

THE CARIBBEAN: LESS TOURISTS MORE PROBLEMS



The economic crisis and swine flu are definitely among the things that harshly affected the tourism industry in the Caribbean. The Caribbean countries are in need of long term strategies to stay competitive in the world where tourism has become a global product.

As a result of the recent turbulences in the world, **the Caribbean region has been receiving fewer tourists**. According to the October 2009 report by Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) only three countries recorded some growth: Guyana 6 per cent, Jamaica 4 per cent and Cuba 4.5 per cent. Several Caribbean destinations recorded a decline of 10 per cent and more. **Perhaps the hardest hit destinations were Anguilla and the British Virgin Islands** with a decline oscillating between 40 and 45 per cent.

Nevertheless, according to the critics the local governments seem to have no intention to make long term plans for the industry to remain competitive. Despite the unquestionable importance of the sector for the local economies it is still often seen by the governments as a second class industry.

Not being well implemented in long term strategies tourism industry is mostly seen as an unending source of tax revenues. However, this approach could severely damage the Caribbean tourism competitiveness. There are destinations that will be able to provide services to tourists at lower price and as a result the Caribbean tourism industry may decline even more. However, **many people in this region are dependent on tourists as their presence creates jobs and brings foreign exchange**.

Not all politicians in the Caribbean are blind to the challenges. Those who realize the importance of the tourism industry diversify their tourism products and markets, invest in training of tourism employees or support indigenous tourism sector. The experts however warn that there is still much to do to save the industry.

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