Sustainable Destination Management– The Focus of ACS Tourism Meetings in Guatemala

SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION MANAGEMENT – The focus of acs Tourism meetings IN guatemala

The acclaimed colonial city of La Antigua, Guatemala, Republic of Guatemala, a National monument and UNESCO World Heritage site ignited with activity and welcomed an estimated sixty (60) delegates, who gathered to attend the meetings organised by the Directorate of Sustainable Tourism of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), which were held on May 22 and 23, 2014 respectively. Included in the high-level gathering were delegations from fifteen (15) ACS Member and Associate Member States, among them Hon. Thadeus Richardson, Minister of Tourism of Sint Maarten, Mrs. Sandra Howard Taylor, Vice-Minister of Tourism of the Republic of Colombia and Mrs. Juliana Johan-Boodram, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Also participating in the meetings were the representatives of leading regional and international organisations: the Organisation of American States (OAS), the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO), the Central American Tourism Integration Secretariat (SITCA for its acronym in Spanish), and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), among others.

With the aim of facilitating dialogue and the exchange of experiences on sustainable tourism among the countries of the Greater Caribbean, a Workshop on Best Practices and Lessons Learnt in Sustainable Tourism was held on May 22, 2014. This Workshop provided an opportunity to showcase ongoing destination management initiatives at the international, regional and national levels. In this regard, the Sustainable Tourism Zone of the Greater Caribbean (STZC) a destination management initiative being spearheaded by the ACS was featured prominently, and a report on the process and progress made in establishing the Zone, as well as a presentation by the Consultants contracted to implement activities related to the current phase were made. The workshop also included a presentation on the Destination Stewardship initiatives of Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd. (RCL), and

the Sustainable Destinations Alliance of the Americas being championed by the OAS and CTO in collaboration with RCL, Sustainable Travel International and others. Most importantly, the workshop was an opportunity for ACS member countries to share knowledge and learn from each others experiences, in relation to their engagement and participation in diverse destination management activities. Presentations in this context were received from Jamaica, Tobago, Guatemala, Honduras, St. Kitts and Nevis and Mexico.

On the morning of the workshop an Inaugural meeting was held on the margins, to install the Ad-Hoc Steering Committee of the STZC. The Steering Committee serves as a technical advisory group to support the establishment of the 'Zone', and is comprised of regional and international organizations working in the area of Sustainable Tourism, as well as Academics, Sustainability experts and Tourism professionals from the Greater Caribbean Region. A primary function of the Steering Committee is to assist in the execution of the Regional Co-operation Mechanism project of the STZC (STZC-RCM), an initiative which forms part of the current phase in the establishment of the 'Zone', and is being implemented with cooperation and financial assistance from the Regional Council of Martinique and the INTERREG IV Caribbean Space Programme. The STZC-RCM project was designed to create an enabling environment for the establishment, promotion and further development of the STZC and includes the development of the STZC website and publication of resource manuals and promotional materials to showcase the initiative, destinations and related destination management tools.

The 25th Meeting of the ACS Special Committee on Sustainable Tourism (SCST-25) followed closely on May 23rd 2014. This meeting held annually gathers senior officials from the Ministries of Tourism and Regional Tourism Authorities to discuss matters pertaining to the projects, activities and new initiatives related to the ACS Sustainable Tourism Work Programme. Among its main outcomes, the SCST-25 meeting endorsed a new project presented by the ACS Special Fund Manager Ms. Ingrid Jacobs, 'Increasing the Competitiveness of Tourist Destinations of the Greater Caribbean through the Implementation of a Certification System for Sustainable Tourism' , an initiative which is linked to the promotion and advancement of the STZC. The meeting also endorsed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the ACS and the Pan American Confederation of Schools of Hotel, Gastronomy and Tourism (CONPEHT), and the Official Airline Guide (OAG). The formalisation of these Agreements are in keeping with the Association's mandate to increase co-operation and collaboration with Regional and International Institutions of relevance to the Tourism Sector, in order to expand the opportunities and benefits available to ACS Member Countries and contribute further to the development and promotion of Tourism in the Region.

Other notable achievements included the presentation by the ACS Director for Sustainable Tourism Mr. Julio Orozco of the Database of Language Training Institutions in the Greater Caribbean, developed to facilitate student exchanges among the ACS Member and Associate Member States. The database is an initial list of schools and other institutions with accredited language programs that also has the capacity to host students as part of a language immersion or cultural exchange program. In the area of promoting co-operation related to Tourism Safety and Security, Sandra Howard Taylor, Vice Minister of Tourism of the Republic of Colombia delivered a presentation on Colombia's "Offer for Cooperation in the area of Tourism Safety and Security within the framework of the ACS".

The 25th SCST meeting was chaired by the Honourable Karine Roy-Camille, in her capacity as Chairman of the Special Committee and President of the Martinique Tourism Committee. In addressing the meeting, the Chair remarked that Martinique in recently formalising its status as an Associate Member of the ACS in its own right, heralded a new era of Regional Integration in the Greater Caribbean. She added that her presence showed the continued commitment of the Regional Council of Martinique, led By President Serge Letchimy, toward the consolidation of Cooperation in the Greater Caribbean, through the framework provided by the ACS.

In his address to the meeting the ACS Secretary General, His Excellency Ambassador Alfonso Munera reiterated that the ACS is a platform for co-operation and the sharing and exchange of experiences in common areas of development for the sustainable economic and social development of the countries of the Greater Caribbean. Highlighting the four programmatic areas that comprise the ACS Sustainable Tourism Work Programme, he called for the renewed engagement of the Tourism Authorities adding that this was a call to action to harmonise efforts with the aim of increasing collaboration among countries in order to fulfil the dream of a unified Greater Caribbean. He indicated that the initiative of the ACS Member States to establish the Greater Caribbean as the First Sustainable Tourism Zone in the World, a process which was completed by the ratification of the Convention November 6th, 2013, provided the necessary legal and political framework from which it was now possible to progress in concrete and measurable ways.

Remarks were also delivered by His Excellency Rodrigo Vielmann de León, Vice-Minister in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Guatemala, in the capacity as President of the ACS Ministerial Council, and Honourable Pedro Pablo Duchez, Director of the Guatemalan Tourism Institute who commended the ACS on its work to promote the sustainable development of tourism in the Greater Caribbean. Mr. Julio Orozco, the ACS Director for Sustainable Tourism, thanked the meeting delegates for their participation and valuable contributions during the meetings and acknowledged the kind generosity and gracious hospitality extended by the Republic of Guatemala in hosting.