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PRESS RELEASE

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Caribbean's First Innovators Symposium Demonstrates Strong Commitment to Sustainable Coastal and Marine Tourism

Washington, DC – The 3rd Symposium for Innovators in Coastal Tourism, held in Grenada from July 9-11, 2014, has helped to set the 'green' agenda for Grenada and the other Caribbean countries. Over 200 delegates participated in the three day event, making it the largest ever Innovators Symposium organized by the Center for Responsible Travel (CREST). CREST hosted the Grenada Symposium

together with the Grenada Tourism Authority, Grenada Hotel and Tourism Association, and the Caribbean Tourism Organization.

The Symposium served to highlight Grenada's new tourism brand, "Pure Grenada: The Spice of the Caribbean." In introducing the concept, Grenada's Minister of Tourism, Alexandra Otway-Noel explained, "We are Pure Grenada because we want to celebrate and preserve our culture rather than destroy it." She continued, "Pure Grenada is home to low-impact, environmentally sensitive boutique resorts."

"Being Pure," the Minister asserted, "begins with valuing ourselves, and staying Pure begins with committing to improvement. This is why I was thrilled when CREST and the CTO offered to host the 3rd Symposium for Coastal Innovators in Grenada. This event will mark a milestone in our development and hopefully in the development of our neighbors too."

Some fifty speakers from around the Americas gave presentations on a range of topics including the impacts of climate change on coastal tourism, 'green' finance, eco-certification programs, travelers' philanthropy, and linking sustainable tourism to local agriculture. Several panels focused on the growing body of environmental and social 'best practices' for large and small resorts, coastal destinations, beaches and shorelines, cruise tourism, marinas, spas, golf courses, sport fishing, and other types of coastal and marine recreation.

At the opening luncheon, keynote speaker Jake Kheel, Environmental Director at Puntacana Resort & Club, one of the Caribbean's oldest eco-resorts, explained, "When Puntacana Resort & Club began in the Dominican Republic over 45 years ago, the concept of 'sustainable development' didn't yet exist. The developers made all of their important decisions based on common sense, their limited resources, and a deep respect for the Dominican Republic, its people, and its incredible natural resources. As it turns out," Kheel added, "many of our early decisions relate directly to what is now known as sustainable development. Today," he concluded, "Puntacana Resort & Club shares its many examples, from sustainable golf courses, water treatment facilities, coral restoration programs, and the unique architecture of the Punta Cana International Airport, as a way to inspire a hopeful vision of what Caribbean tourism can aspire to be."

Symposium speakers and documentary films from Jamaica and Costa Rica also examined a range of problems caused by fast-paced and poorly-planned coastal tourism. Jessica Hsu, coordinator of the organization Another Haiti is Possible, spoke passionately about the ongoing conflict between the government and local community on the Haitian island of Île-à-Vache. As Hsu told the audience, "The population of the island is not opposed to tourism, but is strongly opposed to the current iteration of 'Destination Île-à-Vache' which continues to systematically violate their rights." She added that those on the island "are in favor of development which is respectful of their needs [and] which does not exploit nor threaten to take away their land -- a project in which their participation is central and integral."

In the closing plenary session, Grenada's Ambassador to the United States, Dr. Angus Friday told the Symposium delegates, "We must have an action plan that takes us forth from here. Not just for Grenada but for the region. It needs to be broken down into small bits and fit into a master plan. And that master plan cannot just be something that sits on a shelf. It must actually attract investment so that we can get the sort of jobs and impact we're looking for."

Friday and others went on to list a range of priorities that had been identified at the Symposium. These include: 1) adapting coastal tourism development to the realities of climate change, 2) achieving energy independence and 'green' energy efficiencies, 3) adhering to best practices through eco-certifications and other tools, and 4) linking sustainable tourism to agriculture, fishing, handicrafts, and other sectors in the local economy.

As the Symposium wrapped up, Christine Noel-Horsford from the Grenada Tourism Authority, stood to declare, "I just want to say the past three days have been really overwhelming. Here are the simple points that I took away from the conference which I believe will make a difference in my work and in my life going forward:

1. Going Green is urgent
2. When communicating your GREEN STORY, keep it simple
3. Remember that you cannot go GREEN alone
4. But, the only GREEN strategy that works is when you do it yourself
5. You have to lead the Charge
6. Don't SELL me the Green Story, involve me
7. Sustainability is a JOURNEY."

The [Symposium proceedings](#) are available on the CREST website.

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CREST would like to thank our partners - the [Caribbean Tourism Organization](#) (CTO), the [Grenada Tourism Authority](#), and the [Grenada Hotel and Tourism Association](#) - for helping us organize the 3rd Symposium for Innovators in Coastal Tourism.

The Symposium for Innovators in Coastal Tourism was supported by the following sponsors:



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About the Center for Responsible Travel (CREST):

The Center for Responsible Travel (CREST) is a unique non-profit organization affiliated with Stanford University, devoted to increasing the positive global impact of responsible tourism. Founded in 2003, CREST functions as a bi-coastal institute, with offices in Washington, DC, and at Stanford University in California.

CREST stands alone in the areas of environmentally sustainable and socially responsible tourism, having built an international network of highly-trained experts providing interdisciplinary analysis and solutions, as well as publications, conferences, courses, training, and educational workshops. CREST delivers programs and services in field research, feasibility and impact studies, market research, certification programs, traveler's philanthropy and strengthening sustainable tourism and ecotourism. CREST's mission is to promote responsible tourism policies and practices globally so that local communities may thrive and steward their cultural resources and biodiversity.

The rapid pace of resort and vacation home developments along coastlines and on islands is contributing to a variety of environmental and social issues. CREST has sought to critically address these through research and analysis of the coastal tourism sector - the fastest growing sector in the tourism industry - in order to lessen the social and environmental impact of these developments, and increase the benefits for local communities on the coast.

CREST has extensive experience examining and providing policy recommendations to the coastal tourism sector including several reports and publications: 1) "Alternative Development Models & Good Practices for Sustainable Coastal Tourism: A Framework for Decision Makers in Mexico", a report which compiles existing best practices for sustainable, large-scale coastal tourism developments in Mexico, and provides recommendations for implementation at the policy level; 2) "The Impact of Tourism Related Development along Costa Rica's Pacific Coast", a multi-dimensional study which critically assesses the growth, trends and impacts of tourism and tourism related development along Costa Rica's Pacific Coast; 3) "Global Trends in Coastal Tourism", a study funded by WWF, which analyzes global trends in coastal and marine tourism; 4) "Cruise Tourism Impacts in Costa Rica & Honduras: Policy Recommendations for Decision Makers" and "Cruise Tourism in Belize: Perceptions of Economic, Social and Environmental Impacts", two reports which take a critical look at the impacts of the cruise tourism industry in Central America.

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