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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**BTMI HEAD ANNOUNCES SOLID 2018 PERFORMANCE**

**- Strategic marketing initiatives and increased airlift led to 2.7% growth in arrivals -**

CEO of the Barbados Tourism Marketing Inc. (BTMI), William ‘Billy’ Griffith, has revealed that Barbados enjoyed a 2.7% increase in stay-over arrivals last year, compared to the corresponding period in 2017.

During the course of 2018, the Grantley Adams International Airport (GAIA) welcomed **681,197** visitor arrivals – **17,686** more than 2017. Over at the Bridgetown Port Inc. (BPI), the island’s cruise tourism was significantly impacted by the effects of vessel redeployments following on from the hurricanes of 2017. This was due to the fact that Puerto Rico, the primary homeport for US based sailings to the southern Caribbean, was severely affected. However, Barbados has been resilient, and through new homeporting business, saw a performance of **826,267** arrivals for both transit and homeporting visitors combined.

“I am delighted by this news and what it says about Barbados’ tourism product,” said Griffith. “It is never easy as a mature tourism destination to maintain growth at these levels in the competitive

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business landscape in which we operate, but I am pleased that through strategic marketing efforts we have once again proven Barbados' value as shown by the record number of arrivals at both the air and sea ports throughout 2018.”

Of the five markets, the **United States** registered the strongest growth with 8.4%, producing 204,830 visitors to the island compared to the 189,022 arrivals in 2017. **Other Caribbean** followed, contributing 4.6% growth of business with 77,149 arrivals for the year. **Canada** grew by 1.8% to 86,723 arrivals, and the **United Kingdom** contributed 1.4% growth of the business, and recorded 225,519 arrivals, compared to the 222,346 recorded in 2017.

Griffith attributed the destination's noteworthy performance to a number of strategic and integrated marketing initiatives which were deployed across Barbados' top source markets. “I must commend our tourism teams both here and in our global offices, whose efforts were instrumental in us achieving this record 2.7% growth. They did a great job individually, and that's reflected when we look at our overall reporting.”

Some of the marketing efforts Griffith referenced included:

#### **New air services**

“One of the key components in achieving positive tourism performance is of course the accessibility of the destination to visitors around the world. Bearing this in mind we have worked to ensure that we are both maintaining our current airlift, while adding new, enticing services to our repertoire, for example the new Copa partnership,” said Griffith.

Barbados' new partnership with **Copa Airlines** saw a twice weekly Barbados–Panama service commence last July 17. In Winter 2017/2018, the BTMI also joined with GAIA in welcoming **Virgin Atlantic's** new London Heathrow twice-weekly service to Barbados which re-commenced December 2018. Around the same time, **Thomas Cook** added a new weekly flight from London Gatwick which also recommenced in Winter 2018/19.

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Over in the United States, **American Airlines** announced an addition of a third flight from Miami which commenced December 19, 2018; and in addition, a daily flight from Charlotte also started on December 19, 2018.

**West Jet** saw an 8% increase in seats last summer between May and October, and last winter, **Air Canada** also increased capacity by 75% from Montreal with a large aircraft and three weekly flights.

### **Exciting new attractions and accommodations**

“Considering the numerous new and increased services, we also saw it important to ensure that we had adequate and quality accommodations available to the additional arriving passengers,” Griffith said. “We therefore gladly welcomed a number of hotels that refurbished and reopened just ahead of the 2017/2018 Winter season; hotels such as **Sea Breeze, Fairmont Royal Pavilion, Treasure Beach, The House** and so on.”

Griffith also acknowledged the contribution of the new business that the recently opened **Sandals Royal** located on Maxwell Beach has already brought to Barbados.

Describing the island’s new attractions as “integral” in differentiating destination Barbados, Griffith added that “I am happy to say that a number of new attractions have come on stream – attractions that will differentiate the product offering we have here in Barbados. There’s the **Nikki Beach** club that opened at Port Ferdinand, and last December we experienced the grand opening of **Virgin Holiday’s Departure Beach**. The first of its kind, the beachfront departure lounge allows Virgin customers to spend their last moments in paradise.”

Most recently, visitors to Barbados are now able to take a trip back in time and experience riding the railway line from St. Nicholas Abbey and up the picturesque Cherry Tree Hill. The first trip on the **Heritage Railway** was on January 21, 2019.

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### **International recognition**

Throughout 2018, destination Barbados picked up several awards and accolades. Barbados won the **World DSI Award** with an overall score of 8.8/10. Over 70,000 global travellers from 24 source markets rated their trips across the globe throughout 2017 including areas such as accommodation, food, quality of beaches, security, hospitality and value and Barbados ranked above every other destination in the world.

In November, Barbados also won the prestigious **Star Winter Sun Destination 2018** award at the Travel Bulletin Star Awards in the United Kingdom. Finally, to end the year with a bang, Barbados took the title for the 2018 Digital Marketing Campaign of the Year in Latin America Caribbean with the ‘Brilliant Barbados: Year of Culinary Experiences’ campaign.

### **New opportunities for 2019**

Looking ahead, Griffith said that “While we celebrate the numerous successes of last year, we are already full-steam ahead with our plans to make sure that 2019 is an equally promising year of growth for Barbados tourism. We have high hopes for our new airline partnerships, new hotel accommodations, new product development, and other new marketing activities in which we will be engaging across our source markets.”

“We have packaged 2019 as the Year of Wellness and Soft Adventure, where we will be highlighting the different accommodations, attractions and activities the island has to offer to support the growing and lucrative wellness industry,” he added. “And I am confident that with all the new festivals and events centered around health and wellness, we will once again be celebrating a record year come January 2020.”

Up next for the destination is the annual Connect Barbados B2B conference which sees tour operators travel to Barbados from around the world to experience and learn more about all the island has to offer. The conference is scheduled for May 1 - 4, 2019.

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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](http://www.visitbarbados.org), follow on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/VisitBarbados>, via Twitter @Barbados.