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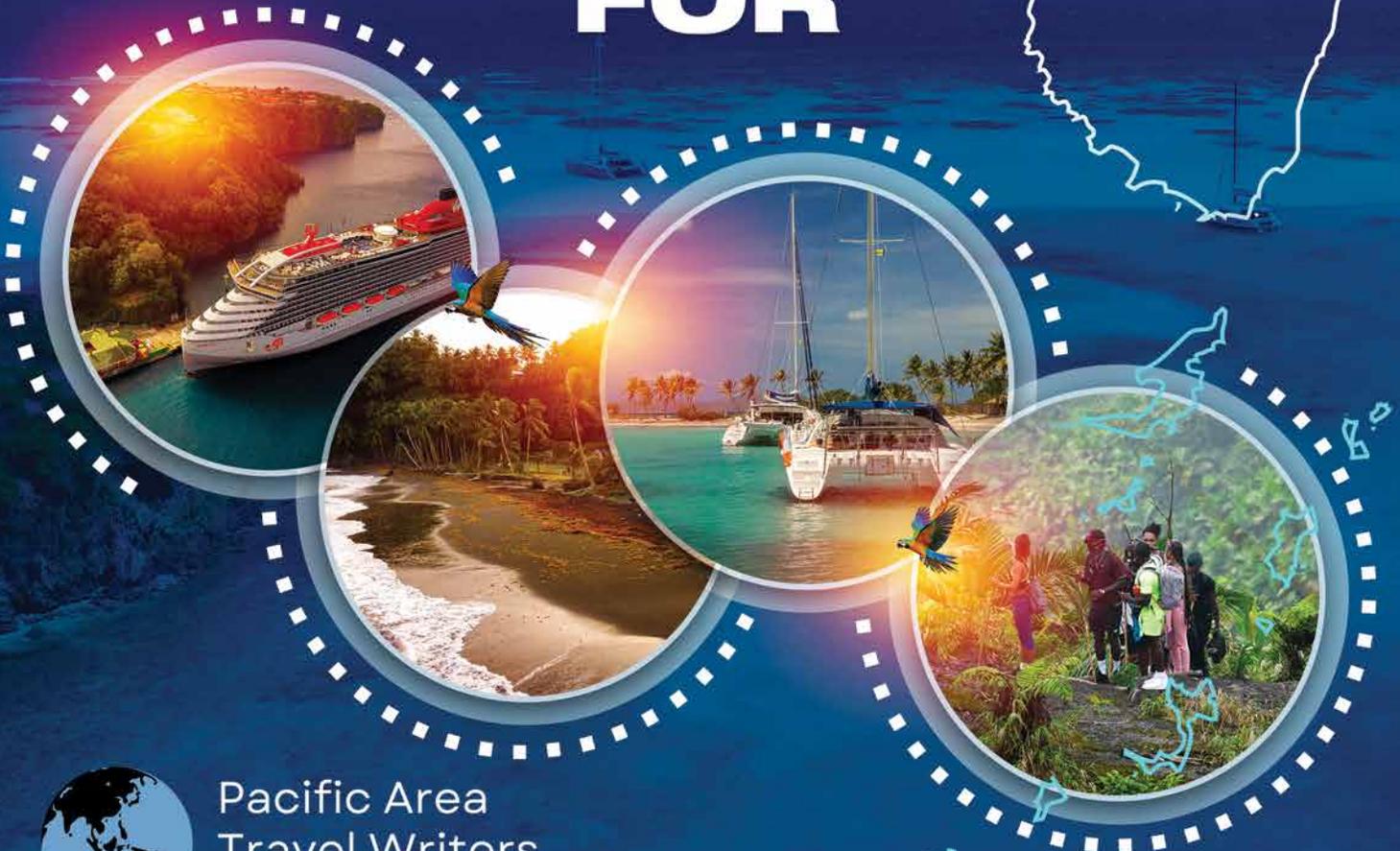
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Sandra Ann Baptiste

### **Associate Editor**

Gail Bindley-Taylor

### **Editorial Associate**

Marguerite Buckmire

### **Communications Specialists**

Kristine De Abreu

Ralph Seeram

Beverley Sutherland-Lewis

### **Travel Writer**

Mark Stevens

### **Sales and Marketing**

Debra Gonsalves

### **Contributing Photography**

CARICOM Secretariat

Caribbean Development Bank  
(CDB)

Caribbean Manufacturers  
Associations

Caribbean Tourism Organization  
(CTO) and member countries

Caribbean Hotel and Tourism  
Association (CHTA)

Sandals Resorts International

Guyana Tourism Authority

Sharon Matthews-Stevens

### **Graphic Designer**

Stephen Mok

### **Caribbean Business & Travel**

is a publication of

### **Caribbean Signature**

[www.caribbeansignature.com](http://www.caribbeansignature.com)

[sabaptiste@ymail.com](mailto:sabaptiste@ymail.com)

### **Cover photos**

World Trade Centre Georgetown  
WTCG Photo

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St. Vincent and the Grenadines  
Sharon Matthews-Stevens

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## **Editorial**

Given the challenging and rapidly changing global trading environment, we decided it was time to throw the spotlight, once again, on the vast potential of the region's manufacturing sector and the scope for much-needed new investment.

The heads of the region's manufacturers associations outline their strategies to boost and diversify production, and to intensify the drive to secure business from new markets within and outside the region.

The message from CARICOM Assistant Secretary-General, Ambassador Wayne McCook, is clear: the region's producers need to do more to capitalize on the opportunities provided through the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), and several regional and international trade agreements negotiated by CARICOM.

The role of the World Trade Centre Georgetown (WTCG) is highlighted.

It is evident that the Guyanese market is regarded as critical for regional growth. Jamaican and Trinidadian manufacturers have recently secured significant new business and not just for exports. They are embarking on joint ventures and sharing their expertise with Guyanese companies.

The Caribbean Manufacturers Association (CMA) and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) play a pivotal role as regional producers adjust to an evolving global trading landscape. We invited the President of the CDB, Daniel M. Best, to outline the support the region's premier financial institution is providing.

In our travel section, the Executive Chairman of Sandals Resorts International, Adam Stewart, makes a strong case for niche manufacturing for the tourism industry, while the President of the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA), Sanovnik Destang, and Grenada's Minister of Tourism, Creative Economy and Culture, Adrian Thomas, identify their priorities.

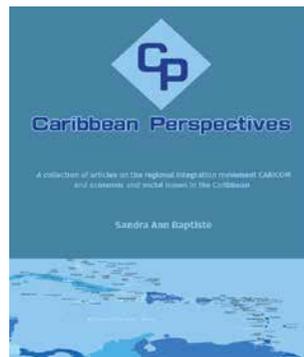
We also inform our readers about additional airlift to Guyana and Barbados, and their new properties, while our travel specialist takes readers on a journey through the captivating islands of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Our aim, as always, is to be a catalyst to spur more investment in the region, and to contribute to strengthening the key foreign-exchange earning tourism industry by encouraging our readers to explore the diverse and awesome Caribbean tourism destinations.



### **Publisher and Editor**

*Sandra Ann Baptiste*



Caribbean Perspectives is a collection of articles by Caribbean Affairs Specialist Sandra Ann Baptiste on regional integration issues, and economic, trade and tourism developments, covering over three decades of CARICOM. It features several Heads of Government, business leaders, organisations and academics.

The book can be downloaded at:

[caribbeansignature.com](http://caribbeansignature.com)

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# Signature Interview

**Daniel M. Best is the 7th President of the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), the Region's sole indigenous multilateral development finance institution based in Barbados.**

**He was a Senior Infrastructure and Development Advisor to the Office of the Prime Minister of Barbados, seconded from his role as Director, Projects Department at CDB. He has over 30 years of experience as a Civil Engineer, Development Banker and Project Management Professional, with a designation from the Project Management Institute.**

**Mr. Best graduated from the University of Durham with a Master of Business Administration and holds a Master of Science in Construction Engineering and Management from the University of the West Indies (St. Augustine).**

**Caribbean Business and Travel (CBT) spoke with the CDB President about the Bank's priorities under his leadership and how the region's premier financial institution is helping governments and the private sector to sustain and increase economic growth.**

**CBT: In your inaugural address to the CDB's annual meeting of the Board of Governors in Brazil, you underscored the need for unlocking the private sector's full potential. Can you provide some examples of how the CDB is helping the business sector in the region achieve this?**

**DB:** We are actively pursuing this through initiatives that expand access to finance, such as the newly approved Trade Finance Guarantee Programme. This facility enables partnerships with regional and international banks to support trade transactions and provide short-term working capital, particularly benefiting MSMEs and exporters. The Bank is also strengthening financial institutions through lines of credit, technical assistance, and institutional support to better serve underserved sectors like agriculture, tourism, and light manufacturing. We are leveraging blended finance solutions with partners like IDB Invest, IFC, and CAF to mobilize private capital for high-impact sectors such as clean energy, agribusiness, and infrastructure. Risk participation agreements are being developed to attract commercial bank financing

while managing risk, especially in smaller economies like those in the OECS.

Beyond finance, we are promoting innovation and competitiveness through the Compete Caribbean Programme, which supports firm-level productivity and ecosystem development. The Bank is also advancing inclusive entrepreneurship by supporting women-led businesses through the SheTrades Caribbean Hub and fostering youth entrepreneurship through policy support, incubator assistance, and capacity-building.

**CBT: All of the region's manufacturers associations have set goals to significantly increase the contribution of that sector to GDP growth.**

**How is the Bank equipping the productive sector to achieve these goals and what is your assessment of the potential of this sector?**

**DB:** CDB is investing in strategic initiatives that enhance quality infrastructure, foster innovation, and support value chain development. The Bank delivers targeted programmes aligned with the Caribbean Industrial Transformation Agenda. One of the ways we do this is



**Daniel M. Best**  
**CDB President**

to work directly with manufacturers to upgrade compliance with international standards and integrate digital manufacturing technologies. Such initiatives position producers to improve product quality and gain access to new and emerging markets. The Bank is exploring new ways to support entrepreneurship in the region's manufacturing sector. With the rise of AI-powered technologies, Caribbean industries now have a real chance to compete on the global stage.

There is tremendous potential within the Caribbean's manufacturing base. To ensure no economy is left behind, regional cooperation over the next decade must focus on expanding entrepreneurship by improving access to finance, technology, and export markets. Sectors such as agro-processing, furniture manufacturing, and renewable energy equipment in this regard, offer strong prospects for inclusive growth and job creation.

**CBT: For companies and entrepreneurs considering the Caribbean as a location for new investment projects, what advantages does the Caribbean have over other regions?**

# Daniel M. Best CDB President

**DB:** The Caribbean has the potential to provide investors with several advantages. For example, the Region is strategically located between major markets in North, Central, and South America, and has good proximity to Europe. This geographic positioning makes it a natural hub for trade and logistics. Additionally, with political and economic stability, the Caribbean can offer a secure and attractive climate for investment. Other advantages, such as a skilled workforce and reliable utilities also make the region conducive for new investment projects. Investment opportunities extend beyond tourism into sectors like agribusiness, renewable energy, ICT, and creative industries, making the Caribbean a diverse and promising destination for entrepreneurs and companies alike.

**CBT: Digital transformation is one of the key pillars of the Bank's 10-year Strategic Plan. What should governments and the private sector be doing and how can the bank assist?**

**DB:** We know that digital connectivity is able to drive development in the Region through reducing transactional costs for doing business and improving efficiency by streamlining and reengineering of processes, and promotion of greater inclusion. When you look at demographics and technology availability and capability in the Region, the digital divide is stark.

CDB is investing in digital readiness—helping firms adopt e-commerce solutions, automate back-office operations, and improve access to digital finance. We have assisted governments with digitalisation as part of their safety net reforms, and interoperability system enhancements, as well as the use of digital technology and in digital transformation within the education



*CDB President Daniel M. Best with Barbados Prime Minister, Hon. Mia Mottley.*

and training system to help build social resilience and promote learning.

**CBT: Can you identify a few major infrastructure projects nearing completion or in the pipeline that will enhance the capacity of Caribbean countries to achieve their production goals and improve efficiency?**

**DB:** We are behind a lot of exceptionally good projects, designed with our stakeholders and responding to major needs. We are proud to be part of the Dominica Geothermal Power Project. Through the Dominica Geothermal Project, the 10MW geothermal plant, supported by the CDB and other partners, will increase the share of renewable energy in the national grid from 25% to 63%. It is anticipated that this will lead to reduced electricity production costs. This shift is expected to improve the competitiveness of local businesses, and attract investment in energy-intensive sectors. Additionally, the project will reduce the fiscal burden of fuel imports, enhance energy security, and create employment opportunities.

In the case of St. Kitts and Nevis, CDB stepped in with a contingent recoverable grant to make exploration possible in Nevis. This major project is helping the country to build its sustainable future - reducing electricity costs and carbon emissions, and increasing energy security. When you think about it, generating more than 100% of the domestic demand is a reality for that country.

The Port Modernisation Project in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is a cornerstone of the country's strategy to achieve its economic production goals by transforming the outdated Kingstown Port into a modern, climate-resilient logistics hub. This upgrade will significantly enhance trade efficiency by reducing vessel turnaround times, increasing cargo throughput, and enabling the accommodation of larger ships, thereby lowering shipping and logistics costs.

The Linden to Mabura Hill Road Upgrade Project in Guyana is a strategic infrastructure investment, transforming a 121 km portion of the critical link between Guyana and Brazil into an all-weather, climate-resilient corridor. This project

will vastly reduce travel time and enhance connectivity between the coastal and interior regions, thereby unlocking access to underutilized land, labour, and resources. Now, that is certainly transformational. The project is part of a South American regional Integration Initiative and will contribute to strengthened trade with Brazil by improving access to markets and services. This inclusive development project is also supporting hinterland communities, ecotourism and Guyana's economic diversification strategy.

**CBT: What impact do you expect the recent seminar at the Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors in Brazil that addressed project implementation delays to have?**

**DB:** Caribbean countries continue to face significant challenges in translating development plans and financing into concrete results. Achieving effective development outcomes is hindered by several factors, including capacity gaps such as limited technical expertise and outdated infrastructure, systems and procedures. Effective implementation of projects is fundamental to driving transformational change in any sector and for achieving CDB's overarching goal of "Reducing Poverty and Transforming Lives through Sustainable, Resilient, and Inclusive Development."

The findings of a major CDB-led study on this topic were aimed at identifying evidence-based solutions, to be implemented in the short, medium and long-term and tailored for each country and the Bank itself. The full recommendations will be available later in 2025.

The main message we wanted to have resonate with everyone participating in the seminar, financial institutions, civil society, the public service, the private sector, financial institutions like ourselves, is that "business as usual" is not an option if the

Caribbean region is to thrive in the face of an ever more complex external environment, the harsh realities of the social challenges we face, and the disaster and climate risks we must adapt to. Each one of us, every day, must hold ourselves accountable for achieving results.

**CBT: The bank's annual meeting in Brazil highlighted the deepening partnerships between the CDB and Latin America. What are some of the opportunities for significantly expanding Caribbean trade and investment with that region?**

**DB:** There are significant opportunities to expand Caribbean trade and investment with Latin America. Through targeted initiatives such as the Enhancing the Belize National Quality Infrastructure project has strengthened its collaboration with CENAM—Mexico's National Metrology Center. This partnership is building Belize's capacity to offer internationally accredited calibration services, improving measurement accuracy and traceability. Beyond this, there are broader strategic opportunities to deepen Caribbean-Latin American trade, particularly in areas such as logistics, energy cooperation, and agro-industrial value chains. Markets like Brazil, Colombia, and Panama offer growing demand for Caribbean products and services, especially in niche areas such as specialty agriculture, creative industries, and professional services. To fully leverage these opportunities, improved transport connectivity and stronger regulatory cooperation between the regions are essential.

**CBT: Given the geopolitical challenges, including tariff and supply chain issues that impact the region, what options do Caribbean governments and the private sector have?**

**DB:** The trade and supply chain

issues could have serious implications for businesses and consumers. So, some of the best options to manage the current wave of trade uncertainty and mitigate the potential risks or recurrence over the near-to-medium term, include actions such as safeguarding (preferential) access to the U.S. market, strengthening intra-regional trade and production integration, and enhancing supply chains and logistical arrangements. CARICOM discussions have also underscored the importance of devising strategies to build trade resilience by improving competitiveness, and establishing a regional emergency competitiveness fund to support both direct investments to improve productivity, standard and compliance, and the private sector in the Region to attain new levels of business competitiveness.

**CBT: What role do you think the CARICOM Private Sector Organization (CPSO) and the Caribbean Manufacturers Association (CMA) should be playing to contribute to achieving sustained economic growth.**

**DB:** The CARICOM Private Sector Organization (CPSO), the Caribbean Manufacturers Association (CMA), and the broader private sector, play an indispensable role in advancing sustained economic growth. Their leadership is critical in strengthening public-private partnerships (PPPs) by fostering collaboration between government agencies, private sector actors, and academia to co-develop and co-finance quality infrastructure solutions that are relevant to industry needs and ensure broad uptake across sectors.

In addition, these bodies should actively shape the design of regional integration and cooperation programs to ensure inclusivity, particularly for MSMEs, women-led businesses, and rural enterprises. By advocating for

tailored support mechanisms such as access to certification, product testing, and technical assistance, the CPSO, CMA, and private sector partners can help ensure that the benefits of regional integration are widely distributed and contribute to a more resilient and competitive Caribbean economy.

**CBT: What projects are being funded to build climate resilience and improve disaster risk management, two issues high on the CDB's agenda?**

**DB:** The Bank is actively financing a wide range of projects to enhance climate resilience, disaster preparedness, and sustainable development. These projects span vital sectors such as transportation, energy, agriculture, water management, education, and coastal protection. Major infrastructure upgrades include road improvements, rural electrification, and sea defenses. Additionally, technical assistance is being provided to improve land use planning, early warning systems, and institutional capacity for climate and disaster risk-informed decision-making, with a strong focus on engaging vulnerable populations, including women and youth.

To further support climate resilience, the CDB is accelerating and scaling up climate action through strategic partnerships and a country-driven approach, ensuring that local communities are involved in designing and implementing adaptation initiatives. The Bank also offers a suite of disaster response financing tools, such as emergency assistance, immediate response loans, and long-term reconstruction funding.

Recognizing the challenges in project implementation, the CDB is working to develop a pipeline of bankable national and regional projects. It has established a project preparation facility to help BMCs overcome

capacity constraints and create viable investment proposals.

**CBT: Earlier this year, the bank forecast that excluding Guyana, the Caribbean economy will expand by 2.5% in 2025 with prospects varying across countries. Is this projection still on track?**

**DB:** Our Real GDP forecast of 2.5% growth for the Caribbean economy in 2025 was developed prior to February 21, 2025, and did not account for the recent escalation in global trade and geopolitical tensions. Since that time, the global economic outlook has weakened, and this is expected to have a dampening effect on regional growth prospects compared to the earlier forecast. The interconnected nature of global trade means that shifts in major economies can have ripple effects on smaller, open economies such as those in the Caribbean.

Given these developments, the Caribbean Development Bank plans to release an updated economic forecast in the second half of the year, which will reflect the evolving global environment and its implications for the region's growth trajectory.

**CBT: In 2024, the CDB approved U.S. \$304 million and disbursed \$323 million in both loans and grants. What are some of the key takeaways from the Annual Meeting in Brazil as it relates to funding?**

**DB:** The meeting highlighted several key takeaways related to funding that reflect the evolving needs and expectations of our clients. One of the central messages was the call for larger, more impactful projects. We need to scale up initiatives to achieve greater economies of scale and scope, which would allow for more efficient use of resources and broader developmental impact. This

shift would signal a move toward more ambitious, transformative investments that can address systemic challenges across sectors. Another major theme was the need for faster implementation. Stakeholders expressed a strong desire for the Bank to accelerate the pace at which projects move from planning to execution, ensuring that the benefits of development financing are felt more quickly by communities. This includes streamlining internal processes, enhancing coordination with national agencies, and improving project readiness.

**CBT: In Brasilia in your inaugural address as CDB President, you highlighted that under your leadership there would be a "Rebirth" of the bank. What can we expect?**

**DB:** Simply put, we will do more, better, faster! The CDB that existed for the past 55 years, will not be the CDB of the future. Analysis conducted by the CDB indicated our clients need financing in excess of \$U.S. 60bn over the next 10 years. All of this cannot be provided by CDB and, of course, other development partners operating in this space will need to contribute. However, CDB must position itself to ensure that it is able to add greater value in the financing ecosystem. My vision of Rebirth is anchored in three pillars – innovate, transform, thrive.

Under the **Innovate** pillar, in our sectors of engagement, we will pioneer cutting-edge solutions and leverage new technologies to address complex development challenges. Under **Transform**, we look inward. We will reshape our processes and systems to enhance efficiency, inclusivity, and sustainability. By thinking differently about how we approach development problems, by relooking how we organize ourselves to deliver, we will contribute to a Region that can **Thrive**.

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# Caribbean Manufacturing Report



Investment Opportunities

## Manufacturing Sector Poised for Significant Medium to Long-term Growth

The Guyana Manufacturing and Services Association (GMSA) is confident that with an expansion in exports, lower electricity rates, major improvements in infrastructure, new investments and attractive incentives, the contribution of the manufacturing sector to the country's economic growth will grow steadily over the next few years.

"A realistic medium-term goal is to grow this contribution to 5-10% of GDP, and in the longer term, through sustained policy support and diversification effort, to achieve 10-20% of GDP," Ramsay Ali, GMSA's Immediate Past President and current President of the Caribbean Manufacturers Association (CMA) said. He noted the Guyanese economy's real GDP grew by 43.6% in 2024, while the non-oil GDP grew by 13.1%. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects the economy will grow by 10% in 2025 despite the unstable global environment.

Ali, the CEO of Sterling Products, said approximately 40,000 persons work in the manufacturing sector, which is critical to the nation's economic development and currently accounts for 5.5% of non-oil GDP. Because Guyana has a labour shortage, he expects manufacturing will increasingly be competing with other fast-growing sectors for skilled labour.

He identified a wide range of investment opportunities in manufacturing in Guyana, driven by rising local consumption, particularly in agro-processing. "Key opportunities exist in processing fruits, coconut, rice, and spices. While these sectors are competitive, there remains significant room for innovation in areas such as packaged and prepared foods, dehydrated snacks, and packaged fruits and vegetables, which is a priority given the region's drive to reduce food imports and strengthen food security."

He observed that the beverage sector has been experiencing growth in both alcoholic and non-alcoholic categories. The CMA President noted that the oil boom has sparked significant

infrastructure investment across roads, ports, and energy, which in turn has generated strong demand for modular fabrication, steelworks, cement, chemicals, paints, and the assembly of service equipment. "Guyana's manufacturing companies are positioning themselves to scale up and supply critical inputs to the country's expanding infrastructure, housing, and logistics sectors. This creates new opportunities for both local and foreign investors to partner in building out the industrial supply chain that supports national development."

The cost of electricity is expected to be significantly reduced due to the Gas to Energy project, from approximately U.S.\$0.24 per kilowatt-hour to between U.S.\$0.08 and U.S.\$0.10 per kilowatt-hour by late 2025 or early 2026.

"There is need for further investment in cold chain and storage infrastructure, including modern refrigeration facilities and warehousing, which are essential to ensuring that products can meet both domestic and export market standards." Guyana currently has four established industrial estates located at Coldingen, Eccles, Belvedere, and Lethem and, in addition to these estates, there are also dedicated agro-processing facilities, including fifteen small-scale agro-processing hubs that support the development of SMEs.

"Together, these facilities provide important infrastructure to foster the continued growth of manufacturing and value-added production across the country."

Major port infrastructure projects are also progressing, including upgrades at Port Georgetown and new deep-water port developments on the West Coast of Demerara at Vreed-en-Hoop. Additionally, Berbice is set to benefit from the development of its own deep-water port. These projects are intended to ease congestion, support containerization, and improve the overall efficiency of Guyana's trade logistics network.

The upcoming Linden-Lethem Road,



**Ramsay Ali**  
**CMA President**  
**GMSA Immediate Past President**

now under active development, will provide a direct link between Guyana's coast and the Brazilian border, greatly enhancing trade and freight movement with northern Brazil. "The new Deep-Water Port in Berbice will significantly expand shipping capacity and is expected to handle larger vessels, reducing the cost of imports and exports. Additionally, the proposed bridge across the Corentyne River to Suriname will create an overland trade corridor, improving connectivity between Guyana, Suriname, and Brazil, and opening access to new markets across all three countries."

Guyana has significantly improved customs processing times and enhanced transparency. In 2024, the Electronic Single Window (ESW) for Trade was launched to further streamline international trade and business processes by providing real-time access to key government services. Through this platform, users can submit applications and track permits, licenses, certificates, declarations, and approvals online.

Identifying some of the key incentives for new investors, Ali said manufacturers and agro-processors benefit from waivers on import duty and VAT for machinery and equipment that are used in production. Companies engaged in manufacturing and exporting products are also eligible for export allowances, which provide deductions from chargeable profits based on the percentage of export sales achieved.

# Guyana Manufacturing and Services Association

New economic projects in Guyana can qualify for tax holidays, including exemptions under the Income Tax (In Aid of Industry) Act, which supports developmental, risk-bearing ventures and new activities introduced in some administrative regions.

Ali said duty-free access within CARICOM is underutilized, but Guyanese exporters are now actively exploring new opportunities within the region. He stressed that reciprocity within the region still requires improvement to fully unlock trade potential.

Manufacturers are making inroads into neighboring markets such as Suriname and Brazil, with support from GMSA and the Guyana Office for Investment (GO-Invest) to facilitate cross-border partnerships and market entry.

“Utilization of existing trade agreements remains underdeveloped. At the national level, the President of Guyana has emphasized the importance of learning Spanish to improve market access in South America. Currently, sensitization sessions are being conducted to raise awareness among businesses, along with assessments of the ease of doing business in these markets.”

Guyanese manufacturers are also working on leveraging opportunities under the CARIFORUM-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), which offers duty-free access to European markets for a range of manufactured goods.

Training efforts within the manufacturing sector include ISO management training, food safety management principles, and good agricultural practices. These programs are being supported by the Guyana National Bureau of Standards (GNBS).

The GMSA is continuing to host Uncapped Marketplace for agro-processors and participate in the AFRI - Caribbean Expo in Grenada and Agro Fest in Barbados. “These platforms provide valuable opportunities for local manufacturers to showcase their products, connect with new buyers, and explore regional and international markets.”

Ali said expositions like GuyExpo provide valuable opportunities for local

manufacturers to showcase their products, connect with new buyers, and explore regional and international markets. “Our vision for GuyExpo is for it to evolve into a multi-sectoral regional expo, combining agro-processing, light manufacturing and oil-services. GuyExpo should also emphasize our manufacturing capacity’s need to meet oil and gas infrastructure and logistics demands.”

Caribbean Export has sponsored GMSA’s participation in a recent Caribbean Investment Forum (CIF) and continues to invite its members to virtual training sessions as they become available. The International Trade Centre (ITC) is supporting GMSA through funding for the development of its e-commerce platform, the Uncapped Marketplace, to promote SME business development and expand market access for local manufacturers.

In addition, the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is currently funding a feasibility study on the potential for expanding furniture manufacturing in Guyana. “The study will help identify opportunities for value addition, improve competitiveness, and guide future investments to strengthen this high-potential subsector.”

Ali reported that the CMA, which groups six manufacturers’ associations in the region, has consistently engaged CARICOM, working through the CARICOM Private Sector Organization (CPSO), on key issues such as the Common External Tariff (CET) reform, non-tariff barriers, and most recently, trade matters related to the United States. These include advocacy around U.S. port fees and the need for reciprocal tariff arrangements. The CMA, which was launched in 2020, is also coordinating the development of regional policy positions to support industrial competitiveness. “One recent example is the creation of a unified



**From left are board member Orson Ferguson, current GMSA President Rafeek Khan, CMA President Ramsay Ali and board member Vasudeo Singh.**

private sector stance on front-of-package labelling standards, aimed at ensuring that regional manufacturers can remain competitive and aligned with evolving international regulations.”

According to Ali, cross-country dialogues have strengthened regional collaboration by supporting a unified position on trade facilitation and the organisation of trade missions. “There has been a noticeable increase in the number of trade missions taking place across the region, helping manufacturers explore new markets and build stronger regional partnerships.”

He also pointed to plans being finalised to reintroduce a regional ferry service to improve maritime links between CARICOM states. “This service will play an important role in facilitating the movement of goods within the region and strengthening intra-regional trade networks. These combined investments in road, port, and ferry services will enable manufacturers to access new markets more efficiently and competitively.”

For potential investors considering a project in the region, Ali stressed that the Caribbean is no longer just a market for consumption, but is a strategic location for production. “We have the raw materials, access to duty-free trade through CARICOM, the EU, and beyond, and an increasingly skilled workforce.”

“As President of the CMA, I welcome investors to partner with our manufacturers. whether in agro-processing, construction inputs, light manufacturing, or renewable energy equipment. We’re ready and we’re open for business.”

# Sterling Quality Generations of trust.



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## Barbados Wants Capital and Expertise to Diversify and Increase Production

Increasing and diversifying production, capitalising on successful regional trade missions and significant improvements in logistics, are some of the strategies for expanding the Barbados manufacturing sector so it can increase the sector's contribution to the economy.

President of the Barbados Manufacturers Association (BMA) Rakeesh Bernard said the association wants to see the sector increase its contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from close to 6% to between 7 to 15%.

"This can be done by increasing the agro-processing aspect, improving value-added food and beverage manufacturing, as well as cosmetics and advancing export diversification by engaging and expanding into new markets, and adopting digital trade and technological platforms," said Bernard, Managing Director of Roberts Manufacturing.

"One of the biggest areas ripe for investment is the agro-processing sector. We are looking not just for capital but also technical expertise," the BMA President stated.

Bernard said there is an urgent need for better shipping links to support the movement of agricultural and processed food products, and to reduce significant losses due to spoilage and shipment delays.

The Barbadian business executive said the larger food and beverage manufacturers have the capacity to supply several products to cruise ships that call at the Bridgetown port. These include flour, oil, biscuits, chicken nuggets and tenders, water and juices.

Bernard said Barbados, which has 10,200 workers in the manufacturing sector, also welcomes investment to manufacture more pharmaceuticals, to expand the high fashion apparel sector, and to produce leather products.

The country is projected to record real

GDP growth of 2.7% in 2025, according to the Barbados Central Bank, which said domestic fundamentals remain solid and should continue to support moderate expansion.

The BMA has led delegations to Guyana and other CARICOM countries, which has opened new opportunities for Barbadian manufacturers. "In Guyana, particularly, there is a strong demand for processed foods, construction supplies, and technical expertise. These missions have helped establish new distribution networks, uncover joint venture possibilities, and assess market readiness for Barbadian products."

"As Managing Director of Roberts Manufacturing, I'm proud to say that we've built a strong regional footprint, currently supplying our products to over 15 countries. Our focus now is twofold: to deepen our presence and strengthen relationships within these established markets, and to ensure we continue to meet evolving customer needs with consistency and quality."

Bernard said potential investors can expect a solid and well-supported environment for manufacturing.

Government incentives include duty-free imports on raw materials, components and production equipment, capital allowances on fixed assets and training grants to upskill workers during the crucial start-up phase. Moreover, exporters can take advantage of duty-free access within the CARICOM markets, preferential trade access to the European Union, Canada, and other markets internationally.

The BMA President, who believes the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) offers a unique platform for expansion within the Caribbean market, said the CARICOM Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) also ensures an integrated, efficient, and supportive environment for businesses operating within the CSME.

"COTED plays a vital role in boosting



**Rakeesh Bernard**  
BMA President

and advancing regional trade by coordinating CARICOM's trade policies, addressing issues, resolving disputes, and ensuring member states agree with standards and regulations."

There are several factories and industrial spaces across the island, and new facilities were recently constructed by Export Barbados (BIDC) at the International Food and Science Centre (IFSC) located in Christ Church, to support small and medium-sized food manufacturers.

"These facilities provide manufacturers with access to commercial kitchens, HACCP compliant facilities and resources, as well as food science lab services, in order to aid businesses upscale their production, to conform and to meet international standards, and also to enter into the export markets."

Bernard said the manufacturing sector in Barbados has strong linkages with the agriculture sector. "One of the most important connections is through agro-processing, where locally grown fruits, vegetables, herbs, and meats are transformed into products such as sauces, jams, juices, frozen meals, seasonings, and snacks. This process not only adds value to agricultural output but, also aids in reducing post-harvest losses."

# Barbados Manufacturers Association

The Ration Pack Initiative of the BMA is another example of this linkage, using excess local produce to create pre-packaged meals for emergencies and institutional use, thereby providing a consistent market for farmers. Additionally, manufacturers work closely with farmers to ensure a steady supply of raw materials, whereby encouraging contract farming and other supply chain partnerships.

Moreover, regional trade initiatives, as well as cold-chain logistics investments, also strengthen this linkage by making it easier to transport perishable goods to processing facilities and to export markets. "Ultimately, the connection between manufacturing and agriculture fosters rural development, improves food security, and supports the growth of a more resilient and self-sufficient economy within Barbados."

On strengthening links with the tourism sector, Bernard said that by supplying locally made products such as toiletries, linens, furnishings, and decor to hotels and resorts, manufacturers help diminish reliance on imports while promoting Barbadian products and culture. As well, food and beverage producers improve the visitor experience by offering authentic local items such as rum, sauces, and baked goods, which are also sold as souvenirs in shops and duty-free outlets.

Various members of the BMA have successfully expanded their business footprint into Central and South American markets, with remarkable results in Panama and Guyana. "Looking ahead, we plan to expand our product portfolio into Panama over the next two years."

While the BMA is collaborating with the CARICOM Private Sector Organization (CPSO) on challenges in the U.S. market, including rising tariffs and rigorous compliance standards, alternative export routes and digital platforms are also being explored.

Regarding enhanced logistics, recent improvements to port facilities at Barbados Port Inc. have focused on increasing and improving efficiency, capacity, and sustainability.

Digital enhancements include the creation and rollout of a Port

Community System (PCS) as well as a Maritime Single Window, which improves cargo traceability, automates documentation, and facilitate smoother interactions among port users and government agencies.

There have also been cruise terminal improvements. "Subsequently these initiatives have aided in reducing delays and improved Barbados' standing as a regional logistics and cruise hub, while supporting environmental and economic resilience goals."

Bernard said there have also been considerable improvements in air transportation for Barbadian products because of new regional and international routes. Suriname Airways now operates a cargo-capable route from Suriname via Guyana into Barbados, which improves and strengthens South American trade ties. Also, Caribbean Airlines launched a new service linking Trinidad, Barbados, and Puerto Rico.

"The development of LIAT 2020 includes various proposals to expand routes to Miami and Panama, which would further integrate Barbados into prominent global air cargo corridors."

Barbados is in the process of positioning itself as a regional transshipment and logistics hub through the implementation of the Seaport Industry (Management, Operations and Development) Bill, which was passed in early 2025. The legislation supports pre-clearance systems, improved home-port provisioning, and motivates vessels to source local supplies.

Barbados is a vital player in the new regional ferry initiative, along with St. Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago. This new ferry system, which is promoted and supported by CARICOM and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB),



**BMA President Rakeesh Bernard at the Roberts Manufacturing booth at the 2025 Trade and Innovation Expo. At centre is Barbados President, Dame Sandra Mason.**

aims to improve the movement of goods and people across the Eastern Caribbean.

"The ferry service is created to include roll-on/roll-off (RoRo) capacity for transporting commercial goods like containers and vehicles, whereby providing an affordable and reliable option for small manufacturers as well as traders."

Bernard said the BMA's June 2025 International Business Conference (IBC) positioned Barbados as a thought leader and innovation hub within the Caribbean. "The conference highlighted the role of manufacturing in addressing global issues such as food security, climate change, as well as logistics and global shipping disruptions. In addition, the launch of the Ration Pack Initiative (RPI) at the Trade and Innovation Expo (TIE) was an important milestone, whereby demonstrating private sector commitment to national development."

Bernard said the Caribbean Manufacturers' Association (CMA) has become a prominent and beneficial advocate for regional manufacturing and has significantly strengthened the capacity of the BMA to influence policy, expand markets, and build resilience in Barbados' manufacturing sector.

"Its role in uniting the region's manufacturers has helped to elevate Caribbean manufacturing as a cohesive and competitive bloc with the ability to respond to global trade shifts, and to seize emerging opportunities across various continents such as Latin America, North America, South America and beyond."

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## Guyana and Suriname Key Markets for Trinidadian Manufacturers

The Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association (TTMA) is aggressively pursuing trade missions, empowering SMEs and laying the groundwork for the production of a wide range of new products as part of its six-year Export Plan.

TTMA President Dale Parson said the association has outlined a bold, multi-pronged strategy to grow Trinidad and Tobago's non-energy exports from TT\$6.2 billion to TT\$10.6 billion by 2030.

"The non-energy sector remains the main engine of growth, up by 19% in 2024 with strong performances in trade and manufacturing. In 2024, the non-energy sector generated around TT\$6.2 billion in exports, reflecting significant growth and investment," said Parson, the CEO of Kaleidoscope Paints.

The TTMA believes that ideally, the manufacturing sector would aim for 25-30% GDP contribution in the medium term, especially with continued government incentives and regional trade expansion.

Parson said the TTMA is working closely with the newly elected UNC Government to ensure the policies set are conducive to non-energy growth locally and for export transformation as Trinidad and Tobago moves away from the energy dependency into non-energy growth.

The association has been focusing on trade missions especially to extra-CARICOM markets, targeting regions like Chile, New York, Canada, the European Union (EU), and Latin America.

The association is assisting smaller producers, SMEs, to overcome barriers like registration, barcoding, and export readiness planning. "One of TTMA's goals is to increase SME participation in exports to foster sustainable and new export growth, not just for local retail and wholesale. We have

engaged a number of legislative bodies to support this SME initiative and create special opportunities and considerations for this sector."

Other key elements of the Export Plan are Policy Advocacy and Incentives, pursuing new "low-hanging" opportunities, Export Classification Clarity, and the construction of a 200,000 square foot facility on 20 acres of land to position Trinidad as the Caribbean's hub for manufactured products, host regional trade shows, CARICOM networking, and investment promotion.

Parson said the "low-hanging" opportunities include an expansion of food and beverage processing sectors to include ready-to-eat meals, health-conscious snacks, and ethnic Caribbean cuisine for diaspora markets. There is also scope to expand pulp, paper and packaging products, cosmetics and personal care, construction materials, renewable energy components, alcoholic beverages and petrochemical derivatives such as the production of plastics and fertilizers.

"These are sectors where Trinidad already has a foothold or the raw materials, knowledge and experience, and logistics to scale quickly."

Parson said Technology (AI) is also central to Trinidad and Tobago's plan to boost non-energy exports by 2030, not just as a tool, but as a catalyst for the transformation across the manufacturing landscape in Trinidad. He noted that technology is driving the export agenda, specifically Digital Transformation of SMEs, Smart Manufacturing & Automation, Data-Driven Decision-Making Innovation and R&D, Digital Trade Infrastructure Initiatives and Cybersecurity & Compliance Technology.

Investment opportunities include food and beverage manufacturing,



**Dale Parson**  
TTMA President

sustainable packaging and paper products, green manufacturing and renewable energy components. "Investors are eyeing solar panel frames, battery assembly and green energy production. These align with regional climate goals and offer long-term growth."

He reported rising interest in botanical-based skincare and wellness products, especially those branded with Caribbean authenticity for export markets.

Parson said Guyana's economic boom, driven by oil and gas, has also created demand and opportunities for construction materials, consumer goods, processed food & snacks and industrial services, areas where Trinidad excels.

"These TTMA Trade missions to Guyana are more than symbolic. They're about building long-term relationships and partnerships, establishing distribution hubs, and exploring joint ventures with Guyanese firms and providing a need to fill a gap in Guyana."

"These inroads aren't just about trade, they're about regional integration, and Guyana - Trinidad collaboration to fill voids needed in Guyana's revenue output," the TTMA President added.

He also pointed to initiatives that have proven to be fruitful. In particular, the Ministry of Trade and Industry,

# Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association

in partnership with TTMA, has supported exploratory missions and diplomatic outreach to countries like Chile, Colombia, Panama, and Brazil. These efforts are aimed at building commercial linkages, distributor networks, and joint ventures.

“Trinidad and Tobago has placed Commercial Officers and Attachés in key Latin American markets to help manufacturers navigate local regulations, identify buyers, and promote trade opportunities.”

Parson said the Guyana and Suriname markets will remain top priorities due to economic growth and geographic proximity and there is also a focus on Colombia, Panama, and the Dominican Republic - Latin American markets with growing demand for processed foods, packaging, and chemicals.

Trinidadian manufacturers have also made “a bold move” into Ghana in West Africa, building on diplomatic ties and cultural connections, and recent trade missions to The Bahamas and Canada have explored opportunities in food and beverage, cosmetics, and logistics.

Parson described the TTMA’s annual Trade and Investment Convention (TIC) as a powerhouse platform for regional and international companies and entrepreneurs because it transforms networking into tangible business growth and provides a gateway to over 35 countries.

“Because Trinidad and Tobago is at the crossroads of the Americas, TIC connects businesses from North, Central, and South America, the Caribbean, and beyond. It’s a launchpad for companies looking to enter or expand in regional and extra-regional markets.

Parson, who stressed that Trinidad’s strategic location, robust logistics, and trade agreements make it a compelling base for regional and international manufacturing, said construction and building materials, downstream petrochemical products and the recycling of steel, paper and tyres are other areas available for investment.

The TTMA President said strengthening the ties between agri-business and tourism in Trinidad and Tobago is gaining momentum as both sectors recognize the mutual benefits of collaboration, especially in boosting rural economies, enhancing food security, and enriching the visitor experience.”

Training and Capacity Building Programs are being developed to train farmers, tour operators, and hospitality workers in agrotourism best practices, customer service, and sustainable production to ensure quality experiences for visitors and viable income for locals.

According to the business leader, Trinidad and Tobago is an attractive destination for business and investment because it offers a compelling mix of strategic, economic, and human capital advantages that go well beyond its low energy costs.

He noted that there is access to over 700 million consumers through numerous trade agreements like CARICOM, the EU-CARIFORUM EPA, and partial scope agreements with Colombia, Venezuela, and others.

The twin-island’s modern ports, road networks, and industrial parks, including eTeck’s Tamana InTech Park, support manufacturing, logistics, and tech-based industries. As well, he noted, a well-established energy and petrochemical base provide raw materials and utilities for downstream manufacturing.

Investment incentives include tax holidays, capital allowances, and R&D grants, there is duty-free importation of raw materials and machinery for approved manufacturers and government support through agencies like InvesTT and ExporTT to help navigate the local landscape.

Parson said many TTMA members are actively leveraging the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) to expand their regional footprint, but there’s still room to grow.

“The CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) is a game-changer



**Dr. Colin Neil Gosine, Parliamentary Secretary; Dale Parson TTMA President and Satyakama Maharaj, Minister of Trade, Investment and Tourism at a meeting at the Ministry.**

for both regional and international investors because it transforms the Caribbean from a collection of small markets into a single, unified economic space, unlocking scale, efficiency, and opportunity.”

Parson emphasised that in light of all geopolitical issues going on globally, TTMA is wide open for business and ventures and is enthusiastic about making Trinidad and Tobago the long-term manufacturing capital of the Caribbean.

He said the CARICOM Manufacturers Association (CMA) plays a pivotal role in transforming the Caribbean manufacturing landscape from fragmented national efforts into a cohesive regional force.

“By promoting collaboration over competition, the CMA helps build integrated supply chains, allowing smaller states to specialize and contribute to larger regional production goals. The CMA is also fostering cooperation in research, training, and technology adoption, helping manufacturers across the region modernize and compete more effectively.”

Parson said, especially in the wake of global disruptions like COVID-19, the CMA emphasizes regional self-reliance, reducing dependence on extra-regional imports, and boosting food and product security.

“In essence, the CMA is about scaling up Caribbean manufacturing through unity, innovation, and shared purpose,” the TTMA President asserted.

## Jamaica Focused on Import Substitution and Trade with Guyana

Jamaica's manufacturing industry stands poised for growth by addressing import substitution, leveraging trade agreements, and improving competitiveness through infrastructure and policy reforms.

Immediate Past President of the Jamaica Manufacturers and Exporters Association (JMEA) Sydney Thwaites said investment opportunities in Jamaica's manufacturing sector continue to grow, particularly in areas that support import substitution.

Thwaites, the CEO of Jamaica Lubricating Specialties Inc., said there is strong potential in the production of goods that are currently heavily imported, from basic food items to packaging materials, cleaning agents, and household products.

"Sectors like chemicals and pharmaceuticals present promising opportunities for new investors, especially in the development of nutraceuticals, cosmetics, and industrial chemicals, where raw material sourcing and regional demand are aligned."

Thwaites said Jamaica's manufacturing sector is driven by the country's high import bill, which stood at approximately US\$7.3 billion in 2024. This highlighted a strong need for import substitution, particularly in agro-processing products like canned callaloo, ackees, hot peppers and herbs.

"The sector can capitalize on growing consumer preference for locally produced goods and leverage Jamaica's strategic geographic location to attract nearshoring investments, especially through Special Economic Zones (SEZs) that offer incentives for manufacturers targeting larger markets such as the USA and Canada." He said domestic exports increased by 11% in 2024, signaling rising competitiveness abroad.

Thwaites said efforts to reduce high energy costs and streamline bureaucracy are enhancing the business environment, encouraging an estimated J\$100 billion investment in manufacturing.

JMEA remains cautiously optimistic about the country's medium and short-term economic outlook. "In the short term, while GDP growth is expected to remain modest as the economy continues to recover from weather-related disruptions, the medium-term forecast of 1.0% to 3.0% growth for FY2025/26 is encouraging. Key productive sectors, particularly Agriculture, Electricity & Water, and Tourism are poised to drive this momentum."

He explained that this offers opportunities to strengthen linkages, increase domestic production, and expand into new markets. Just over 96,000 persons are employed in the manufacturing sector, which represents close to 7% of the total workforce.

The JMEA is advocating reform incentives and tax policy to drive competitiveness as a key element of its five-year Manufacturing Growth Strategy, developed in 2020 in partnership with JAMPRO, the Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce, and other key stakeholders.

The Association is pushing for the modernization of the Productive Inputs Relief (IPR) regime, the Omnibus Incentive Framework and is also working to upgrade industrial infrastructure. The JMEA, which is also trying to secure more land for manufacturing, offers programmes to boost skills development and productivity.

JMEA continues to promote expanded access to affordable financing and is also focused on building export market intelligence by equipping members with real-time data, buyer insights, and trade updates to improve decision-making and market entry strategies.

The JMEA leader said the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) presents a powerful and largely untapped opportunity for Jamaican producers. He noted that in 2024, the region welcomed approximately 34.2 million international overnight tourists. "Coupled with a resident population



**Sydney Thwaites**  
*JMEA Immediate Past President*

of about 16 million, this positions the region as a high-potential, dual-demand market for Jamaican goods and services. The combination of local consumers and a steady influx of visitors creates consistent and growing demand across sectors, particularly for food, beverages, personal care, and lifestyle products."

He is disappointed that, despite these favourable conditions, Jamaican producers are not fully leveraging the CSME's potential. "While the framework facilitates the free movement of goods, services, capital, and skilled labour across member states, many businesses face knowledge gaps, particularly around the trade rules and mechanisms that govern the regional market."

"Strengthening our presence in the regional market is essential for driving export growth, boosting manufacturing output, and enhancing Jamaica's overall economic competitiveness within a rapidly evolving global trade landscape."

Thwaites said investors will benefit from tax holidays that provide exemption from corporate income tax for periods typically ranging from 5 to 15 years, depending on the investment and location. Investors also enjoy import duty exemptions on raw materials, machinery, and equipment essential to manufacturing, as well as accelerated

# Jamaica Manufacturers and Exporters Association

depreciation allowances that enable faster write-offs of capital investments, reducing taxable income. Additionally, there are tax credits available for investments in equipment and employee training programs, further lowering operating costs.

He said Guyana has emerged as the region's breakout growth story driven by the discovery of oil and significant infrastructure investments that are rapidly transforming its economic landscape. The JMEA sees Guyana not just as a high-growth market, but as a strategic partner in advancing the vision of a stronger, more self-reliant CARICOM.

"The three recent Jamaican trade missions to Georgetown were far from symbolic. They were designed to drive business outcomes, expand commercial networks, and position Jamaican companies to support and benefit from Guyana's rapid development," said Thwaites, a two-term JMEA President.

"The results have been both immediate and promising. Several Jamaican firms have already secured contracts, particularly in the construction and technology sectors, where Guyana's infrastructure boom is generating strong demand for materials and services," he added.

The JMEA official reported that in the ICT sector, Jamaican companies have begun forging connections with Guyanese financial institutions, helping to enhance their customer experience and accelerate digital transformation, areas in which Jamaican talent and innovation are well-regarded across the region.

Last year, the JMEA joined the Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce (MIIC) JAMPRO and the Jamaica Special Economic Zone Authority (JSEZA) on a strategic business mission to three key Latin American countries: Colombia, Mexico and El Salvador. "Colombia, in particular, has emerged as a promising destination. Jamaican companies are already exporting non-traditional products like lubricants to this market, signaling that there is a clear appetite for high-quality, niche Jamaican offerings."

Thwaites said given ongoing shifts in global supply chains, Latin American buyers are showing increased interest



*Prime Minister of Jamaica, Hon. Andrew Holness (centre), cuts the ribbon to officially open Expo Jamaica 2025, alongside JMEA President Sydney Thwaites, (left) and Minister of Industry, Investment and Commerce, Senator Aubyn Hill (right).*

in nearshore sourcing options. Jamaica, with its geographic proximity, stable business environment, and strong logistics potential, is well-positioned to serve as a regional manufacturing and distribution hub. "These missions are therefore not just about promotion - they are strategic tools for building long-term commercial linkages, gathering market intelligence, and facilitating partnerships that support Jamaican exporters and contribute to national economic growth."

The JMEA is targeting several key markets in South and Central America, with Panama emerging as a primary focus due to its world-class logistics infrastructure, cultural alignment with Caribbean products, and strategic potential as a gateway for wider regional distribution.

"The response from regional buyers was overwhelmingly positive. Companies secured multiple high-potential leads and held meaningful discussions with distributors from Panama, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Cuba, and Colombia. There was strong interest in products such as Jamaican sorrel beverages, jerk sauces, and herbal cosmetics."

The JMEA has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Dominican Republic's export agency, marking a step forward in formalizing trade cooperation and opening channels for deeper collaboration. Jamaica is targeting several international markets, with a strong

focus on the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, particularly in the food and beverage sector. There has also been notable success in Japan, particularly with Jamaica Blue Mountain Coffee, which remains a top export.

Thwaites said the 2025 Expo Jamaica sent a powerful message that Jamaica is truly an attractive and dynamic investment hub in the Caribbean. Over 250 businesses participated, representing a wide range of sectors, including food and beverages, agro-processing, fashion and textiles, chemicals, and technology. The Expo showcased the remarkable diversity and innovation of Jamaican manufacturing.

"We welcomed over 760 international and local buyers from more than 30 countries, which clearly demonstrates the global interest in our products and the confidence in Jamaica's manufacturing and export potential."

Thwaites said one of the key roles of the Caribbean Manufacturers Association (CMA) is to tackle shared issues such as shipping inefficiencies, which continue to hinder intra-regional trade.

"We are also working together to boost competitiveness by advocating for mechanisms like the Common External Tariff (CET) to support local production, reduce reliance on external markets, and encourage regional value chains. By sourcing inputs within the region and pushing for more integrated trade and production networks, the CMA is helping Caribbean manufacturers become more resilient and globally competitive."



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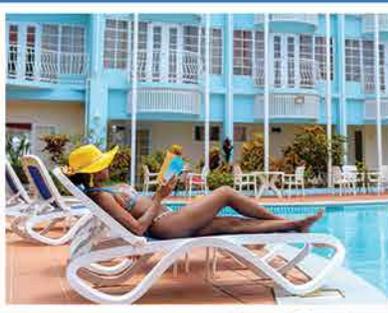
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## Investment Needed for Agro-Processing and Niche Garment Production

Saint Lucia is looking to significantly ramp up agro-processing, particularly in the production of juices, jams, and jellies, and is also seeking investment to expand the production of a wide range of products, including soaps and niche garments.

“By investing in processing infrastructure to pulp and freeze seasonal fruits, Saint Lucia can ensure year-round supply for juice production. This is particularly important given the domestic demand for boxed juices for the school population,” Marguerite Desir, President of the Saint Lucia Manufacturers Association (SLMA) said.

Desir said there is also strong potential for natural soap manufacturing, leveraging the island’s rich supply of coconuts and other botanicals. “The global demand for organic and natural products continues to rise, positioning Saint Lucia to cater to both tourist-driven boutique markets and regional export channels. With relatively low barriers to entry, this subsector is well-suited for small and medium enterprises.”

The SLMA President, who is the Chief Operating Officer (COO) at Harris Paints International Limited, wants to see the manufacturing sector, which currently employs around 2500 persons, increase its contribution to GDP from around 6% currently to 10%.

Saint Lucia’s real GDP growth, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) grew by 3.7% in 2024 and is expected to record growth of 3% in 2025.

Desir said Saint Lucia has already laid the foundation to attract investment in light manufacturing and value-added tech products. Investment

opportunities also exist for chemicals, plastics, and rubber, where demand for packaging and construction materials is expanding, as well as for lumber and wood products, given the increasing need for furniture and construction materials locally and regionally.

She said traditional large-scale garment production is no longer feasible due to shifts in global manufacturing trends, such as increased competition from lower-cost producers in Asia and Central America, limited economies of scale and logistical challenges.

As a result, the focus has strategically shifted toward niche manufacturing opportunities within the garment and textile sector. “One promising area is the production of uniforms, including school uniforms, hospitality wear, and corporate attire. These product lines offer consistent demand within the domestic and regional markets and allow for customization, quality assurance, and shorter supply chains.”

Desir believes there is “significant opportunity” to develop clothing, handbags, and artisanal accessories tailored for the tourism market and the island’s thriving tourism industry creates a ready-made customer base interested in unique, locally-made products.

“Investment needed for this niche segment includes sewing and finishing equipment, design studios and shared production spaces, as well as a skills training program and support for marketing, e-commerce, and export-readiness initiatives.”

Desir said there is a real opportunity to build stronger connections between Saint Lucia’s tourism and agri-business sectors. Hotels and



**Marguerite Desir**  
President  
Saint Lucia Manufacturers Association

restaurants are looking for more locally made products, but many small producers don’t yet have the infrastructure or certification to supply them consistently.

“At the same time, tourists are eager to buy authentic Saint Lucian goods such as handmade soaps, condiments, and crafts. To meet this demand, investment is needed in things like small-scale processing facilities, cold storage, better packaging, and more polished market spaces. These upgrades wouldn’t just boost sales locally, they would also help producers get ready for export and grow their businesses beyond the island.”

Desir advised that Saint Lucia is well-positioned to support the growth of its manufacturing sector with seven industrial estates managed by Invest Saint Lucia. These estates offer factory shells ranging from 4,000 to 32,000 square feet, complete with refrigeration and warehouse facilities.

“They’re strategically located with easy access to distribution ports. Additionally, manufacturers operating within special economic zones can take advantage of tax breaks, duty-free

# Saint Lucia Manufacturers Association

imports, and other government-backed incentives.”

Another encouraging development is new incentives introduced by the government tailored to support the Micro Manufacturing Sector, helping small businesses acquire equipment, packaging, and raw materials to scale production and meet export demands.

These recent measures, according to Desir, build on a long-standing foundation of support that includes land and infrastructure subsidies dating back to the 1970s, and tax and duty exemptions for companies operating within designated zones.

Key benefits for new investors include tax holidays of up to 15 years, import duty waivers on raw materials and machinery, income tax exemptions of up to 100%, waivers on property tax and stamp duties and export allowances that provide tax relief on export earnings for up to 15 years.

She noted several key infrastructure projects that will significantly benefit the manufacturing sector are currently advancing. “Simultaneously, the redevelopment of the Castries and Soufriere ports, under a 30-year PPP with Global Ports Holding, is underway to upgrade berths, expand vendor zones, and enhance logistics, thereby improving import-export capacity. The port redevelopment is targeted for completion by July 2026, with phased rollouts already begun.”

The SLMA envisions a vibrant, competitive, and export-ready manufacturing sector that plays a significantly greater role in the national economy.

The association is keen to increase exports beyond the current 27.3% threshold within the next 3 to 5 years. “This goal aligns with ongoing efforts to diversify away from traditional export routes and respond to U.S. market challenges such as higher tariffs and shifting consumer preferences.”



*Marguerite Desir, Chief Operating Officer (third from right,) during a tour of Harris Paints' new manufacturing facility and flagship retail store at Beterverwaging, Guyana.*

Desir said SLMA members have begun tapping into markets opened through CARICOM's trade agreements, particularly in South America. “We actively support businesses in using these agreements to trade with countries like Guyana, Suriname, as well as Latin American countries, through its CARICOM trade bloc membership.”

Priority products for these markets include alcohol, paint, agro-processing products like condiments, and roofing.

However, one of the key challenges is the availability and cost of shipping, which the regional shipping industry is currently working to address to improve trade flow and market access.

SLMA members have participated in several key regional trade shows, including Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados trade shows, and events in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Grenada, with strong representation from micro enterprises.

Saint Lucian exporters are taking advantage of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), with a growing presence in regional markets such as Barbados, Dominica, Guyana, and Trinidad & Tobago. Key export products include rum, processed foods and beverages, and packaging material.

The Saint Lucian business leader said membership in the Caribbean Manufacturers Association (CMA) gives manufacturers a platform to address common regional challenges, such as shipping constraints and external trade pressure from countries such as the U.S. and China.

“Members benefit from access to regional advocacy, shared best practices, trade missions, and capacity-building initiatives. The CMA also helps harmonize standards across CARICOM and strengthens the region's collective negotiating power in international markets.”

Desir decided to return as SLMA President because of important work she feels still needs to be done. “In my previous term, we made strong progress, manufacturing was brought into sharper focus within national policy, and several of our members, like Baron Foods, achieved major milestones.”

“With growing interest in niche manufacturing, infrastructure improvements underway, and new trade opportunities opening up, I felt the need to continue. I want to help our members take full advantage of these developments, strengthen our voice across the region, and ensure Saint Lucia's manufacturing sector continues to grow in both size and global competitiveness.”

## Dominica to get Assistance from Trinidadian Manufacturers to Grow Exports

The Dominica Manufacturers Association (DMA) is drawing on the extensive experience of Trinidadian manufacturers in its drive to significantly increase production, expand exports and strengthen the organisation.

“Having been inspired by the Trinidad trade mission that visited Dominica, our association has decided to work in collaboration with the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers Association to mentor us through our developmental phase. Towards this end, we have since completed our constitution and strategic plan,” said Robin, the Managing Director of Benjo’s Seamoss and Agro-Processing Ltd.

To further this initiative, a DMA team led by Robin attended the TTMA’s 2025 Trinidad Trade and Investment Convention (TIC), whose mandate is to foster intra-regional and extra-regional trade for regional businesses.

The Trinidad delegation that visited Dominica earlier this year expressed an interest in purchasing root vegetables and processed products, including fruit concentrates, soaps and raw materials.

“Trinidad continues to demonstrate to the CSME, through their annual trade and investment conference conducted globally, exactly what is possible when one thinks big. Moreover, they exemplify how we should operate as a region.”

Dominica’s Gross Domestic Product for 2025 is projected to increase to 4.25% in 2025, up from 3.5% in 2024. Contributing to the 2024 growth was the recovery in tourism, public investment, manufacturing, agriculture and mining.

Robin said several infrastructure projects will contribute to the growth of the manufacturing sector. These include the construction of

an international airport, which is scheduled for completion in 2027 and the expansion and rehabilitation of the Woodbridge Bay Deepwater Harbour to boost and facilitate tourism and cargo expansive related activities.

The construction of a new Marina at Cabrits Marina at Portsmouth, and development of two new main roads, as well as rehabilitation of existing road infrastructure around the island, will also significantly boost the island’s infrastructure.

The DMA President said there is substantial underutilized real estate infrastructure, administered by the government through the Agricultural Industrial and Development Bank in Portsmouth, Grandbay and the Canefield Industrial Estate.

He is advocating for more manufacturing production to be located in these facilities. In addition, there are several government and privately owned properties which are available, which he feels should be acquired to expand manufacturing.

The island’s main exports include soaps, seamoss beverages, sand, cigarettes, rum, furniture, water, herbal teas, coconut water and agricultural produce, including plantains, dasheen, cucumbers, mangoes, yams and pineapples.

Robin said investment is needed for the production of herbal teas, beverages, condiments and sauces, pharmaceuticals and hair and skin products.

There is also scope to increase furniture, craft items, and to produce packaging materials, including through joint ventures.

Robin said investment is also needed to expand the production of bottled water for both domestic consumption



**John Robin**  
DMA President

and exports. “We also have an abundance of clean, fresh and salt water, coupled with a pristine all-encompassing natural environment. That’s why we are known as the nature island of the Caribbean.”

Robin said various packing houses have been constructed and are engaged to a limited extent in packaging fresh produce for export. “However, the management and marketing mandate, budget focus and strategy need to be revitalized. Similar proposals are being considered for the setting up of processing units to where various manufacturers can have their products processed according to international standards and thereafter exported to various markets – locally, regionally and internationally.”

The DMA President said there is a high level of food imports in Dominica and the rest of the region, which can be reduced through collaboration between governments and the private sector, and with the necessary incentives and infrastructure. He stressed that a new mindset on local versus foreign goods is needed.

Robin believes the island’s location in the center of the Caribbean, deep and secure port facilities, and a favourable government fiscal

# Dominica Manufacturers Association

incentive programme are some of the reasons why potential investors should consider Dominica for new manufacturing projects.

Other advantages include regular shipping from Dominica to and from most Caribbean islands, North America and South America, as well as Europe and other international markets. Another asset is the educated and trainable workforce. The Dominican entrepreneur said there are numerous possibilities to expand exports to North and South America. To achieve this, the DMA is addressing issues such as economies of scale, supply chain logistics, compliance, certification, cost of production and innovation.

“Dominica is the ideal location for manufacturing and processing that would make use of its bountiful natural resources and skilled workforce,” Robin stated.

The Government offers duty-free concessions on imported machinery and equipment, packaging and manufacturing inputs through its fiscal incentive programme. Foreign investors are entitled to 100% repatriation of profits, no capital gains tax and tax holidays up to 10-20 years.

The Dominican entrepreneur said there is tremendous potential for backward and forward linkages between agriculture and manufacturing in the Dominica ecosystem. Robin said his company, Benjo’s Seamoss, which employs organic farming practices, is an example of this. The company is the largest drinks exporter from Dominica, with most of the product being shipped to 20 countries in the Caribbean and worldwide.

Robin said Dominica can take advantage of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) by scaling up its manufacturing to allow it to access the markets of all member states and benefit from the advantage of the duty-free access available.



*Pictured during a Trinidad trade mission to Dominica are from left DMA President John Robin, Permanent Secretary Gloria Joseph of Dominica and Trinidad and Tobago Minister of Trade and Industry Senator Paula Gopee-Scoon.*

“As one of the six current and founding members of the Caribbean Manufacturers Association, Dominica can channel its concerns to implement policy changes through the available channels of CMA, followed by the CARICOM Private Sector Organization and the CARICOM Council for Trade and Economic Development – COTED.”

The DMA will also be trying to use the provisions in the various trade agreements to secure funding through the European Development Fund (EDF) to retool and revitalize its manufacturing sector.

On linkages with the tourism industry, he said the DMA plans to reopen its one-stop shop, where practically all products manufactured in Dominica can be purchased by tourists as well as the general public. “Such products include local basketry from the indigenous Caribs known as carenagos, art and craft, paintings and a host of highly sought-after locally manufactured products.”

The DMA’s participation in the 2025 Barbados trade expo afforded the opportunity to showcase several of the products manufactured in Dominica. “Similarly, it simultaneously allowed Dominica to see the numerous offerings presented by the Bajan innovators. Most importantly, several invaluable connections were established, which will serve to significantly increase the volume of

trade between both of our countries,” Robin reported.

He feels the CMA is important because it encourages and promotes intra-OECS and CARICOM trade and its members collaborate on regional and international related trade-related issues.

“CMA is serving as a formidable voice to advocate on behalf of manufacturers in the region. The association will also empower CSME manufacturers and traders with knowledge and skills to enable them to adopt and adhere to sound global quality standard requirements.”

Robin said the regional association will also serve as an educational platform to educate manufacturers and the private sector on a whole, on emerging developments, laws and trade conventions, critical for effective operation in a highly competitive, globalized environment.

As DMA President, he was instrumental in registering the CMA with the CARICOM Private Sector Organization (CPSO) and establishing a manufacturing committee within the CPSO.

Robin said the CMA should assist the smaller manufacturing associations with securing funding, technical assistance, and training to help their secretariats to be more effective, increase their membership, and equip them to provide more assistance to manufacturers to increase their production and exports.

# World Trade Centre Georgetown Forging Regional and Global Trade Alliances

The World Trade Centre Georgetown (WTCG) has been strengthening ties with a number of regional and international organisations in the lead up to its official launch in October.

The building that houses the Centre in downtown Georgetown was commissioned by Guyana's President, His Excellency Irfaan Ali, in June.

Discussions held in 2025 include talks in Barbados with Ambassador Wayne McCook, CARICOM Assistant Secretary-General, CARICOM Single Market and Trade, officials of the Shridath Ramphal Centre for International Trade Law, Policy and Services, and The West Indies Rum and Spirits Producers Association (WIRSPA).

Discussions were held recently with a 45-member group organized by Procolombia.

A WTCG delegation participated last year in Caribbean Legislative Week in Washington D.C., which included meetings with members of Congress and the U.S. State Department.

WTCG Executive Director Wesley Kirton said there have been several follow up discussions in 2025 with World Trade Centers in Miami, Florida, Santo Domingo and Bangalore, India. The meetings centred mainly on market access and the regulatory framework for exports from Guyana such as Phyto-sanitary measures.

Kirton noted that WTCG, with Demerara Distillers Limited (DDL), and its subsidiaries in the DDL Group, is connected with a network of World Trade Center Association's more



President Irfaan Ali speaking at the commissioning of the World Trade Centre Georgetown.

than one million members across more than 100 countries. The WTCG is chaired by DDL Executive Chairman Komal Samaroo.

Priorities for 2026 include sensitization seminars on current trade issues and training programmes designed to help Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) improve operations, standards, profitability, and sustainability.



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Admin:  
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<https://www.wtcgeorgetown.com>

# MANUFACTURING INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Country	Opportunities Include:
<p><b>Guyana</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.guyanainvest.gov.gy">https://www.guyanainvest.gov.gy</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Processing fruits, coconut, rice, and spices</li> <li>• Packaged and prepared foods, dehydrated snacks, and packaged fruits and vegetables</li> <li>• Cold chain and storage infrastructure, including modern refrigeration facilities and warehousing</li> <li>• Modular fabrication, steelworks, cement, chemicals, paints, and the assembly of service equipment</li> </ul>
<p><b>Trinidad and Tobago</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.investt.co.tt">https://www.investt.co.tt</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ready-to-eat meals, health-conscious snacks, and ethnic Caribbean cuisine for diaspora markets</li> <li>• Renewable energy components; alcoholic beverages</li> <li>• Pulp, paper and packaging products</li> <li>• Recycling Plastics; PET, HDPE into renewable plastic resins</li> <li>• Construction materials, petrochemical derivatives such as the production of fertilizers</li> </ul>
<p><b>Jamaica</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.dobusinessjamaica.com">https://www.dobusinessjamaica.com</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agro-processing, specifically for ackee, breadfruit and coconut</li> <li>• Packaging materials</li> <li>• Cleaning agents and household products</li> <li>• Industrial chemicals</li> <li>• Nutraceuticals and cosmetics</li> </ul>
<p><b>Barbados</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.investbarbados.org">https://www.investbarbados.org</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agro-processing products</li> <li>• Food and beverage manufacturing, including for cruise passengers</li> <li>• Cosmetics and pharmaceuticals</li> <li>• High fashion apparel</li> <li>• Leather products</li> <li>• Medical Devices</li> </ul>
<p><b>Saint Lucia</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.investstlucia.com">https://www.investstlucia.com</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Production of juices, jams, and jellies; seamoss products</li> <li>• Natural Soaps from coconuts and other botanicals</li> <li>• Niche garments including school uniforms, hospitality and corporate attire</li> <li>• Packaging materials</li> <li>• Chemicals, plastics, and rubber</li> <li>• Lumber and wood products</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dominica</b></p> <p><a href="https://www.investdominica.com">https://www.investdominica.com</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Herbal Teas</li> <li>• Condiments and sauces</li> <li>• Beverages and bottled water</li> <li>• Pharmaceuticals</li> <li>• Furniture and Craft Items</li> <li>• Hair and skin products</li> </ul>

**Ambassador Wayne McCook is the Assistant Secretary-General, CARICOM Single Market and Trade. He heads the Directorate that is responsible for the CARICOM Single Market and Trade, including trade negotiations.**

**He is a former Jamaican Diplomat who served as Ambassador to the People's Republic of China, and as Permanent Representative to the United Nations' Offices at Geneva and the World Trade Organisation where he chaired the Rules Negotiating Group.**

**Caribbean Business and Travel (CBT) spoke with Ambassador McCook about the CSME, regional and international trade agreements, which were negotiated by CARICOM and other trade-related initiatives.**



*Ambassador Wayne McCook*

**CBT: Barbados Prime Minister Hon. Mia Mottley has stressed that the resumption of the full implementation of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) is central to the region's mission to advance regional unity and development. Please explain the status and key benefits of the CSME.**

**WM:** The goal of the CSME is to promote growth and development in the Caribbean Community through the creation of a single economic space that allows for the Free Movement of Goods, Capital, Services, CARICOM Nationals and the Right of Establishment. These are the five core regimes of the CSME. The four pillars of CARICOM regional integration are Economic Integration; Foreign Policy Coordination; Human and Social Development; and Security.

The CSME delivers benefits by providing a larger preferential market and economic space that facilitates integration of production, investment, movement of goods and services and establishment of businesses. The free movement of skills has supported the movement of talent within the region to meet the demands of regional businesses and provide expanded employment opportunities for Community Nationals.

Free Movement in the Community has

been given a significant push with the agreement by four Member States to implement full free movement among themselves from October 1, 2025. These Members are Barbados, Belize, Dominica and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. At the same time, the Free Movement of Skills regime, which will continue for all Members for some time, has been expanded to include Aviation workers as a thirteenth category.

Significant steps to advance regional production integration are bearing fruit through the 25 by 25 plus 5 Initiative which will be complemented quite soon by the long-awaited CARICOM Industrial Policy 2030, which was presented to the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) in June.

**CBT: Can you sum up how the CSME benefits the region's exporters and are they taking full advantage of it?**

**WM:** The integration of production linking inputs from different Member States is taking place and delivering benefits for primary and intermediate producers in the region. There is significant room for the expansion of these arrangements through innovation and investments. These initiatives will benefit from the Free Movement of Skills and

Rights of Establishment that are well established under the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, as well as the preferences and flexibilities in the preferential trade regime that underpins the CSME. The benefits are augmented by the network of trade arrangements such as the EU and U.K. EPAs, the DR and Costa Rica FTAs, and CARIBCAN and the CBI, which expand preferential market access to reach a combined market of over one billion people. The full activation of the CARICOM Interactive Market Place and Suspension Procedure (CimSuPro), a dedicated platform connecting regional producers, manufacturers and consumers, will support regional companies seeking to source and supply goods across all sectors more efficiently.

**CBT: How is Trade in Services being addressed in both the Single Market and Bilateral Agreements?**

**WM:** While services can be traded freely across the Community, there are regulatory requirements that have to be met in different jurisdictions within the Region. Work to harmonise requirements and facilitate mutual recognition, creating a single, seamless space for Services is a regional priority.

CARICOM's bilateral agreements established with the EU and the U.K.

# CARICOM TRADE AGREEMENTS

have chapters addressing trade in services.

CARICOM and the U.S. have also established a Joint Work Programme on Trade in Services, which aims to identify opportunities for expanding services trade with the U.S. and to address barriers that limit growth in this area. CARICOM and Canada have recognized the importance of their services sectors in the ongoing bilateral discussions regarding deeper cooperation in trade and economic relations. CARICOM is preparing for future work that could add services trade to the scope of the Costa Rica and DR agreements.

## **CBT: Why is the Single Market important for potential investors who are looking to provide capital for projects in the productive sector in the Caribbean?**

**WM:** An enlarged integrated market for goods and services within the CSME, further expanding market access to wider markets through bilateral trade agreements, provides investors with greater opportunities to enhance returns from investments. Opportunities for integration of production across the value chain are enhanced through the enabling environment provided by the single market.

The progressive harmonisation of standards and business practices across the CSME reduces the burdens and risks of cross-border business activities.

## **CBT: Can you update us on discussions to enhance energy security in the region?**

**WM:** The Ministers responsible for Energy will meet later this year to address key strategic priorities relating to Regional Energy Security. The CARICOM Secretariat and



*From left, Ambassador McCook, CARICOM Secretary-General Dr. Carla Barnett and the Barbados Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade Hon. Kerrie Symmonds.*

the Caribbean Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (CCREEE) are also developing the Regional Energy Security Roadmap and Strategy. This is part of a broader initiative to enhance energy security across the region by increasing energy production, lowering energy costs, and boosting resilience.

## **CBT: Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) have been a major impediment to increasing intra-regional trade. What action is being taken to reduce or eliminate these?**

**WM:** The July 2025 CARICOM summit mandated a Ministerial team led by the Ministers responsible for Trade of Barbados, Jamaica, and St. Lucia to lead an expedited effort to identify NTBs on which urgent action will be taken by the Community. This will build on progress already made through the adoption of the agriculture food and health safety policy, now being implemented to facilitate enhanced preparation and marketing of products to ensure they are safe and in keeping with standards for public consumption. The regional electronic agriculture market information system is now being deployed to improve

information sharing regarding agriculture supplies across the region. The region is also moving to launch a pre-clearance mechanism that allows for improved efficiency in trading in October this year.

The CARICOM Regional Trade Facilitation Task Force, guided by the WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation (TFA), is also advancing work to streamline trade and customs procedures, reduce barriers and improve efficiency across the regional trading system.

## **CBT: Why it is timely for producers and businesses in the region to be aware and take advantage of the various CARICOM accords?**

**WM:** Of the seven trade agreements signed by the region, five are within the hemisphere. This probably reflects the region's interest in developing its trade relationships with its developing country neighbours. As many of these were negotiated some time ago, the scope of products is limited to those that were of priority interest at the time. CARICOM producers have not taken full advantage of the market access opportunities provided by these agreements and dedicated

consultations to address this are now underway.

An Expert Working Group will also be focusing on studies for key South-South potential partners, which could be engaged as part of this strategic move to diversify trade partnerships.

**CBT: Regarding the uncertainties arising from the America First policy and changing tariffs, what advice can you give to regional producers exporting to that market?**

**WM:** The Community, working closely with the CARICOM Private Sector Organisation (CPSO) and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), has examined the impact of the current measures and concluded that while the baseline tariff does not place CARICOM producers automatically at a disadvantage to the Rest of the World, it will have a negative impact on some of our key exports in areas such as seafood, rum and sugar. CARICOM will seek to secure the best possible market access terms for entry into the U.S. market. This will begin with an effort to restore Caribbean Basin Initiatives (CBI) benefits recognizing, that the U.S. has formally requested a WTO waiver for its extension.

Also being addressed is the impact on the Caribbean of proposed measures to address Chinese Shipping and Shipbuilding, which led to exemptions and modifications that safeguarded the region's interests.

CARICOM's further engagement with the U.S., which maintains a significant trade surplus with the region, is being guided by the recommendations of the Prime Ministerial Subcommittee on External Trade Negotiations.

**CBT: Now that a trade agreement with Canada that entails reciprocal duty-free access is no longer**

**on the table and a new dialogue has started, what can regional producers exporting to Canada and Canadian companies interested in starting new ventures in the region expect?**

**WM:** Canada continues to provide the region with preferential access to its market for many products unilaterally, covered by a waiver from the World Trade Organisation. Under CARIBCAN, several important tariff lines are eligible for duty-free exports to Canada.

In response to recent geopolitical developments, Canada has moved to reduce intra-provincial barriers to trade within Canada and is actively seeking to diversify its trade relations. At the CARICOM Canada Summit in October 2023, and in the ongoing bilateral discussions in the framework of the CARICOM-Canada Strategic Partnership, CARICOM and Canada have stressed commitment to enhancing co-operation on trade and investment.

**CBT: The Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union was completed in 2008. What are some of the benefits exporters from the region can continue to enjoy and some of the issues being considered for the current review of this accord?**

**WM:** Access to the European market for goods produced in the region is now fully duty-free and quota-free, except for Arms and Ammunition. The rules of origin that determine which products qualify for duty-free treatment, allow for cumulation with products from EU States (including the OCTs), CARIFORUM States, neighbouring States (Central American States, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, and Venezuela) and any ACP State with which the EU has an appropriate agreement. The European

Market is an important destination for rum, alumina, petroleum, cocoa, and condiments and seasonings.

Regional exporters have not been able to take full advantage of the benefits of the EPA. The ability to source quality inputs and products from neighbouring States, or from within the EU, at low cost, add value within the region and export duty-free into the EU is still a significant opportunity. In addition, the development cooperation and technology transfer provisions, and improved access for service providers in key sectors of interest, for example, the provision of business services, are waiting to be exploited.

The main issues of concern with the agreement are converting market access into a meaningful market presence, and the preference erosion for the region's traditional agricultural exports as a result of the European Union concluding trade agreements with third countries. There is also low awareness of EPA opportunities both in the EU and CARIFORUM.

**CBT: Please provide some feedback on the CARIFORUM agreement with the United Kingdom.**

**WM:** The CARIFORUM Agreement with the United Kingdom is a mirror of the Agreement with Europe, as it was in effect negotiated when the U.K. was still a part of Europe.

While regional producers have better transport arrangements with the U.K. than with continental Europe and are more familiar with the quality requirements of the U.K. market, we still have not seen the growth in the value of trade that we could potentially achieve. Many of the challenges and opportunities are the same as with our EPA with Europe.

# CARICOM TRADE AGREEMENTS

**CBT: CARICOM has agreements with South and Central American countries. Can you list the key elements of the trade accord with Colombia and how this is being utilised?**

**WM:** Key provisions of the Agreement with Colombia address trade liberalization, rules of origin, technical standards, trade promotion and financing, services, transportation, and unfair trade practices. Additional articles cover economic and technical cooperation, private sector engagement, and dispute resolution. Colombia is the fourth-largest economy in Latin America, worth over a trillion U.S. dollars at purchasing power parity. There is significant room to grow our trade with that market.

**CBT: Are we taking advantage of the CARICOM-Costa Rica Trade Agreement?**

**WM:** The Free Trade Agreement between CARICOM and Costa Rica allows for free trade or preferential access for a wide range of products, excluding sensitive goods. Most tariffs have been eliminated or phased out. However, duties remain on certain items, including meat, dairy products, some fruits and vegetables, beer, rum, and a few manufactured goods such as Portland cement, candles, and some furniture.

CARICOM has consistently run a trade deficit with Costa Rica and has not fully capitalised on the agreement's potential.

**CBT: What is the scope of the reciprocal Free Trade Agreement with the Dominican Republic?**

**WM:** This accord aims to strengthen economic ties through the liberalization of trade in goods and services; the promotion and facilitation of investments; trade

financing and economic cooperation; agreements on double taxation and government procurement; the protection of intellectual property rights; and support for private sector development.

There are phased tariff reductions, and based on the terms of the agreement, some CARICOM States (LDCs), whose exports benefit from preferential treatment in the Dominican Republic market are not required to grant preferential access to products originating in the Dominican Republic on entry into their territory.

**CBT: How is the CARICOM - Cuba Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement being utilized?**

**WM:** The Agreement with Cuba addresses a wide range of subjects, including the promotion and expansion of trade in goods and services; the establishment of financial arrangements to support two-way trade; the progressive liberalization of trade in services; the encouragement and protection of investments; the facilitation of joint ventures and other economic cooperation activities.

Despite the broad scope of the Agreement, only the tariff liberalisation provisions are currently being implemented. Under these provisions, both CARICOM and Cuban exporters benefit from preferential access for specific products. Similar to the DR and Costa Rica Agreements, CARICOM's Less Developed Countries (LDCs) are not required to extend these preferences to Cuba.

**CBT: For many years, efforts have been made to establish a CARICOM Investment Code to provide a level playing field when it comes to investors doing**

**business in the region. Is this still on cards and what are the anticipated benefits?**

**WM:** Yes, we are working on an investment code to accompany an updated CARICOM Investment Policy. The Code will simplify and standardize the processes for approvals when investing across the Community, while at the same time safeguarding the rights of investors. In the end, there should be measures in place that incentivize intraregional investment, promote foreign investment flows, and allow CARICOM businesses to pursue strategic alliances, grow and achieve the scale they need to eventually become internationally competitive.

**CBT: In terms of significantly improving air and sea transportation of goods within and outside the region, what initiatives in this regard are being addressed in collaboration with the CPSO?**

**WM:** Cooperation in regional air transport has been enhanced through the operationalization of the Multilateral Air Services Agreement (MASA). Twelve Member States have signed and ratified the Agreement. This Agreement provides the regulatory framework within which a CARICOM air carrier can provide air transport services between Member States.

At the moment, eight air carrier services and one helicopter service have been designated under the MASA.

On maritime transportation, work is continuing by a public-private sector team on the establishment of the Southern Caribbean Intra-Regional fast Ferry Service.

Sandals

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# Sandals Chairman: Vast Opportunities for Niche Manufacturing for Hospitality Sector

By Beverley Sutherland-Lewis

The Executive Chairman of Sandals Resorts International Adam Stewart believes there is tremendous scope for niche manufacturing to provide a range of products to supply the region's hospitality industry.

"The opportunity for niche manufacturing in the Caribbean is massive. We would love to see our bathroom amenities come in locally made refillable bottles, scented with Caribbean botanicals and that our takeaway containers, straws and utensils are biodegradable and manufactured just down the road," Stewart told Caribbean Business & Travel.

He said the coffee grounds that would otherwise be considered waste can be transformed into clean-burning biofuel. "This is the circular economy in motion - waste is no longer waste, but a resource waiting to be harnessed. If we rethink our approach as a region, secure investments in the opportunities for sustainability, we can turn these ideas into reality."

Stewart underscored the need for a collaborative regional effort to unlock the potential of niche manufacturing. "First, governments can incentivise sustainable product innovation by providing grant funding and simplified licensing for eco-manufacturers. Second, the tourism industry must take the lead in aggregating demand and creating consistent offtake agreements that make local manufacturing financially viable. Finally, technical support and training programmes can help upskill artisans and small producers to meet hospitality standards."

The Jamaican business executive believes there is incredible potential for new partnerships that will allow the private sector, governments and entrepreneurs to come together and build a green supply chain that delivers world-class experiences while

generating real economic value at home.

Stewart observed across the region, the need to strengthen the link between tourism and agri-business is growing exponentially. "At Sandals, we don't just serve food, we serve heritage, pride, and a better tomorrow. Our central procurement team works closely with farmers, cooperatives, and government ministries of agriculture, and has set the example of the benefits of sustainability by investing in logistic solutions that make regional trade more seamless and efficient."

To further exemplify the cross-linkages and sustainability practices, Stewart alluded to Sandals' partnership with the Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations (CNFO), which spans 17 countries. This partnership builds capacity within the fisheries sector, enhancing market access for small-scale fishers, and promoting sustainable livelihoods.

"The Sandals Foundation supports farmers with training in land husbandry, composting, and marketing, promoting food security and economic independence while ensuring the Sandals kitchens remain stocked with the freshest local ingredients. This is what we call the Sandals Effect - tourism that builds rather than extracts," Stewart explained.

The Sandals Chairman feels the Caribbean holds unmatched potential, not just as a leading destination for leisure, but as a global example of how tourism can drive sustainable development, cultural preservation, and economic transformation.



Sandals Resorts International Chairman Adam Stewart (at left) with Jamaica's Prime Minister Hon. Andrew Holness at the Sandals Jamaica Love Tour 2024.

He suggests the potential in manufacturing, circular economies, strong community linkages, and world-class service are rooted in regional pride.

In Jamaica, the Sandals group has already reached their target of sourcing at least 70% of their products locally. The goal is to do the same in the other countries in which Sandals operates. He is confident that with investments and support from local governments, this is achievable across the Caribbean in the very near future.

Stewart contends that a resilient Caribbean economy is built on partnerships between governments, investors, entrepreneurs, and the private sector and highlighted the importance of bold, forward-looking investment and collaboration to develop a regional green supply chain that elevates local artisans, creates jobs, and delivers unforgettable guest experiences rooted in authenticity.

"Our 'Made of Caribbean: Sourced by Sandals' program is a prime example of how strategic procurement can deliver local economic benefits while enriching the guest experience. This, too, is an example of local sustainability of products and of people."

He sees investment in people as critical as investment in infrastructure and sustainable efforts, and paramount in building loyalty.

“The Sandals Corporate University has had a tremendous impact on both our team and guest experience. By investing in continuous training, certification and leadership development, we’ve created a workforce that is not only highly skilled but genuinely passionate about service.”

The SCU training has created a culture of continuous development, produced top-tier professionals and future leaders, and boosted the competitiveness and sustainability of tourism across the Caribbean.

The university offers a comprehensive employee experience that goes beyond training to create environments where team members feel valued, supported, and excited about their futures.

The employee experiences focus on wellness, engagement, recognition, innovation, and communication.

At the February 2025 CARICOM Heads of Government meeting in Barbados, Stewart offered to share the expertise of the Sandals Corporate University (SCU) to train tourism industry workers throughout the region.

He noted that Sandals is more than a brand. “It’s a legacy forged in the heart of the Caribbean and carried forward by people who care deeply, people who live and work in the very communities our success depends on. For us, success is measured not just by occupancy rates, but by the well-being of the communities we serve and where our team members raise families, find purpose and build futures.”

Sandals has demonstrated its belief in the Caribbean brand and potential of the sector by further investing in the development of Sandals resorts throughout the Caribbean.

The investment of U.S. \$1 billion to expand the Beaches brand across Jamaica, the Bahamas, Barbados and Turks and Caicos demonstrates his commitment to and his faith in the Caribbean’s future. “Each of these destinations offers unique opportunities to redefine the all-inclusive family vacation experience.”

In Jamaica, the Caribbean resort conglomerate is building Beaches

Runaway Bay, featuring over 400 suites and villas designed for large, multi-generational families. Beaches Negril has been expanded with the new three-story Firesky Reserve Villas and the Eventide Penthouse Collection, designed to accommodate up to 18 guests.

In the Bahamas, the project which is underway will transform Sandals Emerald Bay into a family-friendly Beaches resort, bringing access to the natural beauty of Exuma.

In Barbados, the introduction of a vibrant “Main Street” concept to enhance the resort experience is underway, while in Turks & Caicos, the expansion of Treasure Beach Village deepens the presence of Sandals in those islands.

Stewart pointed to the strength of “Brand Caribbean” as a collective identity that celebrates the rich diversity of the Caribbean while presenting a unified message to the world.

“I’m more encouraged than ever that we are taking meaningful steps toward elevating brand Caribbean, not just as individual islands, but as a unified, world-class region. A stronger regional partnership, cohesive marketing efforts, strong investment in the region and a shared recognition that sustainability and cultural preservation are central to tourism expansion.”

“Tourism is more than an industry. It’s the heartbeat of the region. When we collaborate as one, we don’t just compete. We lead,” declared Stewart. “The global market already sees the Caribbean as a single destination. Investors should adopt the same mindset. This region offers a rich, untapped ecosystem of opportunity rooted in natural beauty, cultural authenticity, and a spirit of hospitality that is second to none.”

He said Sandals has succeeded by staying true to the Caribbean. “We don’t try to be something we’re not. We celebrate our music, food, people, landscapes, and climate. Travelers today are looking for exactly that - authenticity. Those who invest in a way that uplifts and amplifies the Caribbean story will not only succeed,



**Adam Stewart with his dad, Sandals founder and business icon, the late Gordon “Butch” Stewart.**

but thrive.”

Stewart emphasised that success in this region isn’t just about building resorts but about building with purpose, which means supporting local communities, training local talent, and creating opportunities that extend beyond tourism into real economic empowerment that is sustainable and long-term.

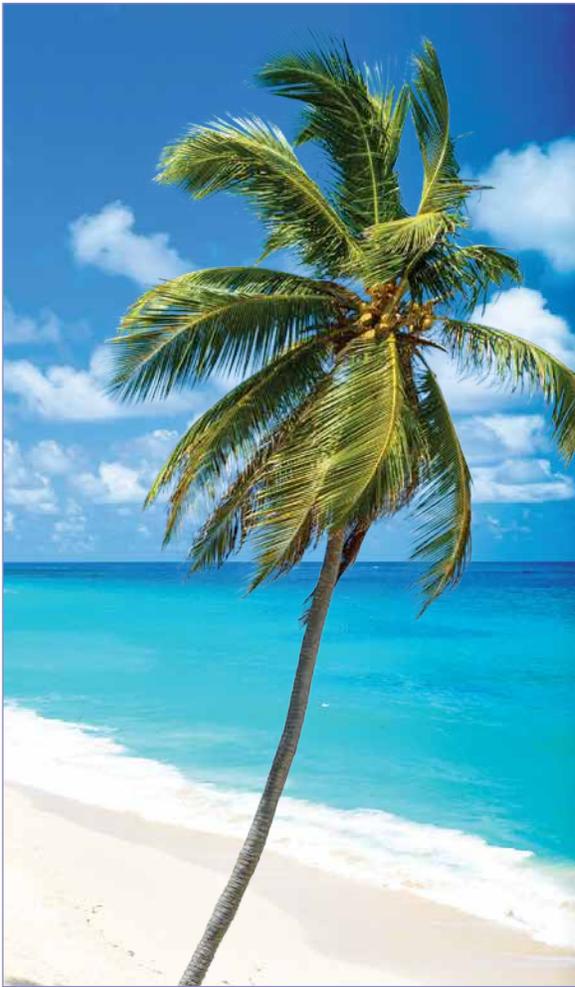
“The Caribbean is having its moment. For those who recognize its potential, respect its roots, and invest with a sense of shared purpose, the future is incredibly bright.”

According to Stewart, the Caribbean is ready to redefine what it means to be a global tourism powerhouse. “Tourism is more than an industry, it’s the heartbeat of the region. When we collaborate, we are one, we are not competitors! Sandals is proud to lead the way.”

“If you’re considering the Caribbean for your next investment, my message is simple. There’s no place like it in the world. The world sees us as one - ‘The Caribbean’. That’s how investors should approach it. So, the opportunity here is to plug into a regional ecosystem with unmatched natural beauty, deeply rooted culture, and a welcoming spirit that’s second to none.”



**Beverley Sutherland-Lewis  
Communications  
Specialist**



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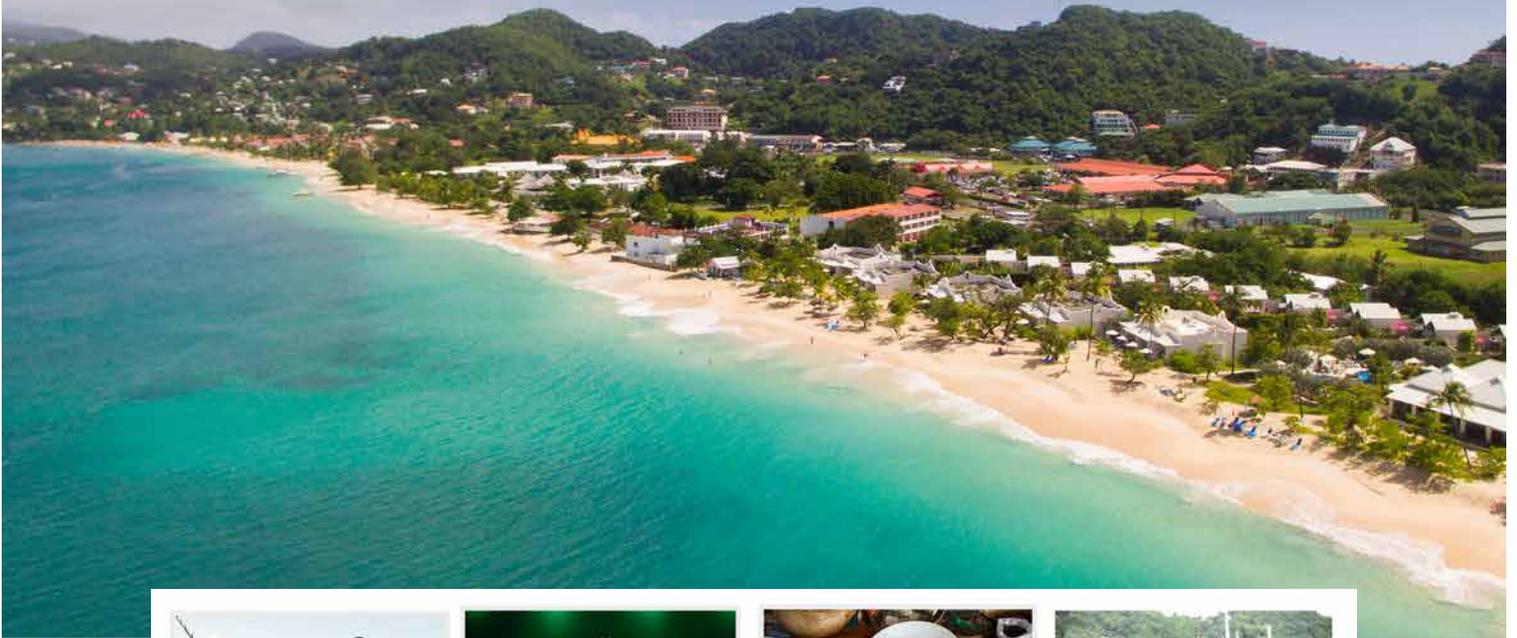


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# Community Tourism and Diversifying Markets Key for Grenada Tourism Expansion

*By Gail Bindley-Taylor*

Continued emphasis on community-based tourism that will provide visitors with a more experiential experience is one of the key pillars of Grenada's tourism expansion plans.

Grenada's Minister of Tourism, Creative Economy and Culture, Senator Adrian Thomas, explains that "community tourism" encourages every Grenadian to become a stakeholder in the country's tourism development. His aim is to provide visitors with authentic experiences rooted in local culture, music, and cuisine.

The Minister has three primary goals: establishing a communication unit within the Ministry to build public awareness, ensuring that all Grenadians benefit from tourism, and creating sustainable tourism products that attract more tourists but also protect the environment.

"We are investing over two million dollars in grants for individuals in Grenada, Carriacou, and Petite Martinique who want to convert their businesses into tourism products," says Thomas.

By integrating tourism, culture, and the creative economy in one Ministry, the government hopes to foster innovation and enhance the island's appeal.

As a former calypsonian, the Minister is particularly passionate about elevating Grenada's musical talents. With over 300 local calypsonians and soca artists, many of whom previously relied on rudimentary home studios, the government has stepped in to offer support. Grants have funded professional studios and attracted international talent like arranger Kasey Phillips, significantly raising the bar for Grenadian music.

Culinary and cultural sectors are also receiving attention as Grenada strengthens its tourism offerings.

The U.S. remains the island's largest tourism market, bolstered by a large diaspora and over 7,000 American

students at St. George's University. However, new markets are being explored, especially in Africa. Direct flights from Africa to the Caribbean take roughly the same time as those from Europe, presenting untapped potential. The Prime Minister has made several trips to Africa to cultivate these connections.

Regionally, Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados are key sources of visitors. For the first time, Grenada is exploring Guyana for trade, investment and leisure travel. Despite high travel costs, Latin America is also under consideration, with intra-Caribbean travel identified as a significant growth area. InterCaribbean Airways now provides improved island-to-island service.

Carnival season, especially Grenada's Spicemas and its iconic "Jab Jab" J'ouvert, is a major tourism draw. For 2025, American Airlines and JetBlue have increased flights, with JetBlue offering twice-daily service. Delta will launch a new route from Atlanta in December and Caribbean Airlines continues its seasonal peaks during Christmas and Easter, also attracting regional tourists. Increased airlift from these airlines is expected to trend upward by year's end. Total arrivals for 2024 were 194,914, up from 178,020 in 2023. In spite of a slight decline in both stopover and yacht arrivals for the first five months of 2025, Grenada's tourism sector is projected to experience continued growth in 2025 and 2026, driven by strategic development, increased airlift, and a focus on sustainable tourism.

Grenada hosted a "game-changing" trade show organized in partnership with Afreximbank in July, which brought over 800 African delegates to the spice island.

Thomas, who noted that Afreximbank views the Caribbean as part of the African diaspora, hopes this trade show could serve as a springboard for alternative long-term development



**Adrian Thomas**  
*Minister of Tourism, Creative Economy  
and Culture*

cooperation, beyond traditional partners like the World Bank and IMF.

According to the World Bank, in 2024, Grenada's economy experienced sustained strong growth, driven by tourism and construction, despite the impact of Hurricane Beryl. Economic growth is projected at 3.9% for 2025, driven by tourism and numerous post-hurricane reconstruction efforts.

Cruise tourism remains a crucial revenue source. In 2023-2024, cruise tourism generated over \$22 million in direct expenditures and brought 200,000 visitors to the island. The cruise industry is a vital pillar of the "community tourism" approach as it immediately benefits taxi drivers, restaurants, tour guides and vendors, among others.

United Nations statistics show that tourism contributes nearly 50% to Grenada's GDP. Of this, 31% is direct tourism income, while an additional 25% is linked to the student population at St. George's University. In 2024, Grenada surpassed its pre-COVID tourism figures, helped by its 50th independence celebrations and the CARIFTA Games.

In addition to increased arrivals, Grenada also saw growth in visitor spending and overall length of stay,

further boosting the economic benefits of tourism. This positive trend is attributed to Grenada's strategic focus on sustainable tourism, strong partnerships, and enhanced air connectivity, including new routes and increased flight frequencies from airlines like JetBlue and Air Canada. The Minister highlighted the island's robust infrastructure, which is critical for investment. There is a strong road network that facilitates access to all regions. Recent airport renovations have also improved terminals and added passenger bridges. Transportation to Carriacou and Petite Martinique has been enhanced, with new daily flights and upgraded ferry services. Cruise tourism infrastructure has also been bolstered with separate terminals for cargo and cruise ships, improving passenger experience and logistics. There have also been improvements in creating better access to the islands of Carriacou and Petite Martinique with a new airport which accommodates daily flights. "People were traveling strictly by the ferry. Today we have SVG airlines flying between Grenada and Petit Martinique twice per day. People are utilizing this a lot. We are also working to improve marinas because yatching is key in Grenada, one of the safest tourism destinations."

Hotel and resort development is thriving. The opening of the Six Senses resort marked a new chapter, and by 2026, InterContinental will launch a 150-room property.

The Citizenship by Investment (CBI) program has fueled much of the island's growth, but the government plans to diversify investment incentives, particularly for small hotels and cottage industries. "We are reviewing our concessions program to create more incentives for diaspora members who want to invest."

Investment opportunities exist for those interested in restaurants and the culinary aspects of tourism. There are also opportunities to support projects to preserve the country's heritage and culture. The Minister shared plans to restore Grenada's oldest fort, Fort George. "It's a beauty to watch. We should complete it by the third quarter



**Minister Thomas with (at far right) Wendy A. McDonald, Regional Vice-President of Government Relations for the Caribbean at Royal Caribbean Group and (at far left) Councillor Tashia Grace, Secretary of Tourism, Culture, Antiquities & Transportation for the Tobago House of Assembly**

of this year and it will be handed to the Ministry of Tourism, where it will be a shell and we will have to retrofit it, but it will be a fantastic tourism product by 2027."

"We will be renting some of the places also, so people are free to come and invest. We hope to have an art gallery, a museum, green spaces and souvenir shops," the Minister added.

Thomas, who has two decades of experience in the Ministry of Agriculture, emphasizes food security as essential for a thriving tourism sector. A \$10 million World Bank project aims to boost local food production, including vegetables, root crops, fruits, and livestock.

Medical tourism is another continuing growth area. Grenada has secured 83 acres to develop a medical compound in partnership with Mount Sinai from the U.S. The facility will include a teaching hospital and guest accommodations, aiming to position Grenada as the OECS leader in healthcare delivery. This move targets the millions spent annually by residents seeking treatment abroad.

Manufacturing, particularly agro-processing, is gaining momentum. Grenadian cocoa and chocolate have already attracted international interest. The tourism sector is helping to promote local products such as jams, jellies, rums, and herbal remedies, creating an ecosystem where tourism drives demand for local manufacturing.

As Chair of the OECS Council of Ministers, Thomas helped launch the OECS Common Tourism Sustainability

Policy 2025–2035. This 10-year strategy focuses on sustainable, inclusive, and innovative tourism development. Key goals include regional marketing collaboration, harmonized immigration rules, and uniform trade standards. Climate change adaptation and the Blue Economy are also major priorities. Grenada has already established a Ministry of Blue Economy and urges others to follow suit.

The Minister acknowledges that training and human capital are significant challenges but believes that collaborative action will make OECS tourism globally competitive. "We must walk jointly to heighten our effectiveness and align with the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals," he asserts.

Thomas is committed to ensuring that all Grenadians reap significant benefits from the tourism industry. "It must reach from the highest level to the five-star hotel, to the ordinary man-in-the-street who is doing the diving, the man who is jumping from the mountain of the waterfalls and tourists who are taking pictures. They all must benefit, the taxi men, the vendors. At the same time, while we are committed to advancing tourism, we want to make sure that the environment is well protected."

**Gail Bindley-Taylor, a Communications Specialist, who served at the United Nations for many years, is a former broadcaster and Caribbean media manager.**



# CHTA President Views AI as an Asset to the Hospitality Sector

by Kristine De Abreu

The president of the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA), Sanovnik Destang, who has identified people, technology and economic linkages as three key pillars guiding him, is taking initiatives to steer Caribbean tourism into a future of sustainability, global competitiveness and, most importantly, digital transformation.

As the Executive Director of Bay Gardens Resorts in St. Lucia and a long-time CHTA board member, Destang combines his extensive operational experience with a regional vision.

While many in the industry have expressed concern over AI's capability of replacing humans in the realms of ICT, marketing, customer service and even the tourism industry itself, Destang sees it as an opportunity to create more jobs and develop the soft skills of tourism workers throughout the region.

He observed that AI is already being used by hospitality businesses in the region, not to replace people, but to free them up. "We started our Technology Task Force a few months before ChatGPT launched. At the time, we were looking at the metaverse, blockchain and then AI took over. AI is the biggest technological advancement since the Internet. And it's not a hospitality job killer. It's a Caribbean tourism job liberator."

"We're using it to reduce mundane tasks. That gives our staff more time to focus on what really matters - guest experiences," said Destang, who is completing his first year as CHTA president.

He stressed that human capital, the Caribbean people themselves, are the true assets. "Technology is one of my big focus areas. But more than

that, I believe our people are our superpower. And tourism should be a platform that uplifts every other sector, from agriculture to the arts. You can put a hotel building anywhere in the world. But good luck recreating the warmth of Caribbean people."

He is proud of the association's Young Leaders Program, which has been running since 2019. "Today, two of its alumni sit on the CHTA board. We're not just training the next generation. We're giving them a seat at the table."

CHTA is aggressively expanding its training efforts, from frontline staff to executive leadership, through partnerships with international training organisations like Hospitality Financial and Technology Professionals (HFTP) and Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International (HSMIA), which provide discounts and other benefits to CHTA members.

The Sandals hotel chain and its university have also provided an avenue for hospitality workers to develop technical and soft skills, from hotel management and engineering to marketing and administration. The training programs are offered on islands such as Jamaica and Antigua and Barbuda. "They've been a force for good in many ways. Sandals University is training a lot of people, and its Foundation does real community work. But we also need to ensure local restaurants and suppliers benefit too. This would ensure a more sustainable model moving forward," said Destang.

He observed that new models like the dine-around program piloted by Sandals in Curaçao are being implemented across the region.

The 2025 CHTA Marketplace was held for the first time in Antigua and



**Sanovnik Destang**  
CHTA President

Barbuda, and despite unpleasant weather, the country hosted it with style and grace under a lot of pressure. "There was massive flooding. I arrived into water past my ankles. But everything still went ahead as planned. It really showed the resilience of Caribbean people in the face of disaster."

He said the open-concept layout with lightboxes and a sleek selling floor allowed easier access to vendors, buyers and other professionals looking to make vital connections within and outside the region.

Taking the spotlight at the CHTA Marketplace was the first-ever Direct Booking Summit and introduction of the Association's Linkages Showcase. "We demonstrated that tourism is more than hotels. So, we brought in people from agriculture, manufacturing, and creative services, and they interacted directly with hoteliers. Some closed deals on the spot."

The CHTA believes that building stronger supply chains and placing emphasis on local people are key to

sustainable tourism. “We’ve got to stop importing everything. That’s why we’ve created a Linkages Task Force within CHTA. By regulating or even cutting back on imports, locals will undeniably thrive.”

This vision also extends to cruise tourism. “When ships come in, taxi drivers, tour guides, and beach vendors depend on them. But we also need to ensure more local products, such as fresh produce and handmade goods are onboard and in port.” Although cruise ships are crucial to the local economies of multiple Caribbean countries, he believes that special protections must be in place to sustain local businesses.

The CHTA President reported that the 2025 winter season showed both promise and slowness. He observed that the present geopolitical uncertainty has had an opposite effect on the Caribbean. There has been unexpected but welcome interest and growth from Canada and Latin America, markets which he is keen to explore. A general demand for authenticity, bucket-list travel, experiential and cultural tourism has contributed to this newfound interest.

Destang said the numbers were good, above 2019 in spend and occupancy, but the pace of growth is slowing compared to 2022–2024. “Geopolitical concerns are affecting demand from traditional markets like the U.K. and U.S. We’re seeing massive growth from Canada, up to 50% in some destinations. Latin America is the fastest-growing region for Caribbean interest in terms of search volume and flight search volume.”

According to STR (Smith Travel Research), the first few months of 2025 saw a 3.2% increase in Average Daily Rate (ADR) across all Caribbean destinations, though the rate of growth has slowed. STR also reported a 1.8% rise in Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR). Room Occupancy was up marginally in 2024 – 66.6% compared to 66.1% in 2023.



*CHTA President Sanovnik Destang with CEO Vanessa Ledesma and Antigua and Barbuda's Minister of Tourism Henry Charles 'Max' Fernandez.*

Destang remains optimistic, suggesting that continued growth is likely, particularly if regional tourism bodies work to better differentiate the Caribbean product and focus on what makes the Caribbean unique and apart from other destinations.

“Our culture, our natural beauty, our people, those aren’t things you can replicate. And now, with intra-Caribbean travel taxes being cut by 50% in places like Saint Lucia and Barbados, regional mobility is improving.”

The Saint Lucian hotelier was awarded “Hotelier of the Year” by Caribbean Journal and, more recently, was honored by the Asian American Hotel Owners Association (AAHOA) and the National Association of Black Hotel Owners, Operators & Developers (NABHOOD) with the ‘Outstanding Hotelier’ Award, marking the first time a Caribbean hotelier has been given that prestigious accolade.

Destang, who underscored the key role of the private sector, had a long career in finance prior to managing Bay Gardens Resorts, which encompasses four properties.

He stressed the need for deeper linkages between sectors. “That’s where the opportunity lies. We’ve got record-low unemployment, a vibrant tourism product, and growing private sector momentum. But there’s more to do, especially in building stronger

supply chains and encouraging investment beyond hospitality.”

Destang identified significant new investments in the region, including the development of over 50 hotels (19,591 rooms), cruise port and airport expansions in islands such as Jamaica, Turks and Caicos, USVI, Saint Lucia and Barbados.

“Overall, the Caribbean presents diverse and promising opportunities not only in hotel and resort development, but also in supporting infrastructure and experiential tourism offerings.”

For investors wondering if the Caribbean is ready, Destang does not doubt that the region is prepared to undertake a new journey towards sustained growth. “We’ve proven our resilience again and again. Whether it’s a pandemic, a hurricane, or flooding, we rise. And with the right investments in our people, in technology, and in local linkages, we’re not just bouncing back, we’re building forward.”



**Kristine De Abreu**  
Communications  
Specialist

# CURAÇAO to Make a Compelling Case for Investors at CHICOS 2025

Curaçao's outstanding tourism performance, modern infrastructure, wide range of investment opportunities and attractive incentives, are some of the factors that led to the choice of venue for the 2025 Caribbean Hotel Investment Conference and Operations Summit (CHICOS).

"We're thrilled to bring CHICOS to Curaçao for the first time as we celebrate our 15th year. Building on the tremendous success of last year's event in Barbados, this year promises to be even more impactful," CHICOS Chairman Parris Jordan said.

He noted that CHICOS remains the only hotel investment conference that takes place in various destinations within the Caribbean region, giving attendees direct exposure to new islands and emerging opportunities.

"Curaçao, known for its vibrant culture and business-friendly environment, offers an ideal backdrop for our milestone gathering in the Dutch Caribbean. While the Caribbean market overall continues to perform well, Curaçao has stood out, recording some of the highest RevPAR growth in the region in 2024 and through the first quarter of 2025, year-over-year," the HVS Executive said.

Jordan said this performance is supported by the island's broad appeal across key source markets, including Europe, the U.S., and South America, and strong demand across both leisure and business travel segments.

His sentiments are echoed by Miles Mercera, CEO of the island's investment agency, CINEX. "Curaçao is rapidly becoming a top-tier investment destination, thanks to its strategic Caribbean location outside the hurricane belt, stable political climate under a recently re-elected government, and booming tourism sector that welcomed over 1.57 million



**Parris Jordan**  
Chairman, CHICOS

visitors in 2024, with continued double-digit growth in early 2025."

He said the current climate offers standout investment opportunities in tourism and hospitality (hotels, resorts, dining, and entertainment), real estate (beachfront properties, mixed-use developments), logistics (ports, warehousing), renewable energy, and creative sectors such as media, education, and wellness.

"What ties these opportunities together, and powers their growth, is Curaçao's robust digital infrastructure.

The island is uniquely positioned to support cross-sector investment through world-class connectivity, including a Tier IV data center (Blue NAP Americas) and six international submarine fiber cables.

Mercera explained that this advanced technology enables everything from smart tourism solutions and remote property management to e-learning platforms and logistics automation, transforming traditional sectors into tech-enabled, future-ready industries.

The investment agency head said Curaçao offers strong investment incentives, including generous tax holidays, accelerated depreciation, no capital gains tax on real estate, full property ownership for foreigners, and a secure Dutch-based legal



**Miles Mercera**  
CINEX CEO

system that ensures transparency and protection.

"Combined with a multilingual, highly educated workforce and modern infrastructure, Curaçao presents a rare and compelling opportunity for investors seeking long-term, integrated and scalable growth," the CINEX CEO stated.

The agenda for CHICOS 2025 includes a site visit to explore investment opportunities, especially available plots of land suitable for tourism development.

"CHICOS stands apart as the only hospitality investment conference where you don't just network - you also get to discover new islands. In Barbados, I immersed myself in the local hotel pipeline and built meaningful relationships in a laid-back setting that perfectly balanced business and island exploration," Adam Greenfader, Managing Partner of AG&T, a Miami-based real estate development and consulting company commented.

"Last year's CHICOS conference in Barbados offered a strategic vantage point into hospitality development, which opened up a new hotel pipeline for our company, all while cultivating life-long connections in a relaxed setting," Greenfader said.

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We are excited to partner with host sponsor CINEX for the 14<sup>th</sup> edition of CHICOS that will take place at the Marriott Beach Resort in Curaçao from November 9 through 11, 2025. Be sure to reserve your spot early and book your accommodations! Further details, including registration rates and group codes, can be found on the conference website. <https://chicos.hvsconferences.com/>

HOSTS



# St. Vincent and the Grenadines

## A Bounty of Blesséd Islands

by Mark Stevens

It's late afternoon on our final day of exploring a bounty of islands called St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

My wife and I are at Sandal's newest resort, lounging on an icing sugar sand beach cradled by towering emerald hills and rugged rock formations nuzzled by waters the color of heaven itself: sapphire, aquamarine, jade. Those cerulean shades now seem perfect metaphor for the feelings that have flooded my very soul for the past few days.

Sipping an icy Piña Colada, I turn in my beach chair, gazing behind me toward a procession of mountains so green, so lush, so voluptuous, I feel their sheer beauty in the pit of my stomach.

Even as I breathe in this spectacle, cumulous clouds shroud the highest peaks, lending a mystical quality to the vista.

It is fitting background for an equally compelling foreground.

In the near distance is a collection of restaurants – Parisol Beach Club where we did lunch, a brand-new farm-to-table spot called Buccan, where we'll shortly do dinner.

Beach houses recline just beyond; past them are five acres of landscaped grounds populated by several pools and decorated with a rainbow of flowering shrubs and foliage every shade of green.

This week we have climbed mountains and cooled in waterfalls snuggled down in a lush rainforest setting. Under sail we have explored neighboring islands as beautiful as this one, discovering first-hand why these islands have earned their reputation as one of the world's best sailing destinations.

We have experienced history, sharing in the celebration of Easter and the love of the sea with Vincies.

Here on the beach at Sandals – an oasis truly worthy of the allure of

these islands themselves – I revisit our memories.

I am feeling truly blessed, which should be no surprise at all.

For we are spending our last day on St. Vincent, an island whose original name reflected that very sentiment.

### LAND OF THE BLESSÉD

The thirty-two-member archipelago called the Grenadines were among the last islands to be settled by European colonists. More than once this week I wonder if that might partly account for a laid-back vibe almost unique in the Caribbean.

Spanish sailors encountering Grenada itself were reputedly reminded of the island's similarity to Granada in the old world.

At first called "la Grenade," when the English eventually took control of that island they Anglicized the name to "Grenada." Somewhere in the process a version of the Spanish for "little Grenada" – Grenadines – took hold as the name for these islands we're currently exploring.

While it's been commonly thought that St. Vincent itself was so named because Columbus sighted it on the feast day of St. Vincent, it's since been established that he was in Spain on the day in question and likely never even saw the island.

Be that as it may, it's the island's original Carib name that I find so evocative.

It was called Haroun. The land of the Blesséd.

### NATURE'S BOUNTY

During our first visit roughly fourteen



*"Double-enders" – traditional wooden sailing sloops – preparing for race start during the first annual SVG Sailing Week.*

years ago, we rose before dawn one morning to leave our accommodations at Young Island Resort for a hike along the Vermont Nature Trail and Rainforest in search of the endangered Vincy Parrot.

Young Island Resort is nestled in 12 acres of gardens, boasting cottages decorated with wicker furnishings and local art, cottages offering hillside views, cottages snuggled down at water's edge.

Despite the fact we never actually saw a parrot, our adventure proved rewarding. We negotiated a serpentine path through dense foliage, learning on the way about the wealth of vegetation surrounding us, with sheer delight we savored the magnificent vistas of the surrounding forest.

Later that day we traversed the Mesopotamia Valley and sampled some roasted breadfruit – a delicious sample of nature's bounty.

During our first full day on St. Vincent on this trip we explore the west coast by car, a rollercoaster ride of switchback turns and precipitous drops, treated to unspeakably gorgeous sea views, to vistas of towering forest-clad hills.

Clearing one ridge we see the Pitons hovering in the distance on neighboring St. Lucia; the heights ascending Soufriere volcano on St. Vincent itself.

After a seaside lunch of “provisions”, we enter the forest and hike to Darkview Falls, cooling off in a pool lounging at its base.

Our guide tells me that these islands have been recognized by the World Travel Awards as “Best Nature Destination.”

I am not surprised.

Nature’s bounty is boundless here in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

### **A BOUNTY OF HISTORY AND CULTURE**

But these islands also offer a bounty of both history and culture.

Their history has resulted in a veritable pepperpot of delights for history buffs or visitors seeking to experience a vibrant cultural scene.

Strolling downtown Kingstown we take in samples of both French and English colonial architecture. We ascend the heights six hundred feet above Kingstown itself, getting a lesson in the archipelago’s often bellicose history at Fort Charlotte.

At the nineteenth-century St. George’s Anglican Cathedral we’re taught the story of the Garifuna, descendants of African slaves and indigenous Kalinago.

We soak up more local culture in a Kingstown must-do, dining on roti at Vee Jay’s, a family-run restaurant bustling with hungry Vincies.

On nearby Bequia we learn about the whaling culture that breathed life into the island for more than 150 years, a culture still celebrated when a whale is caught using traditional methods.

But history’s hardly the only appeal of these islands.

Easter weekend on Bequia is a must-do, celebrating in music, in sailing events featuring those traditional double-ended sloops that are central to the Easter Regatta (now partnered with the first ever St. Vincent and Grenadines Sailing Week).

Visit in summertime for Vincy Mas, the chain’s answer to Carnival; come before Christmas for the unique celebrations of Nine Mornings. Partake of the culinary delights and festivities

marking the annual Breadfruit Festival.

Just more fabulous offerings in an instructive and enjoyable (and delicious) bounty of history and culture.

### **A BOUNTY OF BLESSINGS**

That bounty abounds no matter which island – or islands – you visit.

Both Union Island and Petit St. Vincent were ravaged by Hurricane Beryl though latest reports suggest that rebuilding on the former is moving along. Unfortunately, PSV, a gorgeous private island resort, has yet to re-open.

Tobago Cays is an unspoiled marine park; snorkel with sea turtles or dine on barbecued lobster served at water’s edge.

Get away from it all at nearby Mayreau, a must-do for visiting sailors, chilling at Saltwhistle Bay or sipping drinks at the Ranch Escapade, a charming if rudimentary waypoint on the island’s windward side.

Lime with the rich and famous on the island of Mustique, an island once frequented by celebrities like Paul McCartney. Be sure to sip a drink at Basil’s.

Book an elegant beachside room at Canouan’s Soho Beach House or a hillside villa at Mandarin Oriental or Canouan Estates. Play a round on a golf course rated among the world’s top ten.

Dock your mega yacht at Sandy Lane Yacht Club and Resorts and watch for celebrities at Shenanigans.

Next waypoint is Bequia, an island delight CNN Travel considers a must-do 2025 destination.

Go ashore and stroll the delightful boardwalk fronting Admiralty Bay, sampling the offerings of a wealth of bars and restaurants. Check out the



*SVG’s Canouan is an elegant and private island featuring a range of gorgeous properties including Soho Beach Club (shown here).*

ivory sands of Lower Bay or head to Friendship Bay, where you can learn island history at the museum there; savor the delights of Bequia Beach Resort, boasting some of the best Caribbean views you’ll ever experience.

Or just find a resort – or island – to call your own. For the bounty of blessings you discover here is boundless.

### **A BOUNTY OF BLESSÉD ISLANDS**

I have visited a multitude of Caribbean islands over the years, but St. Vincent and the Grenadines hold a special place in my heart – an island paradise so appealing this marks our fourth visit.

Vincies’ joie-de-vivre is a big reason for my attraction but I’m also seduced by that unspoiled Caribbean charm almost unique to SVG, by the archipelago’s show-stopping beauty, by the variety we’ve discovered here, from lush mountains to rainforest, from pristine beaches to a fascinating history and culture, from sheer luxury to barefoot ramblings embraced by sun, sea and sand.

Welcome to St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Welcome to a bounty of blessed islands.

**Photos: Sharon Matthews-Stevens**

**Mark Stevens is an award-winning Canadian travel writer and past Co-President of the Travel Media Association of Canada (TMAC).**



# Guyana Adds More Hotels as Tourism Arrivals Boosted

The Guyana tourism industry, which recently experienced record growth in visitor arrivals, is getting five new hotels this year, which will add 600 rooms to the accommodation stock.

The 241-room Royalton Hotel and Kings hotel, which has 61 rooms, both in Georgetown, opened earlier this year.

With major construction completed in 2024, three other hotels are also scheduled to open their doors later this year.

In the final stages of completion are Four Points by Sheraton at Houston and Hyatt Place Hotel at Providence, East Bank Demerara; and AC Marriott Hotel at Ogle, East Coast Demerara near the Eugene F. Correia International Airport.

Aiden by Best Western was officially opened in October 2024, adding 138 rooms.

Visitor arrivals increased in 2024 by 16.3 % to 371,222 compared to the same period in 2023. This is the highest ever recorded arrivals in Guyana's history.

The lion's share of arrivals came from the U.S. (45%) followed by the Caribbean (29%), Canada (8%), Latin America (6%) and Other Markets (5%).

With the petrostate's economic transformation, efforts have been fast-tracked to increase and enhance the country's airline connectivity options, with a number of new carriers flying the Guyana route and opening access to more regional and international destinations.

The following airlines have been added to the Guyana route:

**United Airlines** - Georgetown, Guyana- Houston, Texas; **Avianca** – Georgetown, Guyana-Bogota, Colombia; **SKYHigh Dominicana** – Georgetown, Guyana- Santo Domingo,



Visitors enjoying Paddleboarding by Elite Kayaking and Nature Tours

Dominican Republic; **Caribbean Airlines**- Ogle, Guyana-Paramaribo, Suriname.

**LIAT 2020** – Georgetown, Guyana - Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

## New Tour Experiences Include:

### Paddleboarding in the Linden Blue Lakes Experience by Elite Kayaking & Nature Tours

You can now enjoy paddleboarding along Linden's beautiful Kara Kara Blue Lakes! Just request it as an add-on for your next kayaking tour.

### Demerara Sunset Cruise by Blackwater Adventures

This afternoon cruise provides a leisurely journey along the Demerara River. Guests will enjoy glimpses of wildlife and, of course, a mesmerising sunset on the horizon.

### Explore Lethem Day Tour by Rupununi Adventures and Tara's Choices & Tours

This itinerary includes hiking, guided tours of Lethem, visits to Matapee Falls, paddle boarding, and kayaking experiences at Manari Creek.

### Kanuku & Rupununi Trekking and River Adventure by Bush Cow Eco-Trails

This experience invites adventurers to delve deep into the heart of Guyana's rich indigenous heritage. It offers an unforgettable blend of nature and culture amidst the awe-inspiring Kanuku Mountains.

### Guyana Biking Adventure by Atta Rainforest Lodge

This experience allows patrons to explore the canopy walkway and cycle through the scenic trails of Atta Rainforest Lodge, as well as the main road connecting Lethem to Georgetown in the Iwokrama Forest, while spotting wildlife along the trail.

### Jaguar Tour by Adventure Guianas

The Jaguar Tour boasts a unique experience of the Macushi Tribes' traditions, culture, and wildlife. Stops include Iwokrama, Rewa and Apoteri. If you're lucky, you'll spot the elusive jaguar!

Guyana continues to cop the international tourism industry awards. At the 2025 awards by Pacific Area Travel Writers Association (PATWA), Guyana was selected as the Destination of the Year-Natural Attractions, as well as the Tourism Minister of the Year – Ecological Tourism.



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# New Properties and Airlift for Barbados 2026 Winter Season

Visitors planning a trip to Barbados during the 2026 winter season will be able to enjoy a new luxury resort brand as well as several iconic Marriott refurbished properties.

Royalton Resorts will unveil a new adults-only brand aimed at redefining All-Inclusive luxury in Barbados through connecting guests with the destination, art, local flavor, and sensory engagement.

The first property under this brand, **Royalton Vessence Barbados** on the west coast, is scheduled to open in Summer 2026. The resort, previously known as Royalton CHIC Barbados, is based on the philosophy of “Veritas and Essentia,” meaning truth and essence, encouraging guests to disconnect and immerse themselves in Barbados’ culture and atmosphere.

Royalton Vessence, located 30 minutes from Grantley Adams International Airport, will feature 220 suites designed as “artful, luxury accommodation” with locally inspired artwork, featuring oceanfront views, swim-out access, or expansive vistas.

The resort will offer unique amenities, including glow-lit pools for late-night swimming; The Studio, a space for hands-on workshops by day and live performances by night; Moddo by Royalton FIT, a wellness program with yoga and movement sessions and; Digital Detox Zones for reflection and conversation.

For the 2026 winter season, the **Marriott Bonvoy Portfolio** will usher in four distinct refurbished properties on the west coast, offering a unique expression of island elegance.

Opening in early 2026, **Tamarind**, which joins the portfolio as an Autograph Collection, is an All-Inclusive Resort offering 110 stylish guest rooms and suites. This laid-back, family-friendly haven delivers a premium all-inclusive experience,



*A rendering of the Swim Out Suite at Royalton Vessence*

perfect for couples, multigenerational travelers, and those seeking a relaxed yet refined beachfront getaway. Daily activities for children and teens ensure a seamless vacation for all ages.

Adding a splash of color and character to the West Coast is **Crystal Cove**, a favorite among adventurous travelers and social explorers, with 88 chic rooms and suites. Its swim-up cave bar, hidden behind a cascading waterfall, is legendary.

**Turtle Beach** features 161 spacious suites and a warm, family-first atmosphere. Just steps from the energetic St. Lawrence Gap, guests enjoy easy access to local culture, music, and cuisine, making it the perfect base for immersive island adventures.

The iconic **Colony Club**, with 96 elegantly appointed rooms and suites, and newly expanded event spaces accommodating up to 150 guests, was reopened in September. Colony Club is ideal for tranquil escapes, intimate weddings, and elevated corporate retreats.

Visitors will also have more choices to fly to Barbados for the fall and winter season, with **new flights**. American Airlines (AA), United, Delta and Jet Blue have added new routes from several U.S. gateways.

**AA** is flying daily from Miami, weekly from Philadelphia and Charlotte; **Jetblue** will operate daily from JFK and weekly from Boston; **United** is offering weekly flights from Washington Dulles and Newark; and **Delta** is flying daily from Atlanta.



*A rendering of Tamarind Guest Room*



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# Caribbean Tourism Organization Caribbean Week - New York



From left, Carl Stewart, General Manager, Caribbean Airlines; Annarie Seecharan, Senior Manager of Destination Marketing, Guyana Tourism Authority; Lakshmi Balkarran, Guyana Consulate in New York and Dona Regis-Prosper, CTO Secretary-General and CEO.



Clive McCoy, Director of Tourism, British Virgin Islands with Samantha Ballin of NJFPR.



From left, Barbados Minister of Tourism and International Transport, Hon. Ian Gooding-Edghill; Andrea Franklin, CEO Barbados Tourism Marketing Inc.(BTMI), Francine Blackman, Permanent Secretary, and Peter Mayers, BTMI Director, USA.



Anguilla's Minister of Health, Sports and Tourism, Hon. Cardigan Connor with Kimberly King-Lestrade, Chief Marketing Officer, Anguilla Tourist Board.



Minister Hon. Marsha Henderson of St. Kitts and Nevis, who received the Minister of Tourism Award during the Women's Leadership Dinner, with CTO Secretary-General Dona Regis-Prosper.



St. Vincent and the Grenadines Tourism Minister, Hon. Carlos James with CEO of SVG Tourism Authority, Annette Mark, with a media representative at Media Marketplace.

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