

CREST, Partners Host Caribbean's First Innovators Symposium | Grenada, July 9 – 11, 2014



The 3rd Symposium for Innovators in Coastal Tourism, held in Grenada from July 9-11, 2014, has helped to set the 'green' agenda for Grenada and the other Caribbean countries. Over 200 delegates participated in the three day event, making it the largest ever Innovators Symposium organized by the Center for Responsible Travel (CREST). CREST hosted the Grenada Symposium together with the Grenada Tourism Authority, Grenada Hotel and Tourism Association, and the Caribbean Tourism Organization.

Some fifty speakers from around the Americas - including CREST board members Mike Robbins, Mary-Elizabeth Gifford, and Alice Marshall - gave presentations on a range of topics including the impacts of climate change on coastal tourism, 'green' finance, eco-certification programs, travelers' philanthropy, and linking sustainable tourism to local agriculture. Several panels focused on the growing body of environmental and social 'best practices' for large and small resorts, coastal destinations, beaches and shorelines, cruise tourism, marinas, spas, golf courses, sport fishing, and other types of coastal and marine recreation.

The Symposium served to highlight Grenada's new tourism brand, "Pure Grenada: The Spice of the Caribbean." In introducing the concept, Grenada's Minister of Tourism, Alexandra Otway-Noel explained, "We are Pure Grenada because we want to celebrate and preserve our culture rather than destroy it." She continued, "Pure Grenada is home to low-impact, environmentally sensitive boutique resorts."

"Being Pure," the Minister asserted, "begins with valuing ourselves, and staying Pure begins with committing to improvement. This is why I was thrilled when CREST and the CTO offered to host the 3rd Symposium for Coastal Innovators in Grenada. This event will mark a milestone in our development and hopefully in the development of our neighbors too."

At the opening luncheon, keynote speaker Jake Kheel, Environmental Director at Puntacana Resort & Club, one of the Caribbean's oldest eco-resorts, explained, "When Puntacana Resort & Club began in the Dominican Republic over 45 years ago, the concept of 'sustainable development' didn't yet exist. The developers made all of their important decisions based on common sense, their limited resources, and a deep respect for the Dominican Republic, its people, and its incredible natural resources. As it turns out," Kheel added, "many of our early decisions relate directly to what is now known as sustainable development. Today," he concluded, "Puntacana Resort & Club shares its many examples, from sustainable golf courses, water treatment facilities, coral restoration programs, and the unique architecture of the Punta Cana International Airport, as a way to inspire a hopeful vision of what Caribbean tourism can aspire to be."



Symposium speakers and documentary films from Jamaica and Costa Rica also examined a range of problems caused by fast-paced and poorly-planned coastal tourism. Jessica Hsu, coordinator of the organization Another Haiti is Possible, spoke passionately about the ongoing conflict between the government and local community on the Haitian island of Île-à-Vache. As Hsu told the audience, "The population of the island is not opposed to tourism, but is strongly opposed to the current iteration of 'Destination Île-à-Vache' which continues to systematically violate their rights." She added that those on the island "are in favor of development which is respectful of their needs [and] which does not exploit nor threaten to take away their land -- a project in which their participation is central and integral."



In the closing plenary session, Grenada's Ambassador to the United States, Dr. Angus Friday told the Symposium delegates, "We must have an action plan that takes us forth from here. Not just for Grenada but for the region. It needs to be broken down into small bits and fit into a master plan. And that master plan cannot just be something that sits on a shelf. It must actually attract investment so that we can get the sort of jobs and impact we're looking for."

Friday and others went on to list a range of priorities that had been identified at the Symposium. These include: 1) adapting coastal tourism development to the realities of climate change, 2) achieving energy independence and 'green' energy efficiencies, 3) adhering to best practices through eco-certifications and other tools, and 4) linking sustainable tourism to agriculture, fishing, handicrafts, and other sectors in the local economy.

What Symposium Delegates Had to Say...

Here are some of the comments CREST received from Symposium speakers and attendees:

- "What a wonderful experience. I learned so much, was definitely inspired, and even grew on a personal level. Grenada served as such an exceptional destination, made everything clearer. Bravo for a great conference!"
- Ryan Crabbe, Sr. Director, Global Spa Brands and Operations, Hilton Worldwide
- "So many great people! I enjoyed meeting everyone... It was a really cohesive, smart, & passionate group. Perhaps the best I've encountered."
- Andy Dumaine, CEO, shrinkingfootprint
- "We are very pleased and very motivated to continue with the momentum."
- Hon. Alexandra Otway-Noel, Minister of Tourism, Civil Aviation and Culture, Grenada
- "Thank you all for a wonderful, very instructive conference. I will await the posting of the presentations. I will present them at our Aruba Hotel and Tourism Association and at the board of the Aruba Tourism Authority."
- Ewald K. Biemans, Owner & CEO, Bucuti & Tara Beach Resorts
- "An outstanding event. I was very pleased with the level of discussion around such important topics. I enjoyed the tour of Grenada and the events around the symposium. Keep up the good work."
- Miguel Pena, Sr. Analyst, Sustainability Programs, Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd.

Skyviews Launches New Eco-labeling Program Designed by CREST

The Barbados-based company Skyviews Inc., which produces colorful maps and guides for 12 Caribbean islands, is launching a new eco-labeling program developed by CREST. Skyviews maps feature tourism businesses, ranging from hotels, tour guides, and restaurants, to attractions, retail shops, airlines, and boat companies.

The maps will now include eco-labels earned by these companies. The new voluntary eco-labeling scheme, developed by CREST staff and consultant Amos Bien (a leading certification expert), measures and rates the performance of businesses across ten different types of business. The awards program enables all businesses, irrespective of size, to measure their progress sustainability and earn eco-labels in five categories: energy, waste, water, social governance, and biodiversity.



"We are at a pivotal point in the course of history and the degradation of earth's supporting ecosystems," says Skyviews CEO Jessica Bensley. "We have before us an urgent call and challenge to adopt sustainable business practices and decouple environmental degradation from economic progress in order to create continued well-being." The new Skyviews sustainability awards program was officially launched at the Innovators Symposium in Grenada. It is currently being field tested and will be made available shortly to all 600 businesses within Skyviews' portfolio.



(Jessica Bensley with the team from CREST at 1st Innovators Symposium in Grenada)