

# Caribbean Tourism Organization

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*London: Sector must utilize technology or risk losing business*

If the Caribbean tourism industry is not prepared to cater to visitors in a digital age, it will lose business to destinations capable of doing so.

That according to Orville London, chief secretary in the Tobago House of Assembly, during the opening ceremony of the Caribbean Tourism Organization's seventh Tourism Human Resources Conference in Tobago.

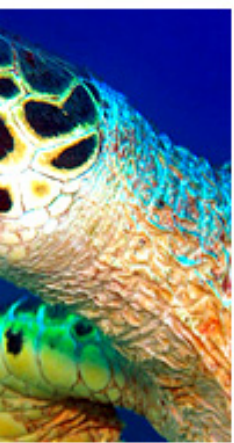
"We have to train and sensitize our employees, our stakeholders and our citizens that if we do not get on

board with the technology the ship will sail to another port," he said.

More than 100 human resources professionals and tourism industry partners gathered at the Magdalena Grand Beach Resort for the conference which ran from Oct. 29-31.

In sync with the conference theme, 'Achieving High Performance in Caribbean Tourism in the New Networked Work Environment,' London also lamented





that many hoteliers and other tourism industry players were yet to implement online marketing strategies. He challenged conference delegates to find creative ways to share the knowledge gained to inspire others in the industry to embrace the benefits of these new digital technologies.

“We have to satisfy the discerning visitor who wishes to experience all the simple pleasures, all the natural ambience, all the scenic beauty and the hospitality of our people that we advertise in our brochures but at the same time is not prepared to be inconvenience by communication and other challenges,” he said.

CTO Secretary General Hugh Riley suggested that unlocking creative capacity would create new employment opportunities within the tourism sector and increase loyalty among visitors.

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“Tourism is the business of creating and delivering memorable experiences to people who have left their own environment and have gone to great lengths to share our space and break bread with us. How we manage that is entirely within our control. There is no limit to the ideas involved in turning those strangers and their friends into our friends forever,” he said.

The CTO's secretary general also underscored the





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importance of ensuring that persons who work in the Caribbean tourism sector are made to feel a sense of ownership of the sector and are encouraged to strive to provide excellent service which surpasses that which is offered by our competitors. This, he said, is one way to sustain the industry.

The conference was a lead-in to Caribbean Tourism Month, which runs throughout November.

“The month also gives us a chance to look inwards at our approach to tourism, at the quality of our product, at the strategies we employ in managing this vital





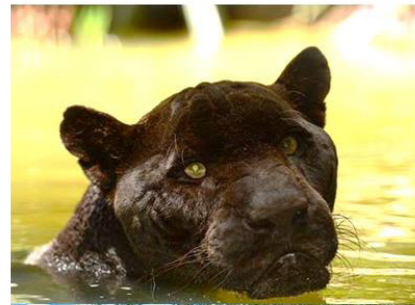
sector. Indeed, this is an ideal time to look at current world trends and find the opportunities to keep pace with the rest of the world,” said CTO Chairman Richard Sealy. “The statistics provided by the CTO’s research department show that arrivals to the Caribbean are up for the first half of this year. While this is encouraging,



we cannot be satisfied, we must all tell ourselves that we are yet to achieve our goal.

“Not only must we keep pace with the rest of the world consistently, we must aim to outgrow the rest of the world. In order to achieve this, in order to remain competitive, in order to realize our vision of positioning the Caribbean as the world’s most desirable, year round, warm weather destination, we must combine the efforts of all stake-holders, public sector and private sector, those who contribute directly and those who do indirectly, tourism workers and the general population. Our success will depend on strong relationships within the travel trade, solid public relations approaches, sound bonds with our citizens and strong regulatory and policy support at the national level. For it is by our combined efforts that can ensure that tourism benefits our countries, our communities, our constituencies.”









## Efforts focused on Regional Sustainability

The Caribbean Tourism Organization's main objective is the development of sustainable tourism for the economic and social benefit of Caribbean people. The CTO has more than 30 Dutch, English, French and Spanish country members along with a number of private sector allied members. The CTO is headquartered in Barbados and manages offices in New York and London.

Gail Henry, CTO sustainable tourism product specialist, and Carol Hay, CTO director of marketing for the U.K. and Europe, participated in an intensive course in tourism and international cooperation for development offered by the UNWTO.

How does the CTO differentiate the Caribbean experience from that of other sun and sand destinations?

"From a marketing perspective, we look at what's authentic about the Caribbean," Hay said. "It's so important that we look at what makes us unique: our people, our culture, our heritage, our music, and we really focus a lot on that."

Henry said the availability of unique regional products is a possible differentiator from other destinations.

"Because our membership is so diverse, we have to make sure that we promote the full range of products that the Caribbean has to offer," she said. "You find very different destinations such as Guyana, Belize, etc., that are very eco-centric, with eco- and nature-based types of products. And then you have some that are mainly the sun, sea and sand type of product with other natural and cultural heritage."

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