

# *Caribbean Tourism Organization Welcomes New Shift to U.S.-Cuba Relations*

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Bridgetown, January 2 (RHC)-- The Caribbean Tourism Organization, the regional agency responsible for the marketing and tourism of the region as a premiere tourism destination, says its welcomes the announcement of a change in diplomatic relations between Cuba and the United States, and that such an event marks an opportunity for increased numbers into the region -- an "important part of the CTO's overall vision for the Caribbean", according to The Barbados Advocate newspaper.

Caribbean leaders have welcomed the restoration of full diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba, announced last month by Presidents Obama and Castro, saying it will increase tourist arrivals to the islands.

In a press release, the CTO referred to the December 17th announcement by U.S. President Barack Obama and Cuban President Raúl Castro to begin a process of normalizing relations between the two countries. It said that the U.S. is the region's largest tourism source market, producing nearly half of the Caribbean's tourism business with over 12 million Americans visiting our shores in 2013.

"Any opportunity to substantially increase that number will be welcomed," the CTO said. Cuba has been a

long-standing and active CTO member since 1992, and the agency remarked that it has engaged the country in its promotion efforts in Canada, Latin America and Europe.

“We look forward to including Cuba in our programs in the United States. We made a small but important breakthrough in 2002 when we succeeded in our efforts to secure a visa for the then Coordinator of International Affairs in the country’s Ministry of Tourism, Orlando Rangel Delgado, to attend Caribbean Week in New York. We anticipate much broader participation in all CTO-organized events,” the agency stated.

In an recent interview with The Barbados Advocate newspaper, CTO’s CEO and General Secretary Hugh Riley had said that contrary to the fears being spouted in some quarters that the strengthening of Cuba as a Caribbean tourism destination will not augur well for islands further south, he held to the position that the attraction of more persons into the region presented a gold mine of sorts for those willing to capitalize on it.

“Cuba is an active engaged member of the Caribbean Tourism Organization, [and my view is that] any magnet that draws new business in significant numbers into the Caribbean has to be a good thing. Now how we take advantage of that as a region of that is a different matter, Riley posited.

The Tourism official noted that the region needed to view and analyze the normalized relations between Cuba and the U.S. from an entrepreneurial point-of-view, to determined how it could strike partnerships that would allow it to benefit from the attraction of thousands of new people into this part of the world.

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