World Tourism Day - September 27th, 2022



Theme: Rethinking Tourism

In the mind of the traveler, the word “tourism” may evoke notions of relaxation, recreational activity, immersive cultural experiences or conducting business away from home. It all depends on the interests and motives of the traveler. Although tourism may mean different things to different visitors, what is common to visitor experiences are the moments of connection with local culture, community, tradition and the natural environment of travel destinations that will resonate for years to come. As the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) joins the international community to recognize World Tourism Day 2022, it is worthwhile to reflect on how the tourism industry evolved over the past year – one of the most unprecedented, difficult periods of disruption facing the industry.

In response to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, efforts by countries in the Greater Caribbean to ensure travel enthusiasm remained high through the prioritization of vaccinations, digitalization of travel services, and the reinforcement of crisis management strategies to enhance visitor safety measures and reduce tourist anxiety in relation to travelling. The undertaking of these efforts to remain relevant and competitive in the market became increasingly necessary as the pandemic uncovered previously overlooked challenges in this vulnerable sector.

As the region transitions from the imposition of mandatory health protocols, allowing for optional mask wear, more relaxed testing policies and the diminished reliance on quarantine protocols, it is evident that an adaptation process has been underway. Moreover, there are signs of easing travel restrictions as there is a pronounced recognition that the travel sector has been greatly impacted and as such, measures to drive a fast recovery are imperative. Climate change impacts continue to manifest in extreme ways and thus, also provide an additional obstacle that the regional industry

must overcome, keeping in mind that most of our Membership can be qualified as Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Faced with these realities, it is more necessary now than ever to reimagine the approach for the tourism industry to be one that takes into account strategies for adapting to environmental externalities and conducive to the environmental welfare of the Greater Caribbean.

Despite these challenges, the Greater Caribbean region continues to chart its course forward with optimism as the end of the pandemic's most devastating effects is in sight. Regional tourism continues to be a cornerstone of development and growth, and we continue to note its progress and performance in spite of the prevailing circumstances. In fact, recent studies done on the Greater Caribbean tourism industry have shown the sub-region's performance has well surpassed its international counterparts in the first quarter of 2022, and that the region's recovery time to crises are shorter in length. The region must thus build on this and continue to leverage innovation, partnerships, resilience, and coopetition during this unpredictable time to drive a strong recovery of the tourism industry and uplift those negatively affected. As a proactive approach to addressing challenges and responsibilities, stakeholders must actively engage in sustainable tourism development as a lever of proactive adaptation. It is also paramount to maintain as part of our mandate the proper coordination and execution of initiatives that are harmonious with the environment in order to preserve the natural ecosystem and resources upon which the Greater Caribbean and its tourism industry rely. In this regard, the conservation of the Caribbean Sea is vital. A number of challenges threaten the health and vitality of the Caribbean Sea and this makes its preservation for present and future generations fundamental to the sustainable development of the regional tourism industry.

In light of this, the ACS has been able to foster sustainable and responsible actions towards tourism recovery and the overall benefit of its membership. Recognizing the necessity of reviving regional tourism, we remain committed to supporting the region's adoption of industry-leading practices that redound to enhance visitor appeal. Thus, we have focused on developing a regional tourism strategy, strengthening crisis management capacity and visitor safety measures in travel destinations, the revitalization of the Sustainable Tourism Zone of the Greater Caribbean (STZC) and supporting a digital transformation process in the sector. These initiatives will collectively serve as a system for planning for the evolving tourism needs of the region and expanding sustainable tourism as a primary vehicle for economic development. Despite adversity, there is hope for flourishing through concerted action. These elements form the core foundation of our efforts in the region, as we continue to monitor global trends and form timely, innovative responses to such. We believe that to rethink tourism, especially at this crucial period, is to fully encourage inclusive participation of all our stakeholders who form the heart of the industry and ensure that their needs are fully addressed.

Above all, to successfully "rethink" and propel the tourism industry, we encourage you, our stakeholders, to be actively engaged in the process of building back better and more sustainably.

Happy World Tourism Day.