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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**READY, SET, CONNECT!**

The Barbados Tourism Marketing Inc. (BTMI) is going to ‘town for its 13th instalment of Connect Barbados – the destination’s annual four-day business-to-business market place. The 70 tour operators coming will mix and mingle with local industry players under the stars at the **Nidhe Israel Synagogue and Museum** in Bridgetown, during the Welcome Cocktail Reception on Wednesday, May 9.

CEO of the BTMI, William ‘Billy’ Griffith, said the choice for the Jewish synagogue was driven by the tour operators’ calls for immersion in the destination’s product offerings each year. “The reason we are able to attract so many tour operators to Connect is primarily because of the desire to actually see and experience all of the selling points of the destination. When they come here, they want to see what’s new, what’s interesting, and what’s unique about Barbados, that they can then take back to their markets and sell. So that’s what we’re doing this year – we have hotels and attractions on board to showcase the best of what we have to offer.”

The Nidhe Israel Synagogue is the oldest Jewish synagogue in the Western Hemisphere and traces

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Jewish history in Barbados back to the 1600s. Beyond the historical element, tour operators will also get a chance to view some of the newly built and refurbished accommodation properties, including the refreshed **Sea Breeze Beach House** in Maxwell, Christ Church, and the recently opened **Sandals Royal** nearby, where the official after-party will be held on the Friday night. Guests will party Bajan style to some of the best in local entertainment, getting a foretaste of the destination’s pinnacle Crop Over festival.

**70 tour operators on the way**

All of Barbados’ top source markets for tourism arrivals will be represented in the 70 tour operators who have registered to attend, including Virgin Holidays out of the U.K., Air Canada Vacations out of Canada, American Airlines Vacations out of the U.S.A, and online travel agencies Expedia and Booking.com.

Of special note is the large contingent coming from Europe, with 13 companies registered, which is a first for the market. This comes as Barbados continues to increase its presence and activity in Europe, set on increasing business from that market.

The visiting participants will have the opportunity to meet face-to-face with local service providers during the two days of business-to-business (B2B) meetings at the Hilton Barbados Resort on Thursday and Friday. Thursday morning will see presentations from the BTMI, the Barbados Hotel and Tourism Association (BHTA) and the Barbados Tourism Product Authority (BTPA), as they give the tour operators a visual walk-through of all the new development on island over the past year, including new hotels, restaurants and attractions. Some of the highpoints are sure to be **Rihanna Drive**, **Nikki Beach**, **Hugo’s** restaurant and the upcoming Heritage Railway by **St. Nicholas Abbey**.

These presentations will be immediately followed by the B2B meetings. Days before the conference opens, over 2000 meeting requests have already been submitted as both visiting tour operators and local industry partners are eager to meet with each other.

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“Connect Barbados is really a win-win for both local and visiting participants,” Griffith added. “In

addition to the first-hand experiences available to tour operators, it offers a platform for our local partners – who may not otherwise have the opportunity to travel to the big shows overseas like WTM or ITB or Virtuoso – to interact with the guys who are out there every day selling Barbados. They’ll get to hear feedback on what’s working and what isn’t; learn about global tourism trends; and see how they can improve or adapt the product here to meet the needs and demands of potential travellers.”

On the final day, Saturday, May 12, the BTMI will host a round-the-island Attractions Day on-board a vintage Bajan Open Bus. Tour operators will get to see first-hand some of the attractions discussed during the conference.

**Culinary theme**

Taking a cue from the Year of Culinary Experiences, this year’s theme for Connect Barbados is ‘Blending Exciting Business Opportunities’. Barbados’ diverse culinary landscape will therefore be on display throughout the conference, exposing tour operators to a range of tasty delights from some of the island’s best chefs and mixologists, and showing them why Barbados is considered the culinary capital of the Caribbean.

Connect Barbados begins on Wednesday, May 9 and continues until Saturday, May 12. For more information, see <https://connect.visitbarbados.org>.

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**About Barbados**

The island of Barbados offers the most authentic Caribbean experience with its exceptionally rich culture and history rooted in remarkable landscapes.  Rated as one of the world's sexiest beaches in 2008 by Concierge.com; Barbados' Crane Beach in St. Philip stands as a premier destination for travellers.  Barbados is also the first Zagat-rated Caribbean island and is known as the culinary capital of the Caribbean. Barbados has hosted several world class events including: The annual Barbados Food & Wine and Rum Festival; the 2006 PGA World Golf Championships-Barbados World Cup, the ICC Cricket World Cup Finals in 2007, the Sentebale Charity Polo match with Prince Harry of Wales in 2010, and the ICC Twenty20 Cricket Finals for 2010, and the Rihanna LOUD concert in 2012. Accommodations range from picturesque plantation houses and villas, to quaint bed and breakfasts and award-winning, five-star resorts. Grantley Adams International Airport offers even more non-stop and direct service from a growing number of U.S., making Barbados the true gateway to the Eastern Caribbean.  Barbados was voted eighth in the World by Trip Advisor's "2008 Travelers' Choice Destination Awards" in its Top 100 Destinations category.  For more information on travel to Barbados, visit [www.visitbarbados.org](http://www.visitbarbados.org/), follow on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/VisitBarbados>, via Twitter @Barbados.