

## **Lack of competition in airline industry stifling regional tourism — Forstmayr**

NASSAU, Bahamas (CMC) — President of the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA) Josef Forstmayr says the lack of competition in the regional airline industry is stifling the tourism sector resulting in outrageous ticket prices and an illconceived network.

Addressing the official opening of the CHTA Caribbean Marketplace 2012 yesterday, Forstmayr said regional travel was also being hampered by Caribbean nationals not being able to travel freely between their countries without being subjected to visas, long immigration lines and other bureaucratic indulgences that stifle any sense of hospitality.

The CHTA official said that with the combined population of the Caribbean totalling 40 million, intra-Caribbean tourism once represented 13 per cent of the market, the same as Canada.

However, he noted that conditions had changed significantly with very little travel taking place among the organisation's 18 member countries.

“As a result of the lack of a competitive and truly regional airline, regional tourism has been suffocated by outrageous ticket prices and a cumbersome and illconceived network.

“We need to establish the very best welcome and farewell to all our visitors as well as returning residents within the Caribbean.

“This must be a call to action to all governments and airport operators to focus on this issue. Too often, we hear that long lines, antiquated bureaucracy and surly attitudes are commonplace in our islands ...this is not acceptable,” Forstmayr told hoteliers, travel agents, tour operators and buyers from the regional and international community.

He said the CHTA estimated that in 2010, the Caribbean governments collectively paid US\$45 million to secure airlift, only to find that the situation is still inadequate and way too expensive for visitors.

Figures released by the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO) suggest that 2010 was a record year for ‘stop-over’ arrivals with 23.1 million visitors, and their forecast for this year is a four per cent growth.

Forstmayr said that the Caribbean tourism industry's marketing and business development unit, CTDC, has taken an important step towards relaunching its vacation website, and that Caribbean Marketplace is “as strong as ever” with registration numbers this year very encouraging.

“There is no question that our buyers who are attending Caribbean Travel Marketplace are in large part responsible for these encouraging and welcome statistics.

“The Caribbean remains the most tourism-dependent region in the world and the substantial volume of transactions — generated by the 15,000 appointments — that will take place here over the next two days will bolster the Caribbean nations' economies directly resulting in a better standard of living for our Caribbean citizens,” he noted.

He said there has to be a strong consensus of regional leaders and the public so that travel and tourism will receive the full support it needs as the Caribbean's most vital export industry.

“It is the fastest way to create jobs, grow the economy and generate income for all. Every citizen needs to understand that, whether or not he or she works directly in the tourism areas,

every tourist's dollar brings economic and social benefits to every level of our society," he added.



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