

THE YEAR WAS 1951: The CTO Story.

By Richard S. Kahn and Johnson JohnRose

The year was 1951. Tourism was already being seen as having a major role to play in the economic development of Caribbean countries, but there was no organised body to focus the visitor's thinking on the entire region as a single destination. However, that was about to change as a group of concerned individuals gathered in Antigua to formulate a marketing plan and create a budget to promote the Caribbean as a region.

They established the Caribbean Travel Association (CTA) with offices in St. John's, Antigua. CTA was given an annual budget of US\$200, 000 and a mandate to promote the Caribbean as the world's leading warm weather destination.

CTA even then was unique, comprising member states from the four language groups – Dutch, English, French and Spanish – and having a public and private sector directorate. Now, 50 years later, the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) stands as the successor and benefactor of those early years and the Caribbean proudly proclaims success as truly the world's leading warm weather destination.

The seeds for CTO's creation were really sown in the 1940s. This was war time and the strategic importance of the Caribbean Sea in World War II was immense. Both the British and American governments had very important military bases scattered throughout various islands.

On August 14, 1941 an historic meeting took place in the mid-Atlantic, on American and British warships, between US President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. The two leaders drew up a joint eight-point declaration, known as the "Atlantic Charter", which set out the principles on which they had agreed that the post-war world should be based.

President Roosevelt appointed Charles W. Taussig, a businessman with interests in the American Caribbean territories, to head a Commission to make a survey of the British West Indian colonies. In that same year the President conceived the idea of forming an Anglo-American Caribbean Commission and made the proposal to Lord Halifax, the British Ambassador in Washington.

The Anglo-American Caribbean Commission was established by an exchange of notes on March 9, 1942 to, among other things, encourage social and economic cooperation between the United States and its possessions and bases in the Caribbean and the United Kingdom and British Colonies in the area. The Commissioners were to concern themselves with labour, agriculture, housing, health, education, social welfare, finance and related subjects in territories under the British and US flags.

The Anglo-American Caribbean Commission first met in 1944 in Brooklyn, NY. In October 1946, it was expanded to include the Netherlands and France, and was renamed the Caribbean Commission. The late Dr. Eric Williams, who would later become Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, was one of the better-known employees of the Commission and one of the committees established under the new Caribbean Commission was the Tourism Committee on which sat ELC Cozier, a distinguished Barbadian journalist, now deceased. CTO is the only surviving link with the historic Caribbean Commission.

The Commission held several meetings on the establishment of a Caribbean Tourism Association, but at first progress was slow.

The move towards forming CTA gained further momentum when the Caribbean Interim Tourism Committee met in Haiti in 1949 to finalise arrangements for the regional body. It gave as the purpose of the CTA: "To focus tourists thinking on the Caribbean rather than on particular territories of the region, and to seek to promote cooperative effort in regard to attracting investment, encouraging airlines and the like."

Following its establishment, CTA maintained its office in Antigua until 1955. After much argument over its function as a marketing office that would focus its efforts only on the major market of the USA, the organisation moved its office to New York.

With a paid staff of 12, CTA engaged in advising and coordinating activities for its members. It organised forums and seminars, as well as programmes for interaction between visitors and host nationals. Its operations were not on the grandiose scale proposed at the Antigua meeting, but it successfully established that there was a Caribbean product as well as national tourism.

CTA created various technical assistance committees to help promote tourism. These committees worked by request of the governments and created marketing and tourism development programmes. The budget was small but an image was created and sold, of an entire region offering an exotic vacation for the rich in a tropical paradise.

One of the first destinations to garner worldwide recognition was Cuba. It was Ernest Hemingway's getaway and the rich and famous followed him there, just as others followed Errol Flynn to Jamaica. National Airlines flew to Cuba in the 1950s and President Fidel Castro was made a lifetime member of the American Society of Travel Agents at the Annual ASTA World Travel Congress in Havana in October 1959.

That same year CTA formed a hotel committee in response to a lobby by hoteliers. This new hotel committee, working within CTA, was principally made up of individual hotels that wanted to discuss ideas on how to work together with the tourist offices to promote the destinations.

The committee evolved into the Caribbean Hotel Association (CHA), which became an autonomous body in 1962. Pat Shillito, who was employed part time by the Puerto Rico Hotel Association began working for the newly developed Caribbean Hotel Association. Ike Cohen was the first president and Osmond Kelsick was president for five years from 1965 to 1970. John Bell was hired in 1974 as Executive Director and over the years he oversaw the launching of a great number of programmes and benefits to assist both independent resorts and chain hotels developing throughout the Caribbean.

Through the 1960s, Caribbean tourism grew slowly on the heels of airlines such as Pan Am, Eastern, BWIA, Air Canada, Air Jamaica, Trans Caribbean, LIAT, Prinair and others. Trans Caribbean was purchased in the late 1960s by American Airlines, thus launching what was to become the single largest carrier to the region from North America. British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC), which came together with British European Airways in 1974 to form British Airways, was the largest carrier out of Europe to the region. BA merged with British Caledonian in 1987.

Regional carrier BWIA, which was founded in 1940, and now transports 1.3 million passengers a year, has been serving the Caribbean for 62 years from its base in Trinidad and Tobago and linking both North America and Europe as well as intra-island

traffic. Air Jamaica began operating in April 1969 between the US and Jamaica, but has since expanded its routes to include Canada, Europe and other Caribbean destinations.

LIAT was founded in 1956 as a one-man operation by Frank Delisle, using one three-seater aircraft flying between Montserrat and Antigua. In 1957, LIAT entered a strategic arrangement with BWIA, which culminated in BWIA owning 75 percent of LIAT's shares. BWIA sold its shares in LIAT to the British company Courtline Aviation in 1971 but the company went under three years later, in 1974 and 11 Caribbean governments bought the Courtline shares, thus saving the airline. Today, LIAT services 18 Caribbean destinations with 40 thousand flights a year, moving approximately 700 thousand passengers.

Air Canada, then Trans Canada Air Lines, made its inaugural flight to the Caribbean on December 3, 1948. It landed at Trinidad's Piarco International Airport at 8:30 a.m. This bi-weekly service from Montreal via Toronto, was provided by a 40-passenger propeller aircraft. Flight time was 15 hours with stops in the Bahamas and Jamaica.

Interestingly, the push and ideas for change in tourism did not come from within existing tourism structures, but from the church, through its regional agency, Christian Action for Development in the Caribbean (CADEC), an arm of the Caribbean Conference of Churches (CCC); the University of the West Indies; other institutions like the Organization of American States (OAS); and the development sector represented by the Caribbean Free Trade Area (CARIFTA), the predecessor to the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

Some of the key players included Carlos Diago, then deputy Director of Tourism for Puerto Rico, Peter Morgan who was then the Minister of Tourism of Barbados, Rev. Andrew Hatch, the Director of the Caribbean Council of Churches in Barbados, Sir Philip Sherlock, Vice Chancellor of the University of the West Indies, Edwin Carrington, now Secretary General of CARICOM and Byron Blake, now Assistant Secretary General of CARICOM. Both Carrington and Blake were economists with CARIFTA at the time.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, these individuals and organisations held several consultations, best known of which was a meeting in Haiti in 1971, organised by the Caribbean Council of Churches.

A consultation was also held at the Windsor Hotel in Barbados, in 1971, as a forerunner to the Caribbean Consultation on Development, which was held in Trinidad the following year. The Barbados consultation called for an institution to examine the undoubted economic benefits as well as the social and environmental costs of tourism.

The Barbados Tourism Minister at the time, Peter Morgan and Sir Philip Sherlock, were sent around the region to speak with governments in all four language areas about the need for such an institution.

At the same time, those directly involved in tourism were beginning to realise that the CTA was paying little attention to research and development areas. There was no credible data to inform the marketing effort, and insufficient research on the region to enable businesses to research, plan, train or educate.

Consequently, CTA held a meeting in San Juan, Puerto Rico in January 1972 to formally discuss these concerns. The meeting was spearheaded by Herb Hiller, who was on loan to CTA from Norwegian Caribbean Lines to help develop a Caribbean focus in North America. It was at that meeting that the idea of the Caribbean Tourism Research and Development Centre (CTRC) was conceived.

Many in the tourism community were resistant to change and people who spoke about the negative impacts of tourism, lack of linkages and the foreign characteristics of the industry, were seen as enemies of the cause. But it helped that Hiller was an intellectual thinker and quite sympathetic to the need for change. Therefore, he worked well with the protagonists.

The seed money for CTRC was provided in 1973 by the Inter-American Foundation, which is an institution of the U.S. Congress. A three-year programme was funded to create a completely new organisation. Herb Hiller was in fact the person who was mandated by the CTA Board to write the proposal that went to the Inter-American Foundation.

The Governments were to match the grant with a third of the funds. It all came to under US\$300,000 with the Foundation pledging not to provide any further funding after an initial three-year period.

CTRC was established in 1974 and commenced operations in Barbados in September 1974 with Jean Holder, a career diplomat, as its first Executive Director and Peter Morgan, one of the major founders of CTRC, as its first chairman. The selection committee which hired Holder had comprised Diago, Morgan and Hatch. Hatch and Morgan interviewed Holder in Barbados and then he traveled to Puerto Rico where he met with Diago who became a warm and close friend from that day.

They had initially selected a senior lecturer and economist from the Cave Hill Campus of the University of the West Indies in 1973 and all was set to start CTRC when the selected candidate opted out, choosing instead to go to work in London at the Commonwealth Secretariat. They were back where they started, and as Jean Holder says, “were probably desperate enough to employ a man whose only contact with tourism was as a tourist.”

As the newly appointed CEO, Jean Holder was able to persuade the Inter-American Foundation to keep on funding CTRC for an additional seven years. Holder was given the goals and objectives of CTRC in the approved proposal, but had a free hand to set up the type of organisation he conceptualised and to hire the related technical staff, within the budget. The organisation had a broad mandate for tourism education and training, tourism planning and research, as well as statistics.

Holder sought to create a regional development agency which operated in the field of tourism to create developmental change and economic growth. CTRC was therefore in form and structure, very similar to many of the agencies with which he had worked as a diplomat. His old diplomatic associations and contacts were critical in getting donor support to keep CTRC going.

Holder contracted the Peat Marwick (now KPMG) office in Trinidad, headed by Ian Bertram, later CEO of BWIA, to help him determine the structure of CTRC and set out to hire his first staff member, a secretary named Pat Byer in September 1974. Now, 28 years later, Pat Byer still works with Holder.

Concurrent with these developments, back in New York, Michael Youngman, then Director of Marketing for American Airlines Atlantic/Caribbean, and Secretary Treasurer of CTA, interviewed and hired Jim Pepperdine to head up the New York office. It was Diago who got Pepperdine interested in the job in the first place, when he called Pepperdine and asked him to travel to New York to head the CTA marketing efforts.

Pepperdine, a marketing expert, owned and operated a hotel in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands at the time.

Jim Pepperdine set about to make the New York operation more Caribbean. In 1975 he changed the organisation's name from Caribbean Travel Association to Caribbean Tourism Association and got Mario Trombone, president of Tromson Monroe Advertising, to create a new logo, which is still used by CTO today.

Then he staffed the New York office with West Indians and hired, among others, a public relations director named Audrey Palmer Hawks. At the same time, he engaged an administrative assistant from Dominica named Sylma Brown, now Sylma Brown-Bramble, CTO Director of Projects and Administration.

Audrey Palmer Hawks was born in Guyana and raised in Grenada. She worked as a government information officer in Grenada after graduating from Cornell University. She eventually became Minister of State for Tourism for Grenada and in 1973, established the first Grenada Tourist Office in New York.

She joined CTA as its Public Relations Director in 1975 and rose, first to Executive Director, and then Director General of the organisation in 1978. She carried the organisation to new heights for nine years before succumbing to cancer in 1987 at the young age of 44.

Back in 1972, a small group of people in New York, lead by Jim Pepperdine and Michael Youngman began to discuss a grassroots marketing programme to promote the region.

With the help of Lloyd Cole, a long-time travel agent, and Jim Furey, president of the media marketing company Furey and Associates, they formed the first CTA Chapter in 1975.

The Chapter system was based on the already-successful Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Chapter programme. Michael Youngman, having been involved in South Pacific marketing for American Airlines in the late 60s, saw the correlation to what CTA was doing in New York and worked with Pepperdine and others to create this grassroots programme.

Lloyd Cole went on to help create and launch the Miami and Chicago Chapters and also traveled to Los Angeles and Toronto to help support the start of Chapters there.

The Chapter system was first expanded across the U.S. and Canada and eventually throughout Europe. It now includes chapters throughout the Caribbean. There are currently 27 Chapters in the U.S., six in Canada, seven in the Caribbean, three in Europe and one in Australia, for a total of 44 Chapters worldwide.

Pepperdine also turned to an old friend, Henry Davis, founder and operator of the famous Henry Davis Travel Agent Trade Shows, to organise a travel agent trade show to promote Caribbean-specific products. The original shows were held in New York, Westchester and New Jersey.

Later, as Chapters were developed in Miami, Chicago and Los Angeles, trade shows were expanded to those markets as well.

Pepperdine also met with representatives of some of the major publications such as Jack Connors of Travel & Leisure and David Hawks of Travel Weekly and launched the first cooperative advertising programme with special sections in those publications. The first Travel & Leisure Caribbean section was a successful 14 pages of editorial and advertising.

1974 was a watershed year for the Caribbean as CTA created and launched the first Pan-Caribbean promotional film called “The Caribbean a World of its Own” which portrayed the region as a real destination with a rich history and culture and advanced political and constitutional development. The CTA Hotel Committee was also growing rapidly, and in that same year, the private sector officially formed the Caribbean Hotel Association (CHA) with John Bell as Executive Director.

This was 1974 and the Caribbean, like the rest of the world, was suffering from the effects of a world energy crisis that had an adverse impact on travel. The governments asked CTRC to organise a conference on the future of Caribbean tourism.

Jean Holder of CTRC invited John Bell of CHA and Jim Pepperdine of CTA to work with him in organising the first Caribbean Tourism Conference as a joint public and private sector conference. Frank Briceño Fortique, then the President of Corpoturismo (Venezuela’s Tourism Corporation) and President of CTA, offered Venezuela as host country.

The conference, held in January 1975, sowed the seeds for the creation of a single agency to bring all Caribbean tourism activity under one umbrella. By the end of 1975 the cooperation between CHA, CTA and CTRC had matured into a plan to combine all three into the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO). A constitution was drafted and placed before the membership at a joint meeting at the Frenchman’s Reef Hotel in the US Virgin Islands in 1976.

The Boards of Directors of CTA and CTRC, as well as that of the East Caribbean Travel Association, decided on CTO. But CHA did not agree to be part of the regional body and decided instead to collaborate closely and to hold its meetings, as far as possible, in the same place and at the same time. It would be another 13 years before CTO was formed, but without CHA.

Even before work started on the merger, back in 1974, Jean Holder set about making contacts with the European Economic Community (EEC) and the Organisation of American States (OAS) to generate financial support for the Caribbean efforts and to create resources for environmental and cultural issues.

Two years later, in 1976, a tragic shooting at his hotel in St. Thomas, took the life of Jim Pepperdine’s wife so he left CTA to focus on personal matters.

Peter Morgan, former Minister of Tourism for Barbados, took over the helm of CTA for two years, after which Audrey Palmer Hawks was promoted to Executive Director and later named Director General of CTA.

In 1979, the idea of the first Caribbean Village was discussed in Berlin when Steigenberger Consulting, which had been engaged by CTRC under the first European Union (EU) funded Lome programme, attended the ITB, accompanied by Holder. Representing the Caribbean at the ITB and other trade shows was a CTA responsibility led by Audrey Palmer Hawks and her team.

Jean Holder, Audrey Palmer Hawks, Sylma Brown and Jean Saurel, Deputy Director of Tourism in Haiti and President of CTA at the time, were present at a meeting which discussed the pointlessness of the Caribbean countries exhibiting at ITB, the world’s largest Trade Fair, scattered all over many acres of fair ground. They were committed to bringing all the countries together in one elaborate exhibit. The concept, to be called the Caribbean Village, however, needed to be funded.

Palmer Hawks and Holder left Berlin and flew to Brussels where they held discussions with the European Commission about funding the idea of a Caribbean Village. The Commission agreed to the proposal and Deitrich Kalhardt, head of an advertising agency in Frankfurt, Germany, was engaged as a consultant under the EC programme to work on establishing the first village. It was a great Caribbean idea, later to be followed by the rest of the world.

Kalhardt then created the first Caribbean Village at ITB in Berlin, complete with a mock waterfall and river. It was the first time all Caribbean countries worked together in Europe and the Caribbean Village concept lives on today, more than 30 years later. The first few years the Caribbean Village won top honours for the Best Booth at ITB until the rest of the world began copying the concept.

In 1984, Audrey Palmer Hawks saw the establishment of the first CTA office in Europe with the opening of the Frankfurt, Germany and European headquarters, which later moved to London.

When Audrey Palmer Hawks passed away in 1987, Sylma Brown-Bramble became Acting Director.

She had her hands full as Project Manager for the organisation. She was in charge of the Chapter system and the Travel Agent Trade Shows, which were held around the country in the Fall and Spring with an average of 10 cities on each tour. She also held and still has the responsibility for the Caribbean Governments State Ball, originally launched under the direction of Carlos Diago, and which now is the culmination of Caribbean Week in New York every year in the spring.

As the years passed, the Chapters were becoming a force of their own and began launching their own marketing and educational efforts. In 1985, the Greater New York Chapter launched the first ever Caribbean Sales Seminar in Aruba with more than 150 travel agents from more than a dozen Chapters around the US attending a Caribbean-specific learning programme in the region. This was more than just a familiarisation trip. It was an opportunity for agents to meet with tourism officials and hoteliers from across the region in one place in the Caribbean.

The second Annual Caribbean Sales Seminar (CSS) programme was in Jamaica and the numbers doubled to 300 agents from even more Chapters. Subsequent CSS programmes were held in Puerto Rico and Aruba and then in the Bahamas, in 1989, where the travel agent programme was combined with the Annual Caribbean Tourism Conference in 1989 under the banner of CTO.

By 1979, it was becoming clear to Caribbean government directors that the marketing activities of CTA and the research, planning and training activities of CTRC had to be integrated. The Boards of Directors of the two organisations were made up of almost the same persons and they held their meetings at the same venue on succeeding days. Therefore, rationalising the time of the directorate and working in synergy made sense.

In 1986 the British Virgin Islands proposed a merger of the two organisations. Jean Holder, along with Baltron Bethel, the Director General of the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism and then CTA President, worked on merging the two organisations into one governmental tourism body. Markly Wilson, former Marketing Manager for Barbados in the US, was hired as Marketing Director for CTA in 1987 but it was clearly understood

that the merger of CTA and CTRC into CTO would take place, and in 1988 the Directors of the two organisations made the final decision at a meeting in the Cayman Islands.

In January 1989, the Caribbean Tourism Organization was born and officially chartered, with headquarters in Barbados and offices in New York and London. Jean Holder was named Secretary General of the new CTO. Among the organisation's first priorities was the forging of the closest possible links with CHA, to seek to change the course of Caribbean tourism into the 21st century.

Two years after the merger, in 1991, CTO organised the first Caribbean Conference on Ecotourism in Belize City, Belize. Ecotourism was growing as an important niche market and there was a general concern for the protection of the environment. However, few Caribbean countries had made any serious efforts to examine the potentials of ecotourism and to capitalise on any advantage that the region possessed. The conference gave government tourism officers, hoteliers, cruise liners, academics, students and Non-Governmental Organisations an opportunity to discuss the issue in a regional forum.

The CTO went on to organise five more such conferences, until it was decided in 1997, to broaden the focus to embrace the concept of sustainable tourism. That year Dominica hosted the First Caribbean Sustainable Tourism Development Conference. Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname and Guyana have hosted subsequent conferences.

Meanwhile, the marketing department and office in New York went through a transition in 1991 with Markly Wilson leaving after two years and the short tenure of Richard Rust, a former tourism director for the state of Massachusetts. Jean Holder hired Michael Youngman as Director of Marketing Worldwide for CTO. Youngman would spend the next 11 years with CTO helping to launch the Regional Marketing and Advertising Programme in 1993, the renowned Caribbean Vacation Planner as well as expansion of the Chapter system worldwide to include the establishment of representation in Toronto, London, Germany and France.

In 1992, at the Heads of Government meeting in Kingston, Jamaica, the Caribbean governments approved the first cooperative regional marketing campaign to be funded by both public and private sector funds and jointly led by CTO and CHA.

The television campaign launched a year later (in 1993), raised consumer awareness of the Caribbean as a vacation destination and thousands of vacationers responded to the promotions. The television commercial featured film from around the Caribbean and the Beach Boys hit song Kokomo. The highly successful campaign reversed a downward trend in visitor arrivals from North America.

As the evolutionary process continued, CTO launched its own website, www.caribtourism.com, in 1995. Early reports indicated that it was one of the most popular sites for consumers and it received accolades in the press. Today, tourism information from all members of the CTO is readily available on the organisation's "world class" web sites, which include gateways in both UK and US English, Dutch, German, French, Italian and Spanish.

Over the years, CTO has matured. One of its major strengths is its development of a sophisticated tourism database, which is the main source of Caribbean Tourism information in the world. For this, it owes much to the skills and knowledge of Arley Sobers, who has been with the Caribbean Tourism Organization since 1984, and who heads the Information Management and Research Division.

CTO also established several other important divisions; the Sustainable Tourism Development Division, headed by Karen Ford-Warner, CTO's Deputy Secretary General; the Finance and Resource Management Division, which under the direction of Luther Miller, deals with the considerably complex finances of the organisation; and the Human Resource Division, headed by Bonita Morgan, which is charged with developing tourism education and awareness programmes for Caribbean schools and the entire public, and creating and delivering tourism training programmes for both public and private sector personnel. It also undertakes an on-going programme of technical assistance conferences and workshops covering a multitude of subjects.

In 1997, the CTO Foundation was established to assist Caribbean nationals in pursuing tourism and hospitality studies. To date, the CTO Foundation, managed by the Human Resource Division, has provided 35 scholarships and grants, totaling over US\$200,000, to various deserving Caribbean nationals.

As we look towards the next 50 years, CTO continues to provide to, and through its members, the services and information needed for the development of sustainable tourism for the economic and social benefit of the Caribbean people. It maintains a special place in world tourism and speaks for regional tourism. No other tourism organisation can boast of such a diverse membership - 32 countries and four languages, yet one destination. CTO stands proud of its history.