ACS CONVENTION ESTABLISHES THE GREATER CARIBBEAN AS THE FIRST TOURISM ZONE IN THE WORLD

The Convention for the establishment of the Sustainable Tourism Zone of the Greater Caribbean (STZC), an initiative of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), has been ratified, gaining the required signatories from the ACS' Member and Associate Member States for it to be fully entered into force, effectively establishing the Caribbean Region as the First Sustainable Tourism Zone in the World!

By receipt of Diplomatic Note from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Colombia, in the capacity as the Depository State of the Association's Ratification Instruments, the ACS has been officially notified that the Convention and its accompanying Protocol, being duly ratified, has been entered into force on November 6th, 2013.

The establishment of the STZC holds many benefits for the countries and indeed the Region. Not only will countries benefit from being part of a Region designated as the First Sustainable Tourism Zone in the World, which will provide a competitive advantage over other tourist destinations; but this initiative will position the region as a leader in the new era of responsible tourism. The establishment of the STZC will also enhance resource mobilisation efforts for the development and implementation of sustainable tourism projects and strategies which can further aid in advancing the benefits of tourism to the countries of the Greater Caribbean. Moreover, the Sustainable Tourism Indicators as part of the STZC will contribute to more efficient management of natural resources and the environment. Additionally, it will assist with mitigating the effects of climate change which is especially important, as many ACS Member Countries are small-island developing states that are highly dependent on tourism, and are, at the same time, significantly affected by risk factors as a result of climate change.

Why Establish the Greater Caribbean as a Sustainable Tourism Zone?

Protecting and guaranteeing tourism as a long-term activity was the main consideration in seeking to establish the Caribbean Region as a Sustainable Tourism Zone. Aware of the importance of the Tourism industry for the region and recognising the need to ensure that the natural, cultural, social and financial resources needed for its development were managed in a sustainable way, the regional Heads of State and/or Governments of the ACS signed the Convention Establishing the Sustainable Tourism Zone of the Caribbean in 2001. The STZC has been identified “as a geographically determined cultural, socio-economic and biologically rich and diverse unit, in which tourism development will depend on the sustainability and the principles of integration, co-operation and consensus, aimed at facilitating the integrated development of the Greater Caribbean”.

The Convention recognises the different conditions of the tourism destinations in the Greater Caribbean as one of the main challenges to establish the Zone. In order to facilitate this process, the Regional Sustainable Tourism Indicators were developed as part of the Convention to harmonise the criteria for the inclusion of destinations in the STZC. Currently, twelve tourism destinations in ACS Member and Associate Member States have been evaluated utilising the STZC Sustainable Tourism Indicators.

Future actives of the ACS will seek to institutionalise and subsequently strengthen the STZC. Prioritised will be completion of the selection and evaluation process of destinations to become part of the STZC; and secondly, conducting national and regional capacity building exercises on Destination Evaluation and Management. Additionally, in setting an enabling environment for the sustainability of the STZC, the establishment of a Website and Regional Cooperation Mechanism will collectively form an important platform for networking and exchange of knowledge and best practises on sustainable tourism development among the countries of the Greater Caribbean.

The STZC is a proactive and innovative initiative by the ACS and its Member Countries, incorporating the principles of sustainable development in integrated tourism planning; and offers a unique tool to co-ordinate regional efforts in the area of tourism development.