



**HON. KENNETH BRYAN, CHAIRMAN**

**CTO COUNCIL OF MINISTERS AND COMMISSIONERS OF TOURISM**

**PRESS CONFERENCE REMARKS**

Members of the media, ladies and gentlemen, good morning,

I extend a warm welcome to all who have tuned in and thank you for taking the time to join us and covering this media conference.

I am very pleased to be in Barbados. While I have visited previously, this is my first time visiting the Caribbean Tourism Organisations headquarters in my capacity as the new Chairman of the organisation.

It has been extremely beneficial having this opportunity to meet with the staff and tour the office, and I am very happy to see the wealth of information that is here on each of the member countries. It underscores the tremendous amount of quantitative and qualitative research and data that has been compiled over the years, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the government of Barbados for making the provision for the CTO to be housed here in this jurisdiction over many decades.

With tourism playing such a critical role in the Caribbean region it is important that our people have the opportunity to keep abreast of the latest news and developments. I therefore appreciate your support and assistance in helping to raise awareness of these results through your various media channels and publications.

Moving swiftly on to today's business, the purpose of this press conference is to present the Caribbean regions tourism performance for 2022, following which I will provide a brief update on the way forward and some of the changes and activities you can expect to see in 2023 and beyond.

So without further ado, I will ask the Acting Secretary General to take us through the 2022 tourism industry results.

### **Outlook for 2023**

As the Chairman of the Caribbean Tourism Organisation's Council of Ministers and Commissioners of Tourism, I am humbled to have leadership over an organization that is focused on positively contributing to the growth and development of an industry that is vital to the economies and people of every country in the Caribbean.

Having just heard how tourism has performed across all of the destinations in the Caribbean, including the 25 CTO member countries, it is clearly apparent that even in the face of the devastating blows delivered by the pandemic, as a region we have responded with hope, strength, and the determination to prevail. Great strides have been made and many of our jurisdictions ended 2022 registering higher than predicted visitor arrivals. That is a clear indication that the sector is bouncing back and hopes are high that the robust pace of recovery will continue into 2023 and beyond.

This is a position also supported by stakeholders, such as the World Travel and Tourism Council which has forecast 5.5% annual growth for the Caribbean over the next 10 years, and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), which is predicting Caribbean economic growth of 5.7 % in 2023, based in part on the continued revival of tourism.

So although we have not yet surpassed 2019's numbers across the board in every jurisdiction, the needle is certainly moving in the right direction.

### **Vision for growth**

Aside from economic growth across the region, I also see this year as a period of growth and development for the Caribbean Tourism Organization.

Since assuming the Chairmanship position in September 2022, my primary focus has been to start the ball rolling on a number of initiatives which will strengthen the Organisation, and allow it to be more effective and responsive to the needs and aspirations of the Member states

One of the ways I envision this being accomplished is by working closely with the Secretariat:

- to grow the membership;
- to grow the Allied partners that we work with;
- to grow tourism in the region;
- and grow the contribution it makes to the economies that depend on it.

It is also my intention to strengthen the relationships with other organisations such as the United Nations World Travel Organisation (UNWTO), the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), and even the Central American Tourism Promotion Agency (CATA) to foster greater collaboration.

With the Caribbean being one of the most tourism dependent regions in the world, and the industry moving from recovery to growth, there is an acute need to ensure that the CTO is appropriately sized and structured, to fulfill the needs and objectives of the Members.

With this background in mind, consideration is being given to the restructuring of the organization and reforming its strategic vision and direction for the next five (5) years.

In the meantime, noting that the organization has been without an appointed Secretary General for a lengthy period, the question of leadership has been one of the primary areas identified for immediate attention.

I am pleased to report that following a detailed review process, a new job description has been formulated for the Secretary General position. The newly revised job description more closely reflects the current needs and relevance of the Organisation, and ensures that the role is structured so that the most senior executive in the organization has more autonomy and is empowered to provide the level of support expected from the territories we serve. The vacancy has been widely advertised across the Region with an open recruitment process currently underway.

Aside from addressing the leadership of the organization, I am also committed to growing the membership of the CTO. I was delighted last

month to welcome The US Virgin Islands into the fold and I will also be reaching out to other countries in the Caribbean diaspora to hopefully bring them on board.

With that being said, I recognize that in order to successfully build membership, it is incumbent on the Organisation to effectively demonstrate the value and benefits that members can derive. To help inform this process, in November of 2022, all of our members were surveyed to gather their input on the initiatives, programmes and issues that they would like to see prioritized in the coming 12 – 24-months. This information and data will help to ensure that the work of the Secretariat not only dovetails with the goals and expectations of Members, but also helps to facilitate growth within their respective tourism industries.

Taking that one step further, I am of the view that wherever possible we should seize the opportunities to present ourselves as a unified Caribbean region.

And with that being said I am very happy to announce the return of the CTO's Caribbean Week, which will once again be held in New York this coming June, from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup>.

Plans are still in the development stages but the vision is for the event to include business development opportunities, consumer engagement, media forums, workshops and a range of cultural activities celebrating the wonderful sights, sounds and flavours of our Caribbean destinations. More information will be published by the CTO as it becomes available so please look out for it.

There are so many elements across our member states to leverage and promote – from the rich cultural heritage of our individual countries' to our beautiful landscapes, local foods, beaches, and traditions. We can, and should, celebrate our shared history and heritage, while highlighting and being proud of our unique attributes. Caribbean Week will provide an excellent forum for all of that to take place.

Turning my attention now to the nagging issue of air connectivity, tourism is a significant economic driver for us all, and yet the lack of inter-regional air connectivity continues to pose a risk to our resilience and sustainability. It is a situation that has existed, and been talked about for decades, and has worsened due to the economic effects of the covid pandemic.

Why?

Because the slowdown in tourism has caused airlines to re-evaluate their business structures and routes from a position of profitability more so than connectivity. Additionally, there is a global shortage of pilots also adding another layer of complexity to this longstanding issue. It would be illogical for me to promise a solution to this issue during my tenure as Chairman. But what I can, and will commit to, is getting the players around the table to forensically examine what we need to do as a unified region to improve this scenario and starting the ball rolling towards the solution.

Aside from the convenience, improving regional connectivity would have a knock on effect that would positively influence travel for all sorts of reasons; such as business, leisure, sports, conferences and meetings, and could potentially transform the region.

The added benefit, aside from tourism, is that it would facilitate and encourage residents across the Caribbean to travel more easily to other islands to visit family and friends.

In the meantime, I look forward to continuing to work alongside our stakeholders and partners to maintain the momentum of growth while also continuing to build more resilience in the tourism space.

As tourism is a global industry that operates in such a dynamic environment, with so many interconnected sectors, it is vulnerable to a wide range of negative impacts, many of which are not of our own making. We are increasingly hearing talk of a coming recession, not to mention....

- inflation,
- the high cost of living,
- rising energy costs,
- the escalation of geopolitical tensions in Europe,
- as well as the ever present risk of COVID variants that could impact visitor travel and threaten the pace of our recovery.

All of these issues can have a disruptive effect on visitation, which is why it is so important for future resilience to be underpinned by co-ordinated action, strategic thinking, and cooperation on the ground.

Last month I had the privilege of speaking at a conference in Jamaica promoting Global Tourism resilience and I remain committed to supporting that initiative, given that the ability to swiftly and sustainably recover, is vital for this indigenous economic driver that we call tourism.

I would like to allow sufficient time for questions so I will bring my remarks to a close by thanking the Acting Secretary General Neil Walters, for his support and leadership to the organization during these turbulent times.

I also express my gratitude to the Board of Directors as well as the management and staff of the CTO Secretariat for their dedication and hard work. I am thankful to the various stakeholders in our industry, whose partnership and performance has enabled this region to achieve the distinction and recognition as the fastest recovering region in the world.

Finally, I look forward to fostering even closer relationships with my Ministerial colleagues in tourism and working together with them in the true spirit of collaboration, for the mutual interest and benefit of our Caribbean region.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are focused, we are committed and we represent the best region in the world for tourism and travel. Here's to a phenomenal 2023.

Thank you