

Message from Minister of Tourism Hon. Edmund C. Bartlett, M.P

As the end of the year approaches it is that time again when the significance of our all-important tourism sector is brought into sharper focus during Tourism Awareness Week. This is a significant period as we are encouraged to reflect on how the tourism industry shapes our economy and serves as a catalyst for economic growth. This year's theme is Destination Jamaica, Our Jamaica.. Celebrate it With Pride. As we enter the 2011-2012 Winter Tourist Season this is an appropriate theme as, 2012 will be a landmark year for Jamaica. We'll celebrate our 50th Anniversary of Independence with a year of festivities here and around the world. We also support our Jamaican Olympians and celebrate their exploits, as they go for gold in the Summer Olympic Games in London. It's our time; a time to take pride in our heritage; our diverse culture; our country... destination Jamaica.

We've taken numerous strides over the last 50 years to build our country and our tourism product. Jamaica is a leader in the region. This year, we were even named one of the world's "coolest" countries by CNN television. Our dominance as a destination was highlighted on the global stage after Jamaica swept the World Travel Awards Caribbean & Americas Gala Ceremony in October, winning several prestigious awards at the global event which is dubbed the 'Oscars of the travel industry.

Among the many awards Jamaica received were the Caribbean's Leading Destination award for the sixth consecutive year, while the Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB) won the Caribbean's Leading Tourist Board award for the fifth consecutive year. The destination was also named the Caribbean's Leading Cruise Destination, the Caribbean's Leading Sports Tourism Destination and was recognized for having the Caribbean's Leading Cruise Port, Ocho Rios, the Caribbean's Leading Beach Destination, Negril, and the Caribbean's Leading Meetings & Conference Centre the Montego Bay Convention Centre.

These awards are pay-back for the hard work that the country has been doing in promoting the destination and our tourism product overseas. These types of accolades demonstrate how the world views us. We're a trendsetting and unique destination. Our strengths in the tourism sector are mimicked throughout the world. Tourism-driven destinations view Jamaica as a model to replicate. And - here's why: Jamaica's visitor arrival figures continue to climb despite the global economic crisis. Between January and September of this year, we welcomed approximately 2.2 million visitors, representing a 6.1 percent increase in total visitors compared with the same period last year. Up to September Jamaica had earned 1.54 billion US dollars which represents a 1.2 percent increase over the 1.53 billion we earned for the same period in 2010. Cruise arrivals also rose by 14.6 percent between January to September while stopover arrivals increased by 2.2 percent for the same period. Preliminary figures also indicate that between January and November Jamaica welcomed some 1.75 million stopover visitors; an increase of 2.1 percent over the same period last year, while cruise arrivals rose by 22.7 percent over last year to just

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over 978 thousand.

A major highlight of the week will be the welcoming of the first visitor to the island to kickoff the winter tourist season on December 15. The upcoming season is expected to be an exciting one with several new developments including the Falmouth Pier as well as new attractions, such as the Galleon Captain Hook.

In order to increase visitor arrivals, we will be boosting our advertising and public relations activities in key markets. An aggressive advertising and marketing initiative spearheaded by the Jamaica Tourist Board will be undertaken in the United States and Canada. This will include a TV advertising campaign in all regions of Canada for fall leading in to winter. We will also participate in select consumer shows in the US such as the Kansas City Golf Show, The Boston Globe Travel Show, the NY Travel Show. This will be supported by equally aggressive public relations and promotions programmes in these and other key markets in the United States, our primary source market. Vital to ensuring strong arrival figures for the winter tourist season is ensuring adequate airlift, and our seat capacity for the upcoming season remains at adequate levels. Already over 1 million seats have been secured for the upcoming winter tourist season. This represents a 4.7 percent increase over the 2011 season. This will allow us to bring in 769 thousand visitors for the winter, representing a five percent increase over the winter last year. We also expect some 583 thousand cruise ship passengers, bringing the total visitors projected to arrive in Jamaica for the winter season to some 1.3 million.

As we celebrate Tourism Awareness Week, let's take pride in our breathtaking destination and consider what each of us can do to enhance our tourism product. This is a destination that millions of visitors are drawn to experience annually. Through unique and engaging Community Based Tourism programmes, we can all do our part to make visitors feel right at home in Jamaica. Our Meet the People programme pairs visitors with local Jamaicans that share similar interests, giving them a true taste of our island home.

We're all brand ambassadors for our country. Let's take pride in our island and make plans to go the extra mile in our commitment to tourism. Our destination is unlike any other. We have numerous attributes that set us apart from our competitors in the tourism marketplace. Tourism is our largest foreign exchange earner and is one of the few key industries in which Jamaica enjoys both a competitive and comparative advantage. And it is thanks to you, the people of Jamaica... our most iconic attraction.

This year for Tourism Awareness Week, which runs from December 1-17, and coincides with the start of the Winter Tourist Season, let's be proud of Brand Jamaica, and of how the world views us. We all have a role to play in supporting tourism - we are all partners in this vital sector. I also want to congratulate and thank all the people who work in the tourism industry. Without your hard work and dedication to delivering high-touch service, we would not be able to achieve the level of success and international recognition that Jamaica consistently receives.

We're all in this together. There's something for everyone to do in support of tourism. Your participation is the key to shaping Jamaica's future. Remember destination Jamaica is our

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Jamaica...celebrate it with pride.

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