

**ANTIGUA and BARBUDA inspires MIDDLE EAST TRAVELLERS as it**

**EYES AN INCREASE IN tourism from the region**

*Tourism leaders from the Caribbean nation showcased the islands’ extensive appeal and environmental best practice in conversation with the UAE’s Green Sheikh* ***at EXPO 2020 – including a nationwide ban on plastic***

**DUBAI, 18 February 2022 –** A high-level government and tourism delegation from Antigua and Barbuda visited the United Arab Emirates earlier this month as part of a week-long promotional and development mission to deepen connections between the two countries and showcase the allure of the destination.

Located at the heart of the Caribbean, the twin-island paradise is known for its 365 white and pink sandy beaches, cheerful weather, and world-class resorts. While it has long been a favourite with affluent US and British travellers, it is now emerging as a must-visit destination for Middle East travellers, with its award-winning V.C. Bird International Airport providing convenient travel connections from key international hubs already popular among Middle East travellers, including London, New York and Miami.

To highlight the exceptional range of experiences on offer, the **Antigua**and **Barbuda Tourism** Authority hosted a series of events across the UAE over the past week, including a culinary masterclass with the Antiguan and Barbudan chef Lejorn Hill who is Executive Chef at Dubai’s Paramount Hotel, providing a taste of Antigua and Barbuda cooking experience. Fashion-loving Emirati women were also treated to a virtual fashion show by Antigua and Barbuda's iconic female fashion designers and artists, while an exclusive dinner with CEOs from major travel corporations at the world’s tallest restaurant, At.mosphere at the Burj Khalifa, provided a meaningful and memorable networking opportunity.

The team also hosted an insightful panel session at the Antigua and Barbuda Pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai to discuss the destination and the positive social, economic and environmental impact of its wide-ranging approach to sustainable tourism.

Led by Colin C. James, Chief Executive Officer of Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority, and supported by Patrice Simon, Executive Director of Antigua Barbuda Hotels and Tourism Association, the conversation also featured valuable insights from **Sheikh** Abdul Aziz bin Ali Al Nuaimi, known as the ‘Green Sheikh’ and the official environmental adviser to the Ajman Government.

**Broad appeal for Middle East travellers**

As one of the Caribbean's premier destinations for leisure, cruises, and business travellers, Antigua and Barbuda welcomes over a million visitors annually to its shores and is well positioned to meet and exceed the needs of travellers from across the region.

“There is undoubtedly a strong synergy between what we offer as a destination, and what visitors from the region are looking for when it comes to travel experiences,” explained Colin James.

The essence of Antigua and Barbuda undeniably lies in its culture and people. Steeped in history and wrapped in a culture of warmth and vibrancy, the country is excited to welcome guests from across the globe to experience the islands’ traditions, taste its delicacies and witness how a rapidly progressing nation is becoming a key business and tourism destination.

“We have a lot to offer the mid to the upper end of the market and know how to cater for a discerning clientele, which is important when welcoming affluent travellers from this region, as they are typically very well-travelled and expect exceptional service and experiences,” continued James.

“The pandemic has really put a reset on where people go and what they do, with people looking to improve their wellbeing, seeking space and opportunities to reconnect with family. Antigua and Barbuda is the perfect fit for the kind of traveller that is seeking these experiences and we would like to be top of mind when they look for new adventures and destinations for their next vacation.”

**Getting there is set to get easier**

James emphasised that whilst getting to Antigua and Barbuda is possible – it is currently featured with Emirates Holidays, showing that there is latent demand – they also have laid the groundworks for introducing air services. “We are continuing to have meaningful discussions with Emirates Airlines, and are very hopeful that, in the foreseeable future, we will be at the top of their list as they expand and look towards our part of the world, making it even easier to get to our little piece of paradise.”

**service WITH CARIBBEAN PANACHE**

Patrice Simon explained how the private sector works diligently to ensure visitors receive the **highest level of service**, but in a way that is authentic to the island and the people. “People who come here expect a certain level of service but they still want to feel like they are in the Caribbean. Our people are very laid back – we’re on an island surrounded by 365 beaches, so there isn’t any stress and we can focus on creating a wonderful environment and offering the best service possible. This is really important to us – hospitality is what we do, it’s not an industry, it’s a way of life – around 70 per cent of our GDP comes from tourism – so we have to excel at it.”

**85 per cent of accommodation sits within the luxury category**, including the 300-acre private island paradise, Jumby Bay Resort which is part of the renowned Oetker Collection of premium destinations and is rated the number one luxury resort in all of the Caribbean, and the fifth-best resort in the world.

**Total ban on plastic**

In a week that has seen the UAE take its own progressive stance in the battle against plastic bags, Simon explained how Antigua and Barbuda was the first country in the western hemisphere to ban plastic bags in 2016, followed a total ban on all plastics and Styrofoam in 2018.

Describing the importance of it being driven at a government level and how the movement had been embraced across the islands, Simon said: “We have a lot of properties that have taken their own initiative to contribute towards the sustainability movement, but we also have a very strong foundation from the Ministry of Tourism which has ensured everyone is aligned in utilising energy saving initiatives, green water to reusable packaging.”

James added: “This is serious for us. We are a small island state and we depend on the marine environment. We realise that a lot of that plastic waste ends up in the ocean and our beaches, and that affects out livelihoods and longevity as a nation. We have to be very targeted in what we do and we make sure to practice what we preach. Much like the UAE, we punch well above our weight on issues that really matter to us.”

**100% green energy – with SUPPORT from partners in the UAE**

The island of Barbuda, known for its beautiful 17 miles of unbroken pink sand beaches, was totally devasted by hurricane Irma in 2017. It has since been rebuilt but, with a very small section of our total population living on Barbuda – around just 1,500 permanent residents – it presented an opportunity to approach the rebuild differently.

In another example of the government’s commitment to using resources wisely, they decided to make Barbuda **the first country in the world to be totally reliant on green energy**. James explained ‘’working in partnership with the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development, as well as the governments of New Zealand, the UK and the governments of Antigua and Barbuda, we have rolled out a solar initiative that allows us to harness the beautiful, free energy source that we have. **By early 2023, every single household in Barbuda will be powered exclusively by green energy**.”

**Avoiding ‘greenwashing’ through transparency**

The Green sheikh commended Antigua and Barbuda for its commitment to creating a cohesive and sustainable approach to environmental challenges. While welcoming the greening of consumer sentiment, he also highlighted the **awakening of travellers** to the reality that not all claims of environmentally and socially responsible practices are true. “Of course, not everyone takes the issue as seriously as Antigua and Barbuda does, and there are instances where perhaps efforts are unsubstantiated and even exaggerated, and we **need more transparency to mitigate scepticism** and enhance consumer confidence in the industry.”

To find out more about visiting Antigua and Barbuda and its commitment to building a sustainable tourism industry, visitantiguabarbuda.com.

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**ABOUT THE ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA TOURISM AUTHORITY**

The Antigua & Barbuda Tourism Authority is a statutory body dedicated to realizing the tourism potential of Antigua & Barbuda by promoting the twin island state as a unique, quality tourist destination with the overall objective of increasing visitor arrivals thereby providing sustainable economic growth. The Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority is headquartered in St. John’s Antigua, where regional marketing is directed. The Authority has three offices overseas in the United Kingdom, United States and Canada.

**ABOUT ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA**

Antigua (pronounced An-tee'ga) and Barbuda (Bar-byew’da) is located in the heart of the Caribbean Sea. Voted the World Travel Awards 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 Caribbean’s Most Romantic Destination, the twin-island paradise offers visitors two uniquely distinct experiences, ideal temperatures year-round, a rich history, vibrant culture, exhilarating excursions, award-winning resorts, mouth-watering cuisine and 365 stunning pink and white-sand beaches - one for every day of the year. The largest of the Leeward Islands, Antigua comprises 108-square miles with rich history and spectacular topography that provides a variety of popular sightseeing opportunities. Nelson’s Dockyard, the only remaining example of a Georgian fort a listed UNESCO World Heritage site, is perhaps the most renowned landmark. Antigua’s tourism events calendar includes the prestigious Antigua Sailing Week, Antigua Classic Yacht Regatta, and the annual Antigua Carnival; known as the Caribbean’s Greatest Summer Festival. Barbuda, Antigua’s smaller sister island, is the ultimate celebrity hideaway. The island lies 27 miles north-east of Antigua and is just a 15-minute plane ride away. Barbuda is known for its untouched 17 mile stretch of pink sand beach and as the home of the largest Frigate Bird Sanctuary in the Western Hemisphere. Find information on Antigua & Barbuda at: www.visitantiguabarbuda.com or follow us on Twitter. http://twitter.com/antiguabarbuda Facebook www.facebook.com/antiguabarbuda; Instagram: www.instagram.com/AntiguaandBarbuda