

Tourism and Entrepreneurship - Drivers for Innovation and Sustainability



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The international Tourism industry has continued to have profound impacts on the global economy and has been specifically significant to the economies of the Greater Caribbean. According to UN Tourism, approximately 690 million tourists travelled internationally between January and June 2025. This represents an estimated 33 million increase in travellers in comparison to the same period of 2024. UN Tourism's projection of 3% to 5% growth in international arrivals for 2025 remains unchanged as various country data on international tourism receipts has revealed that there was strong visitor spending this in early 2025.

The Tourism industry continues to be one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. The robust and dynamic nature of the Tourism sector serves to fuel and sustain opportunities for revenue generation, job creation and provides a foundation for cultural retention and environmental preservation within destinations throughout the world.

Tourism and Entrepreneurship have long had an intrinsically inter-woven dynamic. The latter has provided a pipeline for the provision of rich, immersive experiences that allow tourists to access and engage in meaningful encounters within destinations. As the industry adapts to addressing the needs of local communities and ever-changing natural environments; entrepreneurs serve as a vital bridge that connect tourists and destinations, through their offerings of creative and meaningful events, tourism products and services which protect the natural and cultural environments on which the sector depends but also contributes to economic growth and development.

Data from Booking.com's recent Travel and Sustainability Report 2025 revealed that travellers are increasingly committed to actively supporting the economies of the destinations they visit. A large

percentage of travellers (73%) were desirous of supporting entrepreneurs and businesses where the revenue earned from tourist activities returned to the local community and a further 77% of respondents sought authentic experiences that were representative of the local culture when they travelled.

Entrepreneurs have been increasingly responsive to the needs travellers as they provide a myriad of key services that today's responsible tourist actively seeks and requires during their travel experience. This includes the provision of quaint sustainably focused and family-owned accommodation facilities, engaging guided tours with knowledgeable local guides, diverse and delightful culinary experiences rooted in local cultural heritage, unique locally-sourced souvenir items as well as tech-driven solutions that facilitate ease of travel. In many ways, entrepreneurship has infused layers of vibrancy and value to the otherwise simple activity of travel. This segment of businesses has also actively met traveller demands for greater digital conveniences to support travel experiences through providing digital services that increase the ease of travel and doing business whilst simultaneously boosting the destination's visibility.

Online booking systems, virtual reality tours, social media marketing, and mobile apps allow small businesses to reach global audiences with minimal investment. The rise of the "experience economy" and remote work trends have also inspired entrepreneurs to create hybrid tourism models — such as digital nomad hubs and immersive wellness retreats.

The resilience and adaptability of the tourism sector is underpinned by the presence of entrepreneurs who create new businesses that facilitate employment generation, and income earning opportunities, increase country's access to foreign exchange and continue to provide a wider range of reliable services that are responsive to both traveller needs and to the needs of a destination's natural and cultural environments. The innovation showcased pave new paths for economic development and progress.

Travellers' calls for greater authenticity during travel and their desire and increased demand to engage with local and community-based tourism business has not gone unnoticed by national and international organizations. Governments as well as International and Regional bodies have sought to improve on, and create enabling environments for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSME's) to develop and thrive within destinations. This obtains as there is a growing recognition that entrepreneurship within the context of the tourism industry, and generally, can serve to meet the socio-economic needs of countries seeking to create opportunities for sustainable livelihoods for their populations.

The Association of Caribbean States (ACS), serving as an impactful intergovernmental organisation within the international landscape, recognises that entrepreneurship can serve as a link for local businesses to become valuable collaborators in the thrust towards sustainable tourism development. The ACS therefore continues to be committed to facilitating and promoting the development and execution of policies and strategies that create positive ecosystems that encourage and allow entrepreneurs to flourish.

It is envisaged that with adequate, timely and consistent advocacy projects and interventions, the ACS can continue to provide support to entrepreneurs within the tourism landscape to increase

competitiveness, diversification, and inclusive growth across the Greater Caribbean. Recognizing the critical role that access to sustainable financing plays in both the growth of entrepreneurs and of the tourism industries of Member States, the ACS will continue to support collaborations and partnerships with financing platforms that can enable MSMEs and entrepreneurs to access markets more effectively.

Tourism and entrepreneurship continue to meet mutual interests for global and localised socio-economic growth, inclusivity, and cultural and environmental preservation. As demand amongst travellers increase for more authentic and immersive tourism experiences, so too is the need for entrepreneurs that are equipped with skills, systems and resources to contribute addressing ever-changing traveller preferences and travel trends with innovation and creativity. Destinations are encouraged to actively include and accommodate entrepreneurs in wider tourism development plans, policies and strategies, to advance the industry's growth in ways that recognises the importance of robust co-management structures that empower local talent, promote social cohesion, protect natural and cultural resources and create mechanisms for equitable economic renewal.