

In Celebration of World Tourism Day 2020



ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES (ACS)

DIRECTORATE FOR TRADE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

STATEMENT BY THE ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES (ACS)

IN CELEBRATION OF WORLD TOURISM DAY

SEPTEMBER 27, 2020

There is often a sense of peace that comes when thinking about rural communities in the Greater Caribbean. There is a connection to authenticity, to an intangible harmony, and to grounding in traditions that re-inspire cooperation amongst the peoples of our region. Notably, the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) recognises that rural zones are often overlooked and in need of development, but responsibly so, in order to maintain the character of these communities. Now, more than ever, these sentiments echo powerfully in a year that has been rife with anxiety and uncertainty, and threatens life and livelihoods from the richest to the poorest across the globe.

Being physically distant meant that tourism was significantly reduced, and in many cases, halted altogether. However, within the bowels of this crisis lies tremendous opportunity. There is the opportunity to pause and look inwards, questioning ourselves to ensure that the tourism we pursue is one which creates the greatest amount of good, for the most vulnerable in our societies. Further, there is a chance to retrospect, and to pivot tourism development towards the full realization of social, economic and environmental prowess in the region. This could be our defining moment, and the opportunity to revamp our tourism products in the collective best interests of the Greater Caribbean.

The ACS acknowledges the regional appetite for returning to a world that balances distancing on the

one hand and interacting with our visitors on the other. However, the advancement of rural livelihoods must be part of this equation, because tourism development must always be a means of empowering our people, and not the goal within itself. Hence, we ought to utilise this time to evaluate industry practices, while institutionalising sustainable tourism frameworks as we did in 2001, through the establishment of the Sustainable Tourism Zone of the Greater Caribbean.

We decided then how to conceive and implement knowledge driven development in tourist destinations, including rural communities. Now, faced with this uphill battle, a resilient region like ours must quickly adapt to the lessons of 2020, and decide how we will evolve to become stronger than ever. Can we rethink our Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)? Have we given enough thought to our ideal visitor profile? Are we prepared to take decisive actions that guard against overtourism and local frustration with the industry? These are but some of the considerations for evaluating our future successes in the tourism industry, and the ACS remains committed to helping Member States map sustainable pathways that address these strategic concerns.

On this World Tourism Day, the ACS joins in celebrating tourism as an industry that Builds Peace and Fosters Knowledge, for the benefit of the global community. For instance, through our Regional Network of Artisans in Tourism of the Greater Caribbean, the Secretariat continues to support MSME handicraft artisan development through capacity building for enhanced business competitiveness. This programme has been in existence for over six (6) years, and as it enters a 3rd Phase with continued support from the Republic of Turkey, epitomises the thoughtful and peaceful expression of artistic expertise rife in the Greater Caribbean.

The ACS understands that rebuilding regional tourism with enhanced sustainability requires time and perseverance. Fortunately, history reminds us that the Greater Caribbean's essence is exemplified by adaptability to the times we live in, and the ability to innovate to avoid becoming obsolete. Thus, we encourage you to stay close to the artisanry, hospitality and rhythmic beat of our destinations, as we re-emerge safer, more resilient and better than ever before.

Happy World Tourism Day.