



Economic Letter June 2020



International Guidelines are Needed for Caribbean Tourism

In an interview reported on *Breaking Travel News* on May 27, Jamaica's Minister of Tourism, Edmund Bartlett, looks to the reopening of the tourism industry "in the next few weeks". However, he acknowledges that Jamaica will need international help to recover: "The global imperative is that we work together across sectors, across regions, to develop a framework that can help solve the global challenge of how to restart the travel and tourism economy".

Minister Bartlett's sentiments are widely shared. Throughout the Caribbean the severity of loss of incomes and jobs from the shutdown of tourism is immense; and it is widely recognised that restoring confidence to the travel market is a matter for international collaboration.

However, none of the measures that are currently being taken for the re-opening involves the collaboration of all the relevant international players. Caribbean economies are all looking to re-open to visitors in the coming weeks and months, and Antigua, Aruba, the Bahamas and others have already set target dates. Some hotels that have closed have announced dates for re-opening, with new arrangements in place to reduce the risk of Covid infection. International airlines have cautiously begun to reopen flights, with reduced seating and special precautions to protect the health of travellers.

Initiatives have also been reported from international organisations, including the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), whose membership includes airlines, hotels, airport managers, and other private tourism service companies. They have issued a list of recommended measures. The International Air Transport Association, IATA, which represents airlines, has issued a proposal intended to restore the confidence of travellers and governments, worldwide.

The essential element needed for the revival of travel and tourism is restoration of confidence of visitors that their health is protected while they enjoy a pleasurable holiday. Tourists must first be able to travel and socialize safely within their own countries, and then they must be assured that they can travel and socialize in the Caribbean as safely as they can at home. This is a very tall order, but it is the challenge for countries everywhere, not just for tourism or tourist destinations. The same protocols which will allow for the resumption of spectator sports, political rallies, religious gatherings, weddings, concerts, festivals and other large gatherings, will suffice for the revival of tourism.

This, then, is the destination all countries of the world must sooner or later reach. The faster route is for collaboration between Governments, hotels, airlines and other tourism interests and their representative bodies, under the auspices of the United Nations and its agencies, led by the World Health Organisation. The Caribbean should mobilise to promote this dialogue through our regional bodies, the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO) and the Caribbean Hotel and Travel Association (CHTA). Our leaders have to accept that it is not within the capacity of Caribbean countries to restore the trust of visitors. The things that the Caribbean must do to restore confidence will become clear when practices are in place to allow people to mingle freely, to use all forms of public transport without physical distancing, to dispense with the use of masks and other protective gear, and to attend social gatherings, large and small. The "new normal" will be revealed when the regular American football season resumes with full spectator participation, and no adverse health consequences. Only then will Barbados, Jamaica, the Bahamas and



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the rest of the Caribbean have clear guidance on the measures that will suffice to restore visitor confidence.