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**BARBADOS TOURISM GROWTH CONTINUES, UP 3% IN FIRST SIX MONTHS OF
2018**

New airlift, new experiences and refreshed product are already translating to increased tourism business for Barbados. Newly released figures show that Barbados is continuing its path of positive growth in 2018, attracting 357,668 stayover visitors for the period January to June. When compared to the corresponding period in 2017, there were 10,819 additional visitors to the island; an increase of 3.1 percent.

According to in-house statistics from the Barbados Tourism Marketing Inc. (BTMI), the island enjoyed an influx of arrivals, and of the five top-producing source markets, the **United Kingdom** is out front once again with over 119,241 arrivals, up 2.8 percent from 2017. The UK maintains a 33.3 percent market share. Following closely behind is the **United States**, which recorded the fastest growth of 8.8 percent from 107,328 visitors during the January to June 2018 period. Over in **Canada**, 53,236 arrivals were recorded, seeing this market grow by 2.9 percent when compared to 2017.

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The island also saw 14,863 arrivals coming out of **Trinidad and Tobago**, and there was a further increase of 3.1 percent growth from the other Caribbean territories, while **Europe** retained 4.3 percent market share with 18,988 visitors.

CEO of the Barbados Tourism Marketing Inc. (BTMI), William ‘Billy’ Griffith congratulated the tourism players who contributed to the destination’s growth. He added that “there’s pressure to keep improving and to remain competitive as we continue to grow our brand. We must be strategic in our efforts, and now, more than ever, we must focus on our key relationships. Which is why over the next six months, you will see us working even more closely with our partners to ensure these trends continue through the upcoming winter period and beyond.”

Increases in air capacity

Last December, the BTMI joined with the Grantley Adams International Airport (GAIA) to welcome **Virgin Atlantic’s** new London Heathrow twice-weekly service to Barbados, which will recommence in the coming winter 2018/19 season. Newcomer **Thomas Cook** will also recommence its direct weekly service from London Gatwick this winter 2018/19, which ran successfully through winter 2017/2018.

All eyes are on Latin America as Barbados’ newest partnership with **Copa Airlines** has introduced a twice weekly Barbados–Panama service. The inaugural flight landed in Barbados to much fanfare on July 17 and this new service is expected to open a gateway to wider South America and other Caribbean territories.

The United States will get a further boost this winter with two additions from American Airlines. The airline recently announced that it will be adding a third daily flight from Miami commencing December 19, 2018. On that same day, it will also launch a non-stop, daily service from Charlotte Douglas International Airport to Barbados. Over in Canada, **WestJet** is currently increasing its seats by 8 percent between May and October 2018, and this winter, **Air Canada** will increase its capacity from Montreal with three weekly flights.

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Exciting new attractions and accommodations

In addition to the increased airlift, Griffith also acknowledged the role that the island's new attractions have played in boosting 2018 arrival numbers. "We are cognisant of the continuous need for refreshing and invigorating our product offerings while preserving the elements of the Barbados experience that keep our repeat guest rate so high. New attractions like Rihanna Drive and Nikki Beach, or even Hugo's restaurant, go a long way in showing that Barbados is committed to maintaining its position as a superior holiday destination."

He also spoke about the addition of the new Sandals Royal resort, and extensively refurbished accommodation properties such as Sea Breeze Beach House in Maxwell, Christ Church.

Looking ahead to the next six months, Griffith said he is looking forward to experiencing the new Heritage Railway by St. Nicholas Abbey, which features a 45-minute train ride along the East Coast in a restored locomotive.

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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 & 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. cities, 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, follow on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/VisitBarbados>, via Twitter @Barbados.