Global Tourism Resilience Day 2026: Harnessing the region's Cultural Heritage to navigate from Crisis Recovery to Industry Regeneration



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The culture and heritage of the Greater Caribbean continues to resonate far beyond the region's shores. The Greater Caribbean's culture and heritage continue to shape global popular culture and capture worldwide attention. This global visibility reflects the region's soft power and cultural influence, reinforcing the Greater Caribbean's appeal as a top tourism destination. Yet behind the music, and enthralling celebrations lie a more complex reality and a deeper responsibility. The Greater Caribbean remains one of the world's most tourism-dependent and climate-vulnerable regions. Celebrating the region's culture must therefore go hand in hand with building tourism resilience and promoting regenerative tourism that protects the places, people, and cultures that inspire the world.

Observed each year on 17th February, Global Tourism Resilience Day, established by the United Nations, highlights the need for tourism systems that can anticipate shocks, withstand crises, and recover sustainably . Tourism resilience goes beyond emergency response: it refers to the capacity of destinations, communities, and tourism enterprises to prepare for disruptions, manage risks, adapt to long-term change, and continue delivering social and economic benefits. This is particularly relevant for the Caribbean, where, for example, in Small Island Developing States (SIDS), 38 % of export revenues came from international tourism in 2023, tourism represents 20 % of GDP in several island economies , and extreme weather events regularly disrupt livelihoods, infrastructure, and visitor flows.

Looking ahead, resilience must be coupled with regeneration. Regenerative tourism seeks not only to minimise harm but also to actively restore ecosystems, strengthen local economies, and empower communities. Regenerative approaches enable tourism to contribute to coastal protection, heritage preservation, and community well-being. This shift is particularly critical as climate-related disasters intensify: the Greater Caribbean suffers disproportionately high economic losses from such events,

with tourism being amongst the most affected sectors. For example, Hurricane Melissa in October 2025 caused an estimated US$8.8 billion in damage, affecting areas that account for roughly 89 % of hotel rooms in the region .

At the global level, the Global Tourism Resilience and Crisis Management Centre (GTRCMC) has emerged as a key platform for advancing good practices in tourism resilience. Through research, training, and policy dialogue, the Centre promotes proactive approaches to crisis preparedness and recovery, supporting destinations in moving from reactive responses toward long-term resilience strategies . Its work highlights the value of coordination between governments, the private sector, and local communities.

Across the Caribbean, community-based tourism initiatives also illustrate resilience in action. An example of great practice would be Belize, a leader in marine conservation and sustainable tourism, where community-led ecotourism initiatives such as the Fishermen & Ecotourism Alliance (FETA), formed in Turneffe Atoll and linked to marine and coastal conservation, have helped diversify local livelihoods while strengthening stewardship of natural and cultural heritage . By combining tourism with conservation, community ownership and cultural preservation, such models enhance economic resilience and encourage visitors to engage responsibly with local culture and ecosystems.

In this context, the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) plays an important regional role, through its Directorate of Disaster Risk Reduction, Sustainable Tourism, Caribbean Sea and the Environment (DDTCE), in redefining how Sustainable Tourism practices can reshape the region's resilience and ensure responsible growth within the industry. Through the Convention establishing the Greater Caribbean Region as the world's first Sustainable Tourism Zone (STZC) , the ACS has set a shared political and strategic framework for advancing sustainable and resilient tourism across its Members. By fostering cooperation, promoting sustainable tourism policies, and encouraging partnerships that integrate climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction into tourism planning, the ACS contributes to a more coordinated and forward-looking approach to tourism resilience in the Greater Caribbean. Looking ahead, the ACS' forthcoming Strategic Plan places the protection and promotion of cultural heritage at the core of sustainable tourism resilience, recognizing culture as both a driver of destination appeal and a foundation for community-centred recovery and regeneration. Through the Declaration of Monteria, the ACS also commits to enhance socioeconomic resilience and optimise opportunities for growth, and development. The organisation recognises that resilience requires moving beyond policy development and planning, to facilitating and empowering innovative tourism practices in the region, through which resilience can be embedded.

On this Global Tourism Resilience Day 2026, the message is clear: the growing global visibility of the culture and heritage of the Greater Caribbean brings both opportunity and responsibility. Building a tourism sector that is resilient, regenerative, and rooted in the preservation of local culture over the long term is essential to ensuring that the Greater Caribbean remains not only a destination the world wants to visit, but a region where tourism genuinely supports sustainable futures.

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