



CARIBBEAN
HOTEL & TOURISM
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CARIBBEAN TOURISM STAKEHOLDERS UNDERSCORE IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION DURING TIMES OF CRISIS

BARBADOS (July 6, 2023) – As the 2023 Atlantic hurricane season got off to a busy start, key stakeholders in the Caribbean tourism sector convened a virtual forum last week, placing a spotlight on the pivotal role of effective, strategic crisis communications when responding to, and recovering from, natural and manmade disasters.

During the forum, hosted by the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) and the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA), the consensus was clear: collaboration across regional, national and community levels, paired with efficient, proactive communications, forms the backbone of successful crisis management and resilience in the tourism sector.

Neil Walters, Acting Secretary General of the intergovernmental CTO, noted that just three weeks into the 2023 Atlantic hurricane season the region had already witnessed three tropical storms, which forecasters signaled was an early and aggressive start to the hurricane season.

Walters told ministers, senior officials and private sector leaders participating in the webinar that, “Communication plays a vital role in managing crises, as it shapes perceptions, builds trust, and ensures that accurate and timely information reaches both internal and external audiences during times of crisis ... (which) can mean the difference between chaos and order, despair and hope.” He further highlighted the importance of the CTO and CHTA collaboration, in working together to ensure the safety and well-being of visitors, industry professionals, and local communities.

Referring to the COVID-19 pandemic as “the world’s most devastating health crisis in over 100 years,” Nicola Madden-Greig, Director of marketing and sales for The Courtleigh Hospitality Group in Jamaica, and President of CHTA, which represents the private sector, asserted that partnership between the CTO and CHTA on disaster preparedness has been pivotal to navigate the various challenges that confront the Caribbean tourism sector. She noted the contributions of various partner organizations and surmised that maintaining the legacy of resilience and success as a region and destinations was tied to “working together at the regional, national and community levels.”



“Effective collaboration must be accompanied by effective communications, and in the age of multiple channels of communications, and when any of us with a cell phone and internet access can quickly report, accurately or not, on the status of a crisis, it is essential that we continue to build and implement sound communication plans to ensure that what is actually happening on the ground is reported in the most accurate way,” said Madden-Greig.

The virtual tourism forum, which focused on Crisis Communications and Best Practices for Hazards Response and Recovery, was the second in a series, jointly organized by the CTO and CHTA, as part of efforts to support disaster preparedness, sensitization and capacity building for the tourism sector.

Bevan Springer, president of Marketplace Excellence (MPE) who moderated the session, noted that timely, accurate press releases and updates are necessary, but it is equally important to ensure the narrative is from a Caribbean perspective, thereby framing the destination’s future agenda. “Every crisis prepares us to deal with the next crisis, and learning from one crisis to another is something that is critically important,” he declared.

Springer, who is also founder and president of the Caribbean Media Exchange (CMEx), recommended developing post-crisis marketing plans to reboot and recover, such as the one MPE and the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Tourism instituted after the twin “Irmaria” storms in 2017 to help get the Territory back on the map and into the marketplace by partnering with airlines, travel advisors and other strategic partners.

Similar sentiments were echoed by Trevor Moss, general manager of travel compliance for the Ministry of Tourism, Investments and Aviation for The Bahamas. He outlined the integrated communication and cooperative system used by his country to deal with crises: “We work as one voice, one response with many moving parts, ensuring the safety of lives throughout the Commonwealth of The Bahamas by maintaining a structured method of response with clear communications prior (to), during, and after major incidents.”

Speaking about public relations initiatives for recovery in the British Virgin Islands after 2017’s twin storms, Lauren Kaufman, senior vice president and director of operations at MMGY NJF, asserted there were two types of crises: dangerous situations such as hurricanes, and reputational crises, which tend to last for months beyond some of the disasters comprising dangerous situations. For both situations, she recommended a robust media relations program. She encouraged stakeholders to be proactive by quickly getting messages out and securing control of the narrative.

Wrapping up the session, Lelei LeLaulu, a communications advisor to Marketplace Excellence, stressed the importance of first finding out what affected communities need to ensure delivery of appropriate aid in the aftermath of a disaster. He recommended a fundraising web page or



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portal and highlighted the need for regular updates on the status of recovery, as well as reporting to donors on how their resources were used.

The forum was designed to facilitate the sharing of knowledge, lessons learnt and experiences, with the aim of fostering a culture of tourism sector resilience.

About the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA)

The Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA) is the Caribbean's leading association representing the interests of national hotel and tourism associations. For more than 60 years, CHTA has been the backbone of the Caribbean hospitality industry. Working with some 1,000 hotel and allied members, and 32 National Hotel Associations, CHTA is shaping the Caribbean's future and helping members to grow their businesses. Whether helping to navigate critical issues in sales and marketing, sustainability, legislative issues, emerging technologies, climate change, data and intelligence or, looking for avenues and ideas to better market and manage businesses, CHTA is helping members on issues which matter most.

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