects of community policing and tourist policing initiatives;
- Provide communities with opportunities to experience different tourism activities; and
- Increase tourism awareness through education sensitization programs

Legal Framework

It was determined that Member States possessed an insufficient/inadequate legal framework within which tourism safety and security measures could be effectively implemented. Accordingly, Member States must:

- Review and update in legislation in accordance with the new requirements, including private security;

- Expedite processing tourist related crimes;
- Encourage stakeholders to participate in lobbying activities to get needed legislation passed; and
- Harmonize customs and immigration procedures in order to facilitate processing of tourists through the borders without compromising national security.

Policy Development

It was also acknowledged that at the national and regional levels, the policy framework to address tourist safety and security issues is lacking. It was also emphasized and agreed, that National Tourist Safety and Security Policy Frameworks are critical to all stakeholders. Accordingly, Member States must create a more inclusive process and a system-based upon a multi-agency framework, and develop inter-sectoral cooperation agreements.

Recommendations for Future Action

The ACS should:

- Solicit funding from regional and international donors to support TSS initiatives and continue research on visitor safety and security in the Caribbean;
- Secure agreements of individual Member States in supporting research on visitor safety and security, and the hosting of symposia on visitor safety and security in order to bring national attention to bear on VSS matters;
- Pursue collaboration with Member States to support the establishment of National Visitor Safety and Security Networks;
- Develop co-operation mechanisms with regional and international organizations, including CEDERA, CHA, CARICOM IMPACS, ACCP, UNWTO, CTO, CEPREDENAC, Association of Central American Chiefs of Police, and others, with regard to disaster management and private sector involvement in tourism sustainability; and
- To establish the Network and facilitate the better management of tourist safety at the national and regional levels.

Following upon the Closed Session of the Regional Workshop and Policy Dialogue, and in sync with the ACS' strategic vision, delegates agreed unanimously on the importance and necessity of establishing a Regional Tourism Safety and Security Network (TSSN) that is informed by the establishment of individual National Tourism Safety and Security Networks (NTSSN). The Working Group agreed to move expeditiously to establish the Tourist Safety and Security Network.