

NAME: AZRUDEE LINDSEY

SCHOOL: MONTSERRAT SECONDARY SCHOOL

COUNTRY: MONTSERRAT

TOPIC: What Steps Can OECS Governments Take To Improve The Global Competitiveness
Of the OECS Tourism Industry?

For quite some time the tourism markets of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) have been struggling and are unable to establish new grounds in the global tourism market. This is because of the lack of momentum. This can be said to be directly attributed to what some may consider a lackadaisical management approach by country heads, towards tourism.

The Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) governments can seek to better improve their standings on the global markets with the implementation of measures geared towards central marketing strategies, harmonised tourism rates and service charges, development fund and grants, cruise ships agreements and tourism intelligence services.

Secondly, the establishment of an Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States Tourism Promotion Unit (OECSTPU) can assume the sole responsibility of marketing and promoting member states as a single tourism destination. A single tourism destination makes it possible for one country's strength to complement the weaknesses of another. Also, the unit will allow top marketing and promotional experts of the OECS to be housed under the same roof. This collection of local and regional knowledge will set the stage for diverse and intuitive solutions for both regional and international marketing of the OECS region.

Establishment of a cruise agreement between cruise ship owners, operators and OECS governments, can provide greater incentives for the port calls to other countries. Such an agreement will not only increase visitor numbers but also open the door for previously uncalled ports to be visited. Cruise agreements have the potential to ensure weekly visits of ships to predetermined ports of calls, hence allowing hoteliers, small tour operators, and large tour operators to be better prepared to accommodate tourist numbers at their destinations.

Another important factor is the harmonisation of tourism rates among OECS countries. The harmonisation of rates would include but not be limited to hotels, small group tours, beach access rates, souvenirs rates and landing rates. This show of good measures through the harmonisation, will allow a tourist to better embrace the countries to which port calls are scheduled, knowing beforehand what is expected and at what cost.

This level of harmonisation, can also be seen as a show of organisation to which the single tourism market will truly be presented to the world as a unified region. Countries will also be able to analyse earnings based on ship arrivals and tour sales receipts.

Implementation of a Tourism Development Fund is a step towards aiding small and medium business within the OECS, whose business plans are geared towards the improvement and stabilisation of service delivery and handling of tourists. OECS governments should also be able to apply for this funding to assist with special projects such as port expansions.

An OECS Tourism Development Fund of this nature will be governed by Heads of state and other key funding agents' representatives with interest rates well within the comfort zone of small to medium economies. With the capital provided by the Fund, businesses will be able to expand their reach where a successful business in one country can seek new roots in yet another. This establishes a common feel to tourists and can lead to a sense of commitment and assurance of quality.

The formation of an OECS Standard of Safe Tourism Practices will be the basis of the issuance of tourism licenses to tour and hotel operations and will allow for the creation of an OECS Tourism Watch List to safe guard tourists' safety and transaction security. The Watch List will be readily available to both cruise operators and service providers.

Finally, the establishment of an OECS Tourism Intelligence Unit, a unit dedicated to the collection and distribution of information gathered on visitors, whose conduct and habits warrant special surveillance and possible restriction at member state ports of call. While it is evident that governments should be safe guarding its visitors from internal threats, it is imperative that they protect their ports and people from the external threats of visitors. A unit of this nature will allow sensitive data to be available through special database systems which could take advantage of the World Wide Web and other data transfer methods.

With the implementation of these measures I am convinced that the OECS region will be better able to present our member states to the tourism market as a single market, a single voice, and a single tourism destination.