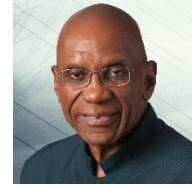




## Economic Letter September 2020



### Resuscitating Tourism

The news that British Airways plans to restart daily flights from London to Barbados in October is very welcome. The UK market is the bedrock of Barbados' tourism, accounting for the largest percentage of arrivals each year. A high proportion of visitors from the UK are our friends and people who know our island well enough to regard it as home away from home. They look forward to their annual holiday with us, and they will be relieved to hear that it may soon become possible to travel. Many will have immediately made a booking with their usual place to stay in Barbados.

However, a great deal remains to be done, if we are to see this first glimmer of hope for tourism come to fruition. All the surveys conducted by industry specialists, around the world, indicate there is a universal fear of flying. That fear can only be overcome when there are widely observed international protocols in place to ensure that no-one who is carrying Covid-19 is able to board an aircraft. Developing such protocols is not impossible; after all, we have protocols to ensure that no-one can board an airplane with a tube of toothpaste or a bottle of water. But we will not have such protocols in place by October. As Adrian Loveridge asks in his *Business Authority* column of August 24, will our UK friends be willing to sit for eight hours on an aircraft when they do not know for certain whether someone in their immediate vicinity has Covid?

The potential visitor may also be deterred by the extent of uncertainty surrounding all travel. In order to avoid testing on arrival, and the possibility of a vacation ruined by quarantine, the prudent visitor may seek to be tested before flying. But how long before? That depends on the stipulations of the Barbados authorities and the turnaround time for results by UK testing facilities.

There is also uncertainty about airport procedures and documentation. What evidence must be produced on the traveller's Covid status, and in what form? What can passengers expect in terms of screening, meals, drinks, entertainment, baggage handling, child care, etc.? These questions arise with respect to the airports of departure and arrival, both outbound and inbound. There is uniformity worldwide in security screening; but we do not know of any international agreements on screening for Covid-19 that are in universal use.

Travellers cannot be sure that whatever guidelines are currently in place will not change before or during the period of their travel, in the UK or in Barbados. The recent experiences of UK travellers to European and Caribbean countries would have deterred many: mandatory quarantines were re-imposed on some countries when tourists were already abroad, prompting a mad scramble of holidaymakers trying to return before the deadline.

There is also uncertainty about the quality and variety of visitor experiences in Barbados, with many restaurants, shops and attractions closed, a majority of entertainment services dormant, and social activity stilted by social distancing.

Tourism is our business in Barbados, so we must address these and all other factors that are crippling the industry. As I have said before, the resolution of these issues is not within the purview of our Government

or of the industry players in Barbados. The greatest responsibility of Government and industry leaders is to be fully and actively engaged in efforts to secure international protocols for all travel by air, including airport procedures and screening. We cannot have high expectations of a resuscitation of our tourism in the absence of global implementation of agreed practices, whatever we do at the national level.