

JAMAICA

SHUTTERSTOCK: VALENTIN VALKOV

Original approach triggers rebound

Reimagining tourism post COVID-19 is generating opportunities for inclusive growth.

Like all countries heavily reliant on tourism for economic stability, employment and fiscal well-being, Jamaica suffered immensely during the early stages of the pandemic, but has since bounced back strongly and quickly due to the government's forward-thinking recovery strategy.

The rapid establishment of comprehensive health and safety protocols — particularly "Resilient Corridors" — ensured the Caribbean country was among the first fully prepared to receive foreign travelers once international borders reopened, passenger planes returned to the skies and cruise lines set sail. In the first eight months of 2021, more than a million visitors arrived in Jamaica to experience its sun-kissed shores, incredible scenery and amazing array of cultural delights. In doing so, they pumped more than \$1.2 billion into the economy. According to Jamaica's Minister of Tourism, Hon Edmund Bartlett, the Resilient Corridors provide a secure environment for visitors to enjoy nearly 90 percent of the country's tourism product, while eliminating direct contact with most of the local population.



Hon Edmund Bartlett
Minister of Tourism



Donovan White, Director of
Tourism, Jamaica Tourist Board

"Tourism is Jamaica's bread and butter; it's the engine of our economy, creates jobs, attracts foreign investment, drives the development of critical infrastructure and promotes trade across multiple sectors," the respected statesman notes. "More importantly, it promotes inclusive economic growth and social mobility. We have been ramping up efforts to ensure our tourism workers are fully vaccinated and have seen much success." The minister, who recently visited the US and Canada for talks with leading industry players, adds that while

the sector's growth ground to a halt in 2020 — and the positions of its 175,000 workers put on hold — it has since shifted through the gears and benefited from a successful focus on sustainability and inclusivity.

Tourism numbers set for take-off

"The silver lining is that the COVID-19 crisis has provided the opportunity for us to reimagine and rebuild this resilient industry to better achieve this mandate," Bartlett adds. "Sustainability and inclusivity are integral to the recovery process. As we seize the

opportunities, we are implementing strategic measures to rebuild a product that is safe, equitable and generates economic opportunities for average Jamaicans.

"The recovery of tourism has exceeded our expectations. The advent of vaccines and the science behind them has given a greater level of confidence in the safety of travel. Jamaica is a unique mix of our ethnic and ideological strengths. We're really the confluence of cultures and ethnicities across the world. Our authentic presence in the global space is driven by us being truly representative of the world community.

"Almost every nation has a place here, with representatives of their cultures, styles and values, embedded in this Jamaican mosaic. It enables us to be far a more attractive destination. To be

Jamaican is really to be cosmopolitan and a true part of the world community."

Working closely with the ministry is the Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB), headed by dynamic Director, Donovan White. Upbeat data compiled by his office shows tourism levels for 2023 are currently projected to hit 3.7 million visitors and \$3.5 billion in revenue, with 2024 on track to surpass 2019 levels with 4.2 million visitors and \$4 billion in tourism revenue.

"As a world-class destination, Jamaica is open for business and has created the environment for safe as well as productive, travel for those business travelers or those persons who are seeking to find healing places," he says. "We look forward to seeing more Americans and south Floridians here in the very near future."

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Hon Edmund Bartlett, Minister of Tourism

Jamaica's sustainability success attracts a new generation of travelers

Sustainability has been a fundamental driver of the tourism industry for years, with operators fully embracing the trend.

Well aware of the absolute importance of protecting its myriad of stunning natural habitats, Jamaica has always taken measures to preserve its incredible coastline, gorgeous forests, beautiful national parks and abundant wildlife, so as to maintain its proud status as the jewel of the Caribbean.

As an increasingly popular destination for eco-tourism tours and activities, the government is implementing a range of policies that strike just the right balance between allowing visitors to experience and enjoy its flora and fauna, while not harming or exploiting its delicate eco-systems.

Sustainability initiatives are spearheaded by JTB through its tourism development strategy, which includes innovative programs and initiatives that benefit the natural environment and the communities that thrive off tourism. "We are focused on sustainability from a number of angles that ultimately contribute to the overall growth of our economy over the long haul," White explains. "Another area of focus is green technologies. More and more of our tourism properties, entities, and attractions are embracing solar energy form.

"Since single-use plastic has been outlawed in Jamaica, they're also embracing biodegradable products to deliver services within their hotels and within their business

entities. These efforts reduce the overall impact on emissions and waste products. We are profoundly focused on the business of sustainability from a very broad angle, but obviously from a very self-imposed approach that allows us to direct it all towards economic growth and development for the nation."

Sustainability ideas include community tourism

Early last year, Jamaica hosted the UNWTO (World Tourism Organization) Summit on Innovation Resilience and Crisis Management, at which Minister Bartlett addressed the high-level audience. He outlined an ambitious vision for the close relationship between resilience, innovation and sustainability, saying his country's impressive response to adversity has been based not just on the latter, but also the former. "It's to build capacity, to trap the disruptions, recover quickly from them and build better, so that you can thrive," he said.

Expanding on this point, he adds: "My goal has always been to create a tourism product where the vast benefits are distributed fairly across society. Tourism is as much about the farmer, craft vendor, entertainer, and transportation provider as it is about the hotelier, restaurateur, and attraction operator."



As a tropical island paradise, Jamaica is completely committed to protecting its flora and fauna.



Jamaica's tourism sector is now the global benchmark for post-pandemic leisure travel activities.

Entertainment industry is up and vibing once again

Inspired by the legendary reggae music and style of Bob Marley, Jamaica's influence on world music is indelible.

Jamaica's musical roots stretch back decades, with its most famous singer songwriter — Bob Marley — helping to put the nation on the entertainment and cultural map and blazing a trail for other talented performers to follow.

"It's safe to say that Jamaica has delivered over five unique genres of music to the world and that its music has inspired other genres of music," states White. "These are things that make us extremely proud. One could say that one of the great men of the last century was Bob Marley. You can't get more Jamaican than Bob Marley."

"There's acceptance of so many elements of our own culture and practices," Minister Bartlett adds. "Our music, reggae, has taken the world by storm and for a small country, the impact that it has had on the global scene is absolutely phenomenal."

Cruise industry takes to the water again

Every weekend, Jamaica's urban areas, such as the vibrant and welcoming capital of Kingston, throb to the beat of traditional tunes and more modern music that attracts a young and hip crowd. Prior to the pandemic, many international pop stars holidayed on the island to recharge their batteries, with several names already spotted on its shores since international borders reopened.

While such celebrities had sufficient funds to charter private jets or luxury yachts, the recent restart of cruise operations means tens of thousands of tourists have booked visits to Jamaica, with nearly two dozen cruise liners — many departing from Florida — scheduled to berth at the modern port of Ocho Rios before the end of 2021.

Minister Bartlett says Jamaica is well prepared for the string of cruise ship calls as all the requirements are in place to meet both international and local Ministry of Health and Wellness COVID-19 protocols, with passengers limited to moving within the Resilient Corridors.

"Cruise shipping is critical to the recovery of the tourism sector, and we are seeing a welcomed return of vessels with the recognition that Jamaica's Resilient Corridors offer a safe environment for our visitors, tourism workers and the general population," he says. "With the return of stopover visitor arrivals since June 2020, we have been seeing steady growth towards pre-COVID-19 levels and now that the cruise shipping industry is back onstream, we are looking forward to significant growth in our numbers."

He underscores that the huge cruise ships have to meet strict measures governing the restart of cruise shipping, requiring approximately 95 percent of passengers and crew to be fully vaccinated and for all passengers to provide evidence of negative results from a COVID-19 test taken within 72 hours of sailing. "Cruise tourism is a critical part of the tourism product in the Caribbean," he adds. "We are the greatest warm weather destination and cruise liners provide instant convertibility of the dock. As a cruise ship enters the port, the dollars start to flow and they go directly into the hands of small and medium-sized enterprises. The government gets a small portion, but the vast majority of cruise passengers' expenditure, once they are off the ship, is in the space of the small and medium-sized enterprises."

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