

Still hope after tourism troubles

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The COVID-19 pandemic may have delivered a knockout blow to Barbados' tourism hopes for the 2020/2021 season, but tourism officials remain optimistic.

Cruise ships were scheduled to make 423 calls at the Bridgetown Port bringing 835 000 passengers between October 2020 and April 2021, but yesterday chairman of the Barbados Hotel & Tourism Association (BHTA), Geoffrey Roach, suggested those hopes were likely dashed when the cruise industry was not expected to rebound before next year.

"We don't anticipate that cruising will be back in any meaningful way until about mid-2021," Roach said during

a virtual media conference.

His comments came days after the Norwegian-owned cruise ship operator Sea Dream Yacht Club cancelled sailing for the rest of the year after its ship **SeaDream 1** recorded several COVID-19 positive cases among passengers and staff on its first Caribbean cruise, forcing it to return to the Barbados homeport, where the cruise was curtailed and affected passengers quarantined or hospitalised in instances of severe cases.

Sea Dream Yacht Club was one of the first lines to resume travel amid the pandemic, offering cruises in the Caribbean from November through April. But in a statement Tuesday, the company said even though "multiple" negative tests were required before travel, seven guests and two staff members were found to have

the virus after being tested by Barbados health officials.

The cruise industry was suspended in March as the coronavirus pandemic raged around the world, and many ships were left stranded on the high seas.

Barbados provided a safe haven for several of those ships and their crew while also facilitating repatriation of stranded passengers to their homes around the world. Many cruise lines announced they would not resume sailing until at least December. But with COVID-19 cases rising to record levels in the United States and European countries, initiating new lockdowns with surges of infections spreading, an imminent return to



Chairman of the Barbados Hotel & Tourism Association (BHTA), Geoffrey Roach, said the cruise industry was not expected to rebound before next year. (FP)



Chief executive officer of the BHTA, Rudy Grant, said the tourism industry depended significantly on airlift. (FP)

cruise ship travel remains in doubt.

For Barbados, the problem with declining visitor numbers could be exacerbated further, at least in the short term, given the effect on airlines grounded due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns in the island's major source markets.

"At the end of the day the industry really is dependent significantly on the airlift," said Rudy Grant, chief executive officer of the BHTA yesterday, while noting the latest one-month lockdown in Britain had put a temporary halt to leisure travel for Britons.

"It is having a negative impact because we would have seen immediately a fall-off in the airlift (with) British Airways and Virgin having one flight a week. They both expected to increase the level of airlift from December 4 and 5 with both airlines scheduled to fly out of Gatwick and Heathrow," Grant said.

"Of course, there is also an impact in Germany as well and I can't say definitively when the airlift out of Germany will come back . . . Until we are able to have the airlift facilitated, there will not be business as we would like coming out of wider

Europe or out of Britain and a lot of that is dependent on what is happening in those source markets and what measures they are taking with respect to COVID-19."

Yet, he was optimistic, saying "we can see travel re-emerging".

He said Barbados was in a good position to welcome even larger numbers judging from the reported enthusiasm among travellers who expressed a preference for holidaying here.

"We are confident that once Britain and the wider Europe start to see a reduction in the number of cases and a relaxing of the travel protocols from where they are right now, then we are very confident that then we will see increasing numbers coming," he said.

Similar optimism was expressed by the BHTA chairman, who said: "While we recognise that Britain is our main source market, what we need to recognise is that Barbados' brand equity internationally is huge. What has been signalled to us is that there is pent-up demand, not only in Britain but in most of our markets, for travel to Barbados."

Ministry of Health and Wellness, Barbados COVID-19 Situation Report
COVID-19 Hotline (246) 536 4500 Thursday November 19, 2020, 10:30 A.M.

STATISTICS WORLDWIDE*	STATISTICS LOCAL	STATISTICS LOCAL
56,747,642 Confirmed Cases to Date	253 Confirmed Cases to Date	5 In Isolation
39,502,649 Recovered	134 Females 119 Males	241 Recovered/discharged
1,358,077 Deaths	1-95 Age Range	7 Deaths
*Coronavirus worldometer	43,420 Total Tests Completed	

Wash your hands
Wash your hands regularly with soap and running water.

Protecting yourself and others from the Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Even if your hands are not visibly dirty, frequently clean them using a 60% or higher alcohol-based hand sanitizer gel.

Three more COVID-19 cases

There were three new COVID-19 positive cases diagnosed in Barbados between Monday and Wednesday.

A 25-year-old Barbadian man who arrived on JetBlue on November 17 and was asymptomatic, a 27-year-old visitor who arrived on American Airlines on November 16 with a negative test, and a 38-year-old woman who arrived on JetBlue on November 14 are the latest to test positive for the virus.

The 38-year-old, who arrived from the United States with a valid negative test, was diagnosed Monday with the viral illness after undergoing a second test.

The man was the only positive case out of 316 tests conducted by the Best-dos Santos Public Health Laboratory on Tuesday.

The 27-year-old woman was the only positive result among 285 tests conducted on Wednesday. One person was released from isolation on Tuesday, and two more were discharged from isolation yesterday.

There are now five people in isolation, while 241 others have recovered. Confirmed cases now stand at 253, comprising 134 females and 119 males.

The laboratory has conducted 43 420 tests to date. (BA/PR)

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