

How can Caribbean tourism investment, business and operations align with the United Nations sustainable development goals?

Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes (WHATT) encourages its theme editors to build on prior work and I am delighted to welcome back Vikneswaran Nair who reviewed past issues on rural tourism development and climate change (WHATT Volume 5, Number 4, 2013; Volume 7, Number 5, 2015; Volume 8, Number 5, 2016). Joined by Michelle McLeod for this issue, they have developed their work by exploring how can Caribbean tourism investment, business and operations align with the United Nations sustainable development goals (SDGs). I would like to thank them and their writing team for another fascinating and comprehensive analysis of the critical role that tourism plays in achieving the UN's SDG in the Caribbean.

WHATT aims to make a practical and theoretical contribution to hospitality and tourism development and we seek to do this by using a key question to focus attention on an industry issue. If you would like to contribute to our work by serving as a WHATT theme editor, do please contact me.

Richard Teare

Managing Editor, WHATT

How can Caribbean tourism investment, business and operations align with the United Nations sustainable development goals?

The 17 United Nations sustainable development goals (SDGs) target for 2030, sets the path that the world must embrace for sustainability of the social (people), economy (profit) and the planet (environment). Tourism can and must play a significant role in delivering sustainable solutions for people, the planet, prosperity and peace.

As outlined in the UNWTO's report – Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals – Journey to 2030:

Each year, approximately 1.2 billion tourists are crossing the border. Hence, the tourism industry has a profound and wide-ranging impact on societies, the environment and the economy. Representing 10% of world GDP, 1 in 10 jobs and 7% of global exports, tourism has a decisive role to play in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. The sector is mentioned in, and must deliver on, three of the 17 SDGs, namely SDG 8 on “Decent Work and Economic Growth”, SDG 12 on “Responsible Consumption and Production” and SDG 14 on “Life below Water”. Yet, given the multitude of links it has with other sectors and industries along its vast value chain, it can in fact accelerate progress towards all 17 SDGs. It can help build a new culture of sustainability and peace.

Thus, tourism has the potential to contribute, directly or indirectly, to all of the SDGs. Achieving the SDGs must now become the over-arching agenda of global tourism and it is perhaps better placed than any other industry to contribute to the cause across the board. On this note, the 2030 Agenda provides an opportunity for the Caribbean to further its sustainable development vision through tourism, which is the leading industry in this region. National governments in the Caribbean are expected to mainstream the SDGs in their development plans as well as devise strategies to achieve these goals within their national context and circumstances.

The hurricanes that swept across the Caribbean over the past decades have further intensified with the strongest hurricane on record to have hit the Bahamas in 2019 – and one of the strongest Atlantic hurricanes on record. This have certainly exemplified the need for strong



adaptation measures in the tourism industry. The threat of these natural disasters with corresponding threats to businesses, large and small, from multi-billion dollar cruise operations to small-scale hospitality operations needs to be well understood. Efforts to build more resilient infrastructure and invest in the underpinning ecosystems on which the sector and vulnerable communities depend, represents one of the best insurance policies and risk mitigation strategies. Hence, the alignment of tourism investment, business and operations with SDGs is critical for the sustainability and resiliency of the Caribbean as a leading tourism region.

Given this backdrop, the key research questions (*RQs*) explored in this theme issue are:

- RQ1.* What are the challenges the tourism and hospitality industry in the Caribbean may encounter in looking to contribute to the SDGs?
- RQ2.* How vulnerable is the tourism sector in the Caribbean with regards to economic viability, social equity and environmental protection?
- RQ3.* How can we innovatively encourage tourists and the industry to consider opting for responsible tourism that supports the SDGs?
- RQ4.* What are the practical tools that can be used by tourism policymakers and managers to foster the sustainable growth of the industry in the Caribbean in support of the SDGs?

This theme issue contains eight articles that explore the four key questions cited and reports on the experience of researchers and practitioners in benchmarking innovative approaches to tourism development in the Caribbean that are aligned with the UN's SDGs. Case studies discussed include some of the experiences from the Caribbean, namely, Aruba, Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados, Belize Grenada, Cuba, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, The Bahamas and also Trinidad and Tobago.

The authors would like to acknowledge the support and assistance provided by University of The Bahamas (UB) and especially Mrs Virginia Ballance of the UB Library, who spent many hours sourcing manuscript references and checking citations. We hope that you will find this theme issue stimulating and that the outcomes can be used to move the industry forward as we inch towards achieving the SDG 2030 target.

About the Theme Editors

Vikneswaran Nair is a Professor in Sustainable Tourism and the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of The Bahamas (UB). Prior to joining UB in August 2017, he was at Taylor's University, Malaysia, for 19 years as a full Professor of Sustainable Tourism in the School of Hospitality, Tourism and Culinary Arts; Programme Leader for the Responsible Rural Tourism Network; Research Fellow of the Centre for Research and Innovation in Tourism; and the founding Director of the Centre for Research and Development at the University. A consultant with many national and international projects, his research achievements with more than 350 publications to his credit have earned him many international and national awards. He successfully completed his first consultancy work in The Bahamas when he led a project in 2018 to produce a report for The Bahamas centred on the UNDP's sustainable development goals. He is currently working with the Tourism Development Corporation of The Bahamas to develop a community-based tourism toolkit for the country. His research specialisations are sustainable and responsible tourism, rural tourism, ecotourism management, environmental management, community-based tourism and green tourism.

Michelle McLeod is an Acting Programme Director at the Centre for Hotel and Tourism Management, The University of the West Indies (UWI) Mona Campus, Nassau, The Bahamas. Her tourism industry experience spans more than 28 years and she is a Graduate of The UWI, the University of Surrey and Bournemouth University in the UK where she obtained her doctorate with no post-viva amendments. Dr McLeod's two co-edited books are entitled *Knowledge Networks and Tourism* and *Tourism Management in Warm-water Island Destinations*. Her present research interests are in the subject areas of tourism, knowledge networks, open data ecosystems, policy networks, destination networks and service productivity.

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