



Air Passenger Duty a continuing concern for Diaspora and the Caribbean

Britain's controversial Air Passenger Duty (APD) and its banding structure, which the Caribbean and its UK Diaspora regard as discriminatory, was a key talking point during the week of World Travel Market, the annual tourism trade show that took place in London from 9-12 November.

Caribbean Ministers and industry representatives attending the event took the opportunity of their stay to meet with British Ministers and Parliamentarians to express their deep concern about the negative impact of a banding structure that places more tax on air tickets from then UK to the Caribbean than the whole of the US. The

measure is particularly concerning to the many British citizens of Caribbean origin who frequently visit friends and relatives in the region.

On 9 November, Tourism Ministers from Antigua, Jamaica, Barbados, Grenada, and St Lucia, the Secretary General of the Caribbean Tourism Organisation and the President and Director General of the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association met with Sarah McCarthy Fry MP, the UK Treasury Minister responsible for APD. The group also met with an all-party group of MPs on 11 November at the House of Commons to develop further cross party support for the Caribbean's concerns about the impact of APD and how they might be addressed.



At the meeting on 9 November, which was chaired by Dawn Butler, MP for Brent South, a constituency with significant numbers of voters from the Caribbean Diaspora, Caribbean Ministers told the Treasury Minister that there was growing anger in the UK and the Caribbean over APD.

The Caribbean delegation made clear that the UK Government's position on banding which placed the Caribbean in a higher tax band than destinations on the US West Coast or Hawaii was discriminatory, would damage tourism and would undercut key UK government and European initiatives in the region on development.

In exchanges the UK Minister indicated that Treasury officials are exploring the legal and revenue issues associated with possibility of re-banding APD for the Caribbean.

At a separate meeting convened by Sarah Teather MP on November 11, an all party group from both Houses of Parliament agreed to adopt a strategy to encourage Government to make a positive decision on rebanding.

Just before WTM, the head of Virgin Atlantic called on David Cameron and the Conservative Party to commit to scrapping further increases in Air Passenger Duty, if they are elected to power in 2010.

Steve Ridgway, Chief Executive of Virgin Atlantic, commented: "These proposed increases will not only hurt the aviation industry but also harm the British economy and those of many developing countries, like the Caribbean, which heavily rely on the tourism trade. It will also tax many hard working British holidaymakers out of flying altogether". The airline also highlighted the fact that if APD is not withdrawn before aviation becomes part of the EU Emissions Trading Scheme in 2012, travellers may be taxed twice-over

The Caribbean Tourism Organisation indicated that a survey of UK holidaymakers in the region earlier this year had revealed that once the cost of flights rises above a specific level, their propensity to book is significantly reduced. CTO continue to support the Diaspora in the UK in their efforts to lobby the British Government. Further information can be found at <http://www.caribbean.co.uk/apd/Update.aspx>

Baroness Kinnock, the Minister in the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office with responsibility for the Caribbean, recognised the Diaspora's concern over APD during a speech on 9 November. Speaking at a reception held for members of the Caribbean Diaspora, the Minister reiterated that the Government was aware of the challenge faced by the Caribbean and that government was exploring re-banding and the issues surrounding it.

(Pictured: Top left, Dawn Butler MP and Edmund Bartlett MP; Middle right, Sarah Teather MP with parliamentary delegation)

Events Diary

16-20 November, 2009
Trade Mission to Jamaica

2-7 November, 2009
Havana International Fair, Cuba

23-26 November, 2009
Commonwealth Business Forum,
Port of Spain, Trinidad

26-27 November, 2009
Cuba's Energy Revolution Seminar,
Havana, Cuba

30 November – 2 December, 2009
Caribbean and Central American
Action Annual Conference, Miami

4-6 May, 2010
Caribbean Hotel and Tourism
Investment Conference, Puerto Rico

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In 2009, Virgin Atlantic celebrates 25 years of flying. In this time it has become the largest scheduled airline between Europe and the Caribbean, carrying 825,000 passengers on its ten Caribbean routes last year.

Virgin Atlantic flies to Antigua, Barbados, Grenada, Havana, Kingston, Montego Bay, St Lucia and Tobago from London Gatwick and to Barbados and St Lucia from Manchester.

For more details and to make bookings, please visit www.virgin-atlantic.com.



Cuba Initiative Holds High Level Energy Seminar in Havana

At the end of November, former UK Energy Minister, Brian Wilson (pictured), will lead a delegation to Cuba of around 20 people representing UK companies in the renewable energy and oil and gas sectors. In Havana, they will participate in a two day conference organised by the UK and Cuban sides of the Cuba Initiative.

The seminar will be formally opened by Minister for Basic Industries, Yadira Garcia, and it is expected that there will be a total of around 50 participants from the Cuban side, made up of key figures who are responsible for delivering energy policy nationally and regionally, and Cuban enterprises which wish to upscale their existing renewable energy equipment or develop new overseas markets.

The seminar will include presentations on opportunities for UK companies in the following areas: oil and gas exploration and related services, biomass, wind energy, wave and tidal energy, and hydroelectric and solar power.

If you would like further information about the seminar and how to attend, please contact Chris Bennett chris.bennett@caribbean-council.org



Caribbean community welcomed to the FCO

Baroness Kinnock, Foreign Office Minister with responsibility for the Caribbean and the Commonwealth, reinforced the UK's commitment to the Caribbean during constructive talks with a range of representatives from the Caribbean community in the UK.

During the event, which was organised with the help of the Caribbean Council, Baroness Kinnock and participants discussed a number of important issues facing the UK and the Caribbean, including crime, climate change, the future of the Commonwealth and the global recession.

At a reception following the talks, attended by over 150 members of the Caribbean community in the UK, the Minister paid tribute to the "huge contribution" that the Caribbean community has made to life in the UK and praised how the UK and the region were coming together to tackle global challenges.

'The relationship we have with the Caribbean now is more than just good bilateral ties and shared historical and social links. We also face common problems and challenges... In the round table we just had we discussed some of the new challenges we face - the current economic crisis and drugs and organised crime...'

'We must therefore value our historic ties but more importantly we must nurture our contemporary ties so that we can build for a common future together with strength and equity.'

In her speech the Minister also paid tribute to the Commonwealth, which will hold its Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Trinidad & Tobago later this month. Commenting that there was "no organisation better placed to discuss and react to ... poverty eradication and climate change", the Minister called on guests to take part in the debate around the Commonwealth's future, through the [Commonwealth Conversation](#).

Virgin Atlantic Launches Direct Flights to Puerto Rico

The first Virgin Atlantic flight from London Gatwick to San Juan, Puerto Rico departed on 7 November. This will make it Virgin Atlantic's 9th Caribbean destination.

Nick Parker, Virgin Atlantic Country Manager for the Caribbean, said: "The Caribbean has remained a strong market for Virgin Atlantic since we first started flying there in 1998 and we are thrilled to be adding San Juan. Virgin Atlantic flies nearly two million passengers each year from London Gatwick and Puerto Rico will serve to increase this further, especially with many passengers connecting onto cruises operating within the Caribbean.

Flights from Gatwick depart on Saturdays at 09:25, arriving into San Juan at 16:05 the same day and depart on a Saturday from San Juan leaving at 18:05, arriving into London Gatwick at 08:35 the following morning.

Oil and gas market visit to Trinidad 22 to 29 January 2010, Port of Spain

Trinidad is home to some key energy players including: Petrotrin (NOC); BPTT (BP Trinidad); BGTT (British Gas Trinidad); National Gas Company (NGC) and National Energy Company.

With its highly developed industrial sector and geographic position, it not only offers the chance to expand/grow a customer base in Trinidad but may also provide a gateway to other oil and gas markets of South and North America.

NOF Energy is coordinating a market visit to Trinidad that has been designed to assist both experienced and novice exporters to meet with new partners and find out about potential business opportunities in the oil and gas market.

We are utilising the in-country knowledge and expertise of The British High Commission of Trinidad and Tobago based in Port of Spain, to devise a programme of meetings with key players ... to assist you to win business. *For more information please contact Jenna Gray jgray@nofenergy.co.uk*