



Intensifying and expanding public-private partnerships

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Recent years have witnessed travellers treating safety and security measures as less of an annoyance and, instead, viewing them more as essential aspects of contemporary travel. Giving this changing mindset, it is reasonable to deduce that a sense of safety and security increases people's willingness to travel, the likelihood that they will remain longer at their destination, retain more positive memories, and utilise a wider range of services. The attendant economic and socio-political benefits of this new thinking are obvious for tourism destinations, including those in the Caribbean sub-region, which holds the distinction of being the most tourism-dependent sub-region in the world. However, understanding the multi-level and interrelated dimensions of safety and security can prove challenging for tourism stakeholders, who often do not fully comprehend this complex phenomenon.

The attitudes toward visitor safety and security held by many tourism stakeholders in the Caribbean sub-region have long been shaped by the following factors: almost total dependence on a mono-crop economy; the legacies of the plantation economy; proximity to the world's single largest tourist supply market; the concentration of a wide range of tourism destinations that are as interesting and as diverse as any other sub-region in the world; salubrious climate; exceptional beauty; diverse cultures and traditions; and very rich natural and archaeological resources. Over the years, this combination of factors has drawn millions of pilgrims to the sun and sea annually, and has long fostered the mindset that tourists will always come.

Also helping to shape these attitudes is the historical role played by government, which, for the most part, approached the tourism industry as essentially a private enterprise and, consequently, adopted a hands-off approach, thereby granting enormous control of the industry to the hoteliers and airlines. Paradoxically, however, as other development initiatives began to prove less attractive in the changing global marketplace,

successive administrations, acknowledging tourism's development potential, invested heavily in tourism infrastructure by securing funds for capital projects, including cruise ship complexes, international airports, and roadways, and by providing incentives such as tax free holidays for hotel construction as well as duty free concessions. Much of this development, however, took place with little or no government regulation.

The growing importance of tourism to the region has witnessed a number of countries in the sub-region developing tourism master plans over the past five years. However, most of these plans offer but a cursory approach to the issue of visitor safety and security; none has treated with this issue systematically and comprehensively. Notwithstanding this shortcoming, the following have become increasingly clear to stakeholders in the sub-region: a safe and secure environment is conducive to tourism development; tourists increasingly demand safety and security; and issues of crime, harassment and terrorism, among other factors, strongly impact upon a destination's ability to attract tourism investment.

Armed with this knowledge, various regional entities such as the Sustainable Tourism Directorate of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), the Caribbean Hotel Association (CHA), and the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO) have sought to engender a more nuanced understanding of visitor safety and security that necessarily includes, but exceeds, the issue of crime and harassment. Working in collaboration with ministries of tourism, national tourism boards, and hotel associations, these entities have pursued a number of interventions aimed at changing local attitudes towards tourism in an effort to reduce complacency and foster conditions conducive to tourism investment.

Among other things, interventions have sought to educate stakeholders to the fact that an individual's sense of safety and security, as well as that of a given destination, are often informed and influenced by media coverage – especially the international media



– a factor usually beyond the control of the destination and often complicated by the distance one is removed from the locale. Another point of clarification is that not only does the nature and level of crime inform the perception of safety and security at a destination but also the sense that destinations summarily and effectively respond to these outbreaks in ways that minimise the negative fallout from these events.

The reality for the Caribbean sub-region is that while violent and capital crimes have occurred from time to time at tourist destinations, very few have been visited upon tourists. Instead, the most types of crime committed against tourists are crimes of dispersion such as petty theft (pick pocketing, stealing handbags and purses, money, cameras and other portable property), as well as taxi drivers, who supplement their incomes by inflating fares by taking circuitous routes. One recent study indicates that approximately 95 per cent of all crimes against visitors to this area are (portable) property-related crimes. Thus, while there are high levels of crime in some Caribbean destinations, the likelihood of a visitor becoming a crime victim, generally, and a homicide or kidnap victim, particularly, is negligible.

Regional tourism stakeholders, therefore, operating on the premise that a safe and secure environment is attractive to tourism investment, have sought to address the level of safety and security of borders and ports; infrastructure, including facilities and accommodations, and standards setting, including Occupation Health and Safety (OSHA) standards;

transportation and communications systems, and roads and signage; food; health and healthcare delivery systems; crisis response, disaster preparedness, disaster response, and disaster mitigation; education and training; and crime, harassment, and terrorism. In the area of health, for example, national health management entities have established protocols with the principal sub-regional health coordinating agency, the Caribbean Epidemiology Center (CAREC), which, in turn has established protocols with the US Center for Disease Control (CDC) and its counterpart in the UK regarding health concerns issues such as SARS, Mad Cow Disease, and Bird Flu, as well as various types of food-borne pathogens.

Cementing the link between safety and security and industry competitiveness, interventions have also included the development human resource capacity by providing training in the following areas: basic hospitality skills (housekeeping, front office, food and beverage, maintenance); customer relations; tour guide training; computer training and web-based marketing; communication, including foreign languages; standards upgrade and certification; and public education and awareness.

Programmes and initiatives geared towards enhancing visitor safety and security include national and regional symposia on safety and security; disaster preparedness and disaster mitigation; national training and outreach programmes (training, reorienting and educating all employees in the tourism sector); the

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institution of Visitor Safety and Security Boards and Councils; Victim Support Units; Rapid Response Units; Community-based Tourist Protection; Amber Alert Programmes Initiatives; Downtown Ambassador Programmes; increased police presence and visibility initiatives, including Tourism Police (TOPS) Programmes, Tourist Police Wardens, Tourism Bicycle Units, Mobile Police Stations, Mounted Police, deployment of and increase in number of Beach Wardens and uniformed police on certain beaches, and the regular policing of tourism “hot spots.” Additional interventions include Tourism Safety and Security Awareness Programmes for Security Personnel; Tourism Awareness Programmes for Police Forces; the requirement that new police recruits be trained in tourism issues; the passage of ordinances criminalising harassment and authorising magistrates to hold court at any time “in the interest of justice;” and the securing of maritime ports in accordance with the guidelines of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO).

Additionally, the Sustainable Tourism Directorate of the ACS has sought to collaborate with various national and regional entities to establish national safety and security networks that are linked together in a regional visitor safety and security network – a system that is now in its embryonic stage. Collectively, therefore, these interventions are geared toward maintaining the attractiveness of the sub-region to tourism investment as well as providing collateral benefits to the respective destinations so that they remain economically

competitive and socially and politically stable.

Intensifying and Expanding Public-Private Partnerships

While tourism is one of the world’s biggest income-earning industries, many countries in the region still see it as something frivolous and not as worthy of government attention as, say, manufacturing. And while ideological reasons may have contributed to the historic low levels of government investment in the sector, then, as now, the rate of change of government investment in the sector throughout the sub-region remains comparatively small. Notwithstanding the need for basic infrastructure as well as poverty reduction programmes for nationals, there is urgent need for an overhaul of ageing infrastructure and the application of new technologies to facilitate major improvements and increases in the tourism infrastructure. The way forward, therefore, calls for greater public-private partnerships, whereby government grants concessions to promote efficiencies in new plants that will simultaneously require the talents of trained and highly skilled nationals. The following are among the practical initiatives that can and should be pursued:

1. Given the high costs of energy, new hotels must be more energy efficient, and new technologies should incorporate key cards that activate lights and air condition units. Systems should be programmed to prevent air conditioners from being activated unless the doors and windows are not properly closed;



Further policy coordination is needed to encourage greater intra-regional travel



television sets and electric lights will shut down within 30 seconds of the keycard being removed from its slot; and motion sensor lights will trigger immediately upon a guest exiting the room and entering the hallway. These lights will also extinguish within 30 seconds of the absence of physical activity in the hallway. Huge savings can be achieved by implementing these measures, which, correspondingly, will enhance the safety and security of the visitor.

2. These changes simultaneously require a changed mindset whereby government leaders in the sub-region consider tourism management to be just as credible and attractive, a specialty area as other areas such as medicine and public health, law and criminal justice, or planning and public finance. Given that health, recreation and security issues impact heavily upon tourism, and given the relative shortage of administrative talent in the region, governments should consider increasing the number of “slots” for study abroad for individuals who wish to pursue expertise and qualification in tourism administration. In addition, where not already in place, governments should actively encourage the development of domestic tourism, whereby nationals are offered incentives (including reduced airfares and hotel rates, where applicable) so that they may have greater exposure to what the country has to offer as well as participate in the “tourist experience.” Where such programmes are already in place, they should be expanded.

3. A more concerted public education programme should be undertaken to change the very narrow and often distorted view of what constitutes tourism and just who and what a tourist looks like. Change management will and must raise national awareness of the various technical, managerial, operational, and product definition and product development skills that help to create the tourism product. This process must also speak to industry demand for skills such as electricians, air conditioning and refrigeration experts, computer programmers, accountants and bookkeepers, media relations personnel, food and beverage managers, chefs, nutritionists, health and safety experts, as well as trained gardeners and landscapers, who contribute to the aesthetics of the destination.

4. Additionally, policy coordination must necessarily include the issue of high airfares that militate against greater intra-regional travel. Strategies should be geared towards opening the region’s market so that there is total freedom to travel within the region. In this regard,

the recent marriage between the CTO and CHA is both timely and necessary for policy development and coordination. Strategically coordinated planning, led by these two entities, can bring on board other entities such as the West Indies Cricket Board of Control, FIFA and other sporting organisations; churches and religious organisations that promote gospel, jazz, carnivals and other music festivals and event tourism promoters to open up the tourism industry to all, thereby avoiding any repetition of the problems experienced during CWC 2007. Since all of these activities consume tourism resources, greater collaboration and coordination between and among these entities are called for in a rejuvenated effort to liberate tourism from the traditional mindset and open it up to an increasingly prosperous Caribbean community capable of sustaining the sector especially through the “off season.”

Led by the ACS Sustainable Tourism Directorate, a number of countries have begun to engage stakeholders in promoting greater visitor safety and security awareness and are actively engaged in instituting national networks to foster these initiatives and to support the institutionalisation of a regional network. While these entities are doing their necessary part to enhance visitor safety and security, government, through sound and far-sighted policies, must simultaneously promote and secure continuous investment in the travel and tourism infrastructure in order to ensure the long-term success of travel and tourism in the Caribbean sub-region. ■

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