



CARIBBEAN
HOTEL & TOURISM
ASSOCIATION



For Immediate Release

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Contact: Greta Andzenge, Marketplace Excellence +1 201 861-2056
greta@marketplaceexcellence.com



CHTA's Frank Comito (left) with STR's Fatima Thompson and KPMG's Gary Brough at the CHRIS Conference in Miami last month.



CHTA's Frank Comito speaks about the region's recovery.

TOURISM CHIEF UPBEAT ABOUT THE CARIBBEAN'S FUTURE

CHTA's Frank Comito expresses confidence in the Caribbean's tourism performance

MIAMI (June 4, 2018) - High consumer demand for a Caribbean travel experience and increased tourism investments in hotels and airport improvements bode well for the future of the Caribbean's tourism sector, which is exceeding 2018 expectations despite the fact that some hotels in six of the Caribbean's 32 major destinations are still in rebuilding mode following last year's hurricanes.

"A growing number of travelers are understanding that the Caribbean is a vast region comprising many diverse destinations all rich in natural beauty but each distinct in its history, music, culture, food and welcoming hospitality," said Frank Comito, CEO and Director General of the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA). "Just like a winter blizzard may affect the northeastern United States while people are sunbathing on Miami Beach, a weather incident in one part of the Caribbean does not affect the overwhelming majority of the Caribbean."

Thanks to the robust upturn in the tourism sector, many parts of the region are seeing corresponding growth in employment, visitor spending, government revenue, and public and private sector investments to upgrade and expand the tourism product. "Capitalizing on these trends and getting the region to work together on marketing and addressing other matters which can cause tourism to be an even greater economic engine for the region is a challenge which the region's public and private sector leaders must embrace," states Comito.

Comito echoed a challenge by Frank Rainieri, the noted developer of the Punta Cana region in the Dominican Republic, to attendees at the Caribbean Hotel and Resort Investment Summit (CHRIS) in Miami last month to work together on common matters which impact the entire Caribbean region, in particular aviation, marketing and sustainability. Rainieri, chairman and founder of Grupo Puntacana, received CHRIS' Lifetime Achievement Award at the event.

A CHTA study earlier this year revealed that 58 percent of hoteliers have a positive or extremely positive outlook for the industry's future. This was reinforced by the record level of attendees at CHRIS as investor interest in the Caribbean has strengthened since the two Category 5 hurricanes of 2017. According to data recently collected by the World Travel and Tourism Council, hurricane-affected destinations themselves anticipate annual tourism spending growth of 8.7 percent in 2019 through 2021.

"In all of our discussions with industry stakeholders from destinations such as Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the British Virgin Islands, St. Maarten, Dominica and Anguilla, we fully expect them to be showcasing to the traveler a completely revamped, fresh new product. We're already beginning to see that in several of the destinations and, later this year, expect it to accelerate as more refurbished and rebuilt hotels come on stream," Comito stated.

Attendees at the CHRIS conference were pleasantly surprised by data from a just released KPMG study which shows the boost in lender confidence: "We felt post-hurricanes that there might be a diminishing of confidence, but it's stronger than it's been since post the recession, with a significant shift by commercial lenders," the CHTA CEO noted.

Bolstering the healthy growth and rapid recovery from the storms is the increased airlift coming into the region from North America and Europe, which Comito asserted is at a record pace. "An increase in arrivals and activity, as well as the amount of hotel investments points very positively to where the region is headed."

Over the past several months all the major carriers serving the region have announced plans for new and expanded service into the Caribbean. However, it was among regional carriers where Comito saw a significant rise. He pointed to InterCaribbean Airways as an example, which four years ago served a dozen locations in five destinations and currently covers 22 airports in 13 countries.

The CHTA chief reported on the completion of several airport expansions in recent years and cited more than a dozen other airports which are under construction or are in the planning stage.

CHTA also reported on a major expansion thrust by leading hotel brands and chains and the debut in the region of new independent boutique and luxury hotels as well as the growth of the sharing economy.

Hurricanes Irma and Maria, despite the devastation they wreaked, Comito contended, also delivered critical messages for the future of the region - more than 70 percent of which was unaffected by the storms: "The hurricanes taught us that the Caribbean is viewed as one brand in the minds of the public and the consumer. The lesson learned is that we've

got to work more closely together as a region, public and private sectors, to let the world know about the lifetime of experiences and destinations which our vast region offers."

But Comito, whose association comprises private sector hospitality and tourism stakeholders, cautioned against complacency: "While we've been on a good growth curve in both the hotel and arrivals side of it in terms of the data, it doesn't take much to swing positive numbers to negatives. We are working with our industry and public sector partners to build a new spirit of collaboration. The need for this became even more apparent in recent years as we've worked to counter the negative impacts, largely due to mistaken public perceptions of storms and other natural occurrences. We need to be diligent, to be ready to bounce back and respond as effectively as possible."

These and other Caribbean travel and tourism issues will take center stage at CHTA's fourth Caribbean Hospitality Industry Exchange Forum (CHIEF), taking place at the Hyatt Regency Miami from June 22 to 24.

For further information, visit www.chtachief.com .

About CHIEF

Produced by the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA), the Caribbean Hospitality Industry Exchange Forum (CHIEF) is the premier educational forum for Caribbean hospitality and tourism professionals. CHIEF is where hospitality industry leaders assemble to connect, learn best practices, share ideas, brainstorm creative solutions to current challenges and build relationships. With three educational tracks covering a multitude of relevant topics, from the sharing economy to sustainability, and interactive roundtable and speed networking sessions, this event addresses issues affecting all businesses. The forum attracts hoteliers, vendors, government officials and industry experts focused on a stronger, profitable and more sustainable industry. CHIEF is supported by host sponsors Interval International and JetBlue Getaways; platinum sponsors Adara, CaribbeanWE, Expedia, Figment Design, Marketplace Excellence, Mastercard, OBMI, STR and TravelZoo; and gold sponsors Caribbean Wedding Industry Awards, Flip.to, La Bottega, Oracle Hospitality, SportsArt Fitness, Travalliance Media/Vacation Agent, Travel Channel, Travel Relations, TravelClick, TravPro Mobile and TripMate. For additional information about CHIEF, visit www.chtachief.com or call +1 305 443-3040.

About the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA)

The Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA) is the Caribbean's leading association representing the interests of national hotel and tourism associations. For more than 50 years, CHTA has been the backbone of the Caribbean hospitality industry. Working with some 1,000 hotel and allied members, and 32 National Hotel Associations, CHTA is shaping the Caribbean's future and helping members to grow their businesses. Whether navigating new worlds like social media, sustainability, legislative issues, emerging technologies,

climate change, data and intelligence or, looking for avenues and ideas to better market and manage businesses, CHTA is helping members on issues which matter most.

For further information, visit www.caribbeanhotelandtourism.com.

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