

ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES (ACS)

25TH MEETING OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON SUSTAINABLE

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**BRIEFING DOCUMENT ON THE PROGRAMME FOR THE PROMOTION OF
MULTI-DESTINATION TOURISM IN THE GREATER CARIBBEAN:
Exploring Closer Ties & Opportunities for Connectivity**

1. INTRODUCTION

The focus of the Multi-destination Tourism (MDT) Programme of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) is to facilitate and enhance collaboration and dialogue between the regional tourism and transport sectors to promote the concept of multi-destination packaging, increase intra-regional travel and facilitate synergies for enhanced intra-regional connectivity. This is intended to strengthen co-operation networks between countries to enable them to increase and better share the revenues generated by tourism. The objective in this regard, is to improve connectivity within and access to the region by air and sea, and is so doing contribute to preserving the Greater Caribbean market share in extra-regional markets and increasing intra-regional tourist flows.

The ACS Secretariat has identified MDT as having the potential to contribute to the promotion of the Greater Caribbean Brand concept and advancement of the realisation of the 'Sustainable Tourism Zone of Caribbean'. From a policy perspective it is intended that member states pursue an integrated multi-sectoral approach that is responsible, sustainable and community driven.

2. BACKGROUND

The countries that comprise the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) in the Greater Caribbean embrace many cultures and have a wide variety of attractive natural resources. All countries recognise the economic importance of tourism, an industry that is highly competitive and demands marketing innovation and superlative service to ensure long-term success.

Recent reports by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) indicate that tourist arrivals to the Americas have stagnated, and the Region is forecasted to continue experiencing moderate to no growth. This is attributed to the adverse economic climate heightened by factors impacting major source markets in the United States and Europe as well as increases in commodity and oil prices and substantial exchange rate fluctuations, which has undermined both business and consumer confidence. Increasing competition from emerging destinations in Asia and the Pacific has also been indicated as another significant factor contributing to the declining market share of the countries of the Region in the international Tourism and Travel market, and consequently the diminishing growth potential.

From the perspective of the tourism destinations of the Greater Caribbean, it is observed that countries are faced with several challenges that also impeded their performance. Some of the main challenges, *inter alia*, are firstly that countries are constrained by the lack of resources for marketing (particularly to attend key industry events) to showcase the destination and access the market; secondly some countries are relatively new to the tourism arena and so lack the expertise and know-how to navigate the tourism industry channels and form the vital links with the international Travel Trade (Tour-operators, Airlines, Cruise lines, Global Distribution Networks and Travel agencies etc); and thirdly, the lack of a cohesive and consistent Public Relations strategy hinders the formation of partnerships with key international travel media, necessary to project and maintain a positive and welcoming image of the countries and the region.

In order to improve this outlook, countries will need to adopt new and innovative strategies for marketing, branding and product diversification to maintain and also grow their share of the market. From the ACS perspective, the Region may gain a competitive advantage and thus enhance the sustainability of the tourism industry if it can package, market and deliver its varied attractions in order to effectively entice the visitor and incentivise repeat visits from visiting tourists as well as residents from within the Region. It is recognised that as a first step, the commitment of the public and private sectors to create an enabling environment which includes the development of well-defined systems, processes and co-operation mechanisms is an essential factor in determining the way forward. In this regard, there are three initiatives currently being pursued within the MDT programme in seeking to facilitate the formation of strategic alliances among economic operators working in the regional tourism and transport sectors.

THE PROCESS TO DEVELOP THE MULTI-DESTINATION TOURISM PROGRAM

- **Forum of Airline and Tourism Executives**

ACS interventions in this area began in November 2005, with the hosting of a ***Forum of Airline and Tour Operators Executives*** which was held in Martinique. Subsequently, as a component to the 2005 Forum, the ***Greater Caribbean Multi-Destination Tourism Market Place*** was organised in July 2008. These projects, which were funded by INTERREG through the cooperation of the Regional Council of Martinique gave practical expression to the MDT concept, with the aim of further developing a series of special interest multi-destination packages amongst the destinations in the Greater Caribbean.

As a follow-up to this foundation work, the Directorate pursuant to outreach to Regional and International Air Transport and Civil Aviation bodies convened in Cancun, Mexico, November 13th 2013 - **The Caribbean Region and Latin America Meeting of Tourism and Transport Executives**. This meeting was hosted in collaboration with the Latin American and Caribbean Air Transport Association (ALTA), the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO). Participating in this historic dialogue were over 50 Aviation industry and Tourism industry leaders and High-level Authorities from the region; including Ministers of Tourism and Transport, Tourism Directors and Commissioners, Civil Aviation Authorities, Airline CEOs as well as senior representatives of Tourism and Aviation Industry

Associations. Discussed were important matters relating to connectivity, intra-regional travel, immigration facilitation and the opportunities and challenges facing the Region. The meeting also set the framework for the Agenda and key topics for the second Caribbean Aviation Day Meeting planned for 2014, which is intended to advance the dialogue and support the development of strategies to address issues pertaining to travel facilitation and air connectivity among the countries of the Greater Caribbean.

The ACS is committed to continue working with its Regional partners to address the critical issues of air transport affecting the region and also support opportunities for meaningful dialogue that would offer practical policy recommendations and lead to tangible action-oriented solutions.

- **Initiatives focussing on Cruise Tourism**

The second initiative in this area focussed on the implementation of a project and consultancy to explore the feasibility, composition, functions and other institutional facets for the establishment of an Association Caribbean Cruise-Ship Destinations (ACCD). This initiative evolved from a mandate of ACS Member Countries who called on the role of the ACS as a regional forum for cooperation to facilitate dialogue on a collective approach towards the exchange of information and coordination of mutually beneficial areas of interest for the strengthening of the Cruise Sector in the Greater Caribbean Region.

The process began with the **Panama Declaration of July 29th, 2005**, which reaffirms the commitment of Heads of State and/or Governments of the ACS to sustainable tourism development; and mandates inter-alia to convene a Tourism Ministerial Meeting with High Rank Officials of the tourism sphere to "exchange experiences and analyze proposals and alternatives on tourism public policies, especially on cruise ships, in order to assess the potential for this type of tourism to better contribute to the sustainable development of the sector in the countries' of the region".

Subsequently the ACCD project was launched; conceived as a leading and governing platform for the integration and sustainable development of cruise ship destinations through the establishment of sustainable strategies for the Greater Caribbean. The project spanned an intensive, detailed and comprehensive 6 year period with extensive consultations with ACS Member countries. It is worth noting that efforts in that regard succeeded in cruise tourism being placed at the forefront of regional policy discussions which resulted in the ACCD receiving the attention of Regional Tourism Ministers and Policy Makers, both in terms of providing feedback to the project documents and participation in ACCD Meetings.

Addressing the question of the way forward concerning the ACCD, the financial, institutional and other operational aspects associated with establishing a new Regional Organisation were considered. It was therefore agreed that future interventions would not focus on establishing a new Regional organisation, but that cruise tourism would be incorporated as a permanent topic in the Multi-Destination Tourism Programmatic area of the ACS Sustainable Tourism Work Programme. It was further agreed to incorporate more knowledge-based exchanges and data gathering activities via studies, symposia

and projects on issues of mutual interest to the destinations in the Region, so as to facilitate ongoing dialogue and co-operation on Cruise Tourism among the countries in the Region.

The primary objectives for engaging in tourism and by extension cruise tourism are to maximize the revenues as well as the employment and entrepreneurship opportunities which are generated by the sector. However, the industry is extremely volatile and highly susceptible to external factors that can have a negative impact on the sector. On the macro level, consumer perception of the region and/or destinations, the image of the industry, and the political and socio-economic condition of the various destinations are key considerations. At the micro-level, on-board incidents, accidents at sea and the recurring threat of natural disasters are critical issues. The importance of countries keeping abreast of such factors as well as emerging trends and practises, news, events, consumer feedback and preferences and how these lead to changes in demand and market participation cannot be over-stated. The ACS will seek to address this need, by promoting co-operation and the sharing of experiences among countries.

In keeping with this new direction, a project has been developed in collaboration with the ACS Directorate of Trade and External Economic Relations. This project *Cruise Tourism and Entrepreneurial strengthening in the Greater Caribbean: Opportunities for Women*, was designed to deliver training and capacity building tools to women with Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism industry.

This project will include as a first activity the hosting of a Regional Symposium to generate interest and awareness on the topic. Subsequently a needs assessment will be conducted and a Training Program Curriculum developed to meet identified needs. It is expected to hold capacity-building workshops to implement the training. This project is expected to transfer to policy makers knowledge and resources for capacity-building targeted to women with SMEs and showcase women-owned SMEs to generate interest, exposure and opportunities for increased business.

3. THE NEXT STEPS

At several fora, issues such as accessibility, visa/immigration policy and product diversification in terms of the relationship to promoting multi-destination tourism and enhancing intra-regional travel have been addressed. What is consistently lacking however is the necessary packaging and establishment of support mechanisms to facilitate travel between the countries. This would include developing Multiple Destination Travel and Vacation options; establishing seamless systems and processes to facilitate travel between countries; standardising visa and exit/entry requirements and offering discounts and other incentives.

Countries in the Region have historically focused on single-destination tourism where only one country benefits from the visitor's travels. Currently, little multi-destination tourism activity exists. The ACS recognizes that most of the factors that will enhance MDT will also positively impact on the development of intra-regional tourism and single destination tourism, creating a synergistic effect on the overall tourism industry, thus facilitating its long-term profitability. This will further contribute to enhancing the

competitiveness and growth potential of the industry, while also providing a more balanced environment for Caribbean operators through the diversification of the customer base and the type of tourism products being offered.

With the gaining popularity of niche markets such as eco-tourism, adventure tourism and cultural-heritage tourism, there is an opportunity through co-marketing and branding, to position the region as a multi-destination vacation/travel option and attract new markets as the natural and historic sites, cultural festivities, sporting and other social events found in each destination are developed and promoted. This will act as a means to overcome international competition and take advantage of the natural and cultural assets which are innate to region.

The afore-mentioned strategies are meant to encourage the ACS Member States in the Greater Caribbean to maximize efficiency and leverage the benefits that can be gained through co-operation. As in all undertakings with multi-lateral benefits, the success of this initiative requires leadership and participation from ACS Member and Associate Member States such that subsequent implementation of multi-destination tourism within the Greater Caribbean is assured. This requires willingness and commitment on the part of the countries to **coordinate** marketing and investment strategies and synthesize policies related to development goals and objectives.