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Caribbean Travel Forum Spotlights Innovation, Resilience, and Regional Unity

CHTA Leads Regional Dialogue on Tourism Growth, Airlift Solutions, and Sustainability

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA (May 23, 2025) – Earlier this week at the Sandals Grande Antigua, the **Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA)** convened top leaders from across the region for the **Caribbean Travel Forum**, where discussions centered on shaping a more resilient, inclusive, and innovative future for Caribbean tourism. The event featured thought-provoking insights into travel trends, economic forecasts, airlift challenges, and sustainable development, underscoring the region's commitment to thriving amid global shifts.

Travel Trends and Outlook: Growth, But With Shifting Dynamics

Kicking off the Forum, Olivier Ponti, Director of Intelligence and Marketing at ForwardKeys, officially launched the latest Caribbean Travel Trends report, offering timely insights into shifting traveler behavior, emerging markets and areas of opportunity to strengthen regional competitiveness. Ponti highlighted that while travel to the Caribbean is projected to grow in 2025, the pace has slowed compared to previous years. Large destinations are claiming greater market share, increasing competition across the region. Opportunities lie in diversifying source markets beyond the U.S., with strong travel intent emerging from Canada, Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, and Spain. Digital nomads, families, and high-end travelers remain key segments, with events tourism also presenting strong potential, as seen with cricket and major concerts.

Economic Uncertainty Presents Both Risk and Opportunity

Zeek Coleman, Vice President at Tourism Economics, emphasized the fragility of the global economic landscape, citing consumer unease despite low unemployment and reduced inflation. While intended leisure travel remains high, U.S. travelers may look closer to home, offering the Caribbean a potential edge. However, geopolitical tensions, trade wars, and a possible U.S. recession could disrupt travel behavior and impact group and business travel.

Experience-Driven Travel and Higher Spend

Carl Gordon, Director of Government, Strategic Growth, English Caribbean, shared key findings from Mastercard's recent Global Travel Trends 2025 report. Gordon shared that visitors are staying longer and spending more, drawn to the Caribbean's leading assets: its people and its beaches. Interest is surging in wellness, nature, gastronomy, and cultural experiences—well positioning the region well to capture evolving traveler preferences.

Critical Policy & Advocacy Issues Identified

Tourism Analytics' James Hepple shared results from a recent regional survey of National Hotel and Tourism Associations (NHTAs), identifying the top three priorities facing the industry today: airlift and airport infrastructure, workforce development, and rising operational costs. Other key concerns included regulating short-term rentals, digital immigration systems, and cruise ship taxation. These issues represent the initial findings of CHTA's new Advocacy Repository, a strategic resource to be fully launched later this year to inform future actions by CHTA and its national association partners.

Fixing Intra-Caribbean Airlift: A Regional Imperative

Addressing one of the Caribbean's most pressing and persistent barriers to growth, CHTA President Sanovnik Destang led a powerhouse panel on the future of intra-Caribbean air connectivity. Panelists included Valerie Damaseau, Commissioner of Tourism and Culture of Saint-Martin; Mario Reyes, former airline owner, former LIAT board member, and current Saint Lucia Tourism Authority board member; and Claudio Buncamper, Chief Commercial Officer of Sunrise Airways.

The panel delivered a clear and urgent message: the Caribbean cannot realize its full tourism and economic potential without reliable, efficient, and affordable regional airlift. Panelists called for decisive, collaborative action to break the cycle of fragmented connectivity that has long hindered inter-island travel and regional integration. Among the bold solutions discussed were restructuring airspace to function as a single regional zone, reducing excessive aviation taxes, rethinking aircraft deployment for better route efficiency, and reforming visa policies that discourage intra-regional movement. The session underscored that fixing airlift is not just a transportation issue—it is a strategic necessity for the Caribbean's future.

Linking Tourism to Local Economies

The importance of tourism linkages was addressed in a session led by CHTA Immediate Past President Nicola Madden-Greig, who emphasized strengthening connections with agriculture, manufacturing, and entertainment to ensure tourism dollars reach local communities. Panelists Aswad Morgan, Director, Jamaica Manufacturers Association, and Winston Anderson, Regional Managing Director, Eastern Caribbean, Sandals Resorts, shared examples of successful cross-sector collaboration, highlighting tourism's role as a catalyst for broader economic development.

Sustainability in Action

Hosted by Hon. Charles Fernandez, Minister of Tourism for Antigua and Barbuda, the sustainability session spotlighted bold, innovative initiatives shaping a more resilient future. The panel featured Ambassador Diann Black-Layne, Director of Environment for Antigua and Barbuda; Dr. Deborah Brosnan of Deborah Brosnan & Associates; Johnella Bradshaw, Redonda Ecosystem Reserve Coordinator with the Environmental Awareness Group; and Ruleo Camacho, Marine Ecologist and Consultant to the National Parks Authority. The session highlighted Barbuda's emergence as a model for community-led, eco-conscious development; the extraordinary ecological restoration of Redonda into a thriving nature reserve; and Antigua and Barbuda's pioneering coral reef restoration projects, which are supporting marine biodiversity and climate resilience. Together, these efforts reinforce the country's leadership in sustainable tourism and offer a blueprint for environmental stewardship across the region.

"Each year, Caribbean Travel Forum sets the tone for a stronger, more connected regional industry," said CHTA President Sanovnik Destang. "CHTA is action-oriented by nature, and we are putting plans into motion using insights to help stakeholders navigate challenges and seize emerging opportunities. Whether it is festival and sports tourism, culinary and cultural travel, or tapping into growth markets like Latin America and Canada, we are focused on where the potential lies. We are also advancing intra-Caribbean travel solutions, strengthening tourism linkages to support local entrepreneurship, especially among youth, and scaling regenerative tourism efforts that benefit both our communities and our environment. Together, these actions reflect our commitment to turning ideas into meaningful impact across the Caribbean."

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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. For more information visit <https://caribbeanhotelandtourism.com>

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