

## **The ACS Pivotal in Promoting Collaboration among the Regional and International Tourism Organisations in the Greater Caribbean**



Researchers in the field of sustainable tourism often link regional integration and tourism development, suggesting the inseparable nature of the two in the movements towards the pluralistic and inclusive growth of the region. The following organisations work both independently as well as with the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) to promote regional integration in the approach to sustainable tourism development.

The Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA), founded in 1962, with offices in Miami, San Juan and Barbados, represents the entire spectrum of the hospitality industry's private sector including 36 national hotel associations across the Caribbean region, with over 600 hotel members and more than 300 supplier companies represented as 'allied' members. With social and responsible tourism development among its guiding principles, the CHTA has as its mission to facilitate the full potential of the Caribbean hotel & tourism industry and engages a market-driven approach to service member needs and build strategic partnerships. A close partner of the CHTA, the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO), established in 1989, with its headquarters in Barbados, is the tourism development agency of the Caribbean. The CTO's primary objective is the provision of support and technical assistance in the areas of marketing, advocacy, human resource development, research and information technology among others for the development of sustainable tourism and the economic and social benefit of the region's inhabitants as a result. Efforts of the CTO are heavily focussed on product development and marketing and in partnership with the CHTA, jointly owns the Caribbean Tourism Development Agency, a marketing and business development entity dedicated to promoting the Caribbean tourism brand worldwide, through available media and the combined resources of the region's public and private sector tourism agencies.

The Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) headquartered in Saint Lucia is another important sub-regional Organisation which incorporates Sustainable Tourism as part of its mandate.

Founded in 1981, the OECS comprises nine countries and dependencies in the Eastern Caribbean and focuses its efforts on assisting Members to respond to the multi-faceted challenges related to development, by providing opportunities for joint or coordinated action towards the economic and social advancement of their countries. In the area of Sustainable Tourism, the OECS has successfully negotiated an Air Transport Agreement which seeks to implement a common air transport policy among Member Countries. Additionally, the organisation has identified yachting as a prime niche market and is pursuing efforts for joint development and promotion among the Eastern Caribbean States.

With regard to Tourism development in Central America, the Secretariat for Tourism Integration in Central American Tourism (SITCA), working under the System for Central American Integration (SICA) has been responsible for the implementation of sustainable tourism programmes as well as putting into practice the Agreements of the Central American Tourism Advisory Board, since its introduction in 1991. With its headquarters in Nicaragua, SITCA supports regional integration in tourism, one of the main areas being sustainable destination management throughout the region. Noteworthy is the Dominican Republic's recent membership to SICA, becoming the first non-continental territory to achieve membership.

At the hemispheric level, the Organisation of American States (OAS) is leading efforts to shape the tourism policy dialogue, through its implementation arm, the Culture and Tourism Section of the OAS which works to support the development of cultural and tourism assets in contributing to the economic and social development of the Latin America and Caribbean region. In fulfilment of this mandate, the organisation engages in activities to strengthen the productivity and competitiveness of the tourism industry through training and capacity building, identifying avenues for cultural exchange through tourism and providing opportunities for social inclusion to increase the scope and benefits of tourism.

From the international perspective, the regional office for the World Tourism Organisation of the United Nations (UNWTO) functions under the UNWTO's regional programme for the Americas and works to fulfil objectives linked to the attainment of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG's). With the principal mandate being to contribute to poverty reduction and the promotion of sustainable tourism, initiatives focus on capacity building for small and medium enterprises, the teaching of skills related to the development of goods and services within the region, ensuring wider and informed participation in decision-making processes through the creation of spaces for education, as well as the sustainable management of the region's natural resources.

Finally, at the level of civil society, the quality of service and hospitality inclusive of gastronomy, maintenance and upkeep of sites and attractions, safety and security of the locality and knowledge and skills including language competencies of the human resource are critical components in the tourism experience and contribute to a destination's continued appeal and competitiveness. The Pan American Confederation of Schools of Hotel Catering and Tourism (CONPEHT) founded in Mexico in 1991, is a civil association of tourism institutions, in the countries of the Americas and Europe with the main objective of improving the hospitality and tourism education system. With this mission to contribute to the advancement and professionalisation of the tourism and hospitality sectors at the national, regional and international level, the Organisation spearhead several programs and initiatives aimed at students, graduates, teachers, researchers and academics. CONPEHT's

membership spans approximately 125, public and private universities from 20 Latin-American and European countries as well as tourism related organisations, businesses and service providers and international agencies pursuing similar objectives.

With the aim of contributing to a higher quality of life in the region, to lead to the overall improvement in the region's tourism sector and thereby enhancing the tourist's experience, the ACS has been working to enhance sustainable tourism activity within the newly-established Sustainable Tourism Zone of the Greater Caribbean (STZC). To support tourism development in its 32 Member States, the organisation leads initiatives to encourage community involvement in tourism, enhance opportunities for cultural exchanges and language learning, promote multi-destination tourism with an emphasis on increasing intra-regional dialogue and connectivity, and to improve safety and security in the tourism industry.

In the execution of its mandates, the ACS has maintained partnerships with the various aforementioned tourism agencies, for the joint execution of programmes and projects. Furthermore, in seeking to invigorate and strengthen the fraternity among the regional and international agencies engaged in tourism development in the Region, the ACS convened representatives for a historic meeting in Managua, Nicaragua, on February 18th, 2013, to explore avenues to enhance inter-agency collaboration and alignment of complementary work programmes to attain more efficient use of resources and reduce the incidents of overlap and duplication of efforts. These agencies are committed to pursue a more complimentary and collaborative relationship in the execution of their work, to advance issues of mutual interest.

The ACS through its Directorate for Sustainable Tourism remains at the helm of advocating for sustainable and responsible tourism development in the region, by bringing together regional and international stakeholders, to support development based on the principles of integration, consensus, shared responsibility and community participation ushering in a new era of development cooperation, which is in keeping with the Association's mandate to serve as platform a for consultation, cooperation and concerted action.

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