



CHTA New Executive Team (left to right): Emil Lee, President, CHTA; Vanessa Ledesma, COO, CHTA; Frank Comito, CEO, CHTA; Matt Cooper, CMO, CHTA.

move up our ADR, our Average Daily Rate, as quickly as we wanted to as an industry, but we've been seeing it move up four to six points each year over the last two years. Despite improved performance, one third of the hotels reported an anticipated loss in 2015. That's not insignificant, but at the height of the Recession over half of them were reporting that. So we've seen some change, that way.

"90 percent of the hotels characterized the 2015 tourism industry as 'strong to moderate.' And the outlook for 2016 remains positive with some concerns. The outlook wasn't as strong as 2015, but it's still strong. We asked a few questions about those concerns and received comments that categorized a couple of areas – high operating costs, taxation pressures, air lift challenges, and, to a lesser extent, perceptions of crime and safety in the region."

You mentioned "air lift challenges." Are you alluding to the fact that air travel to the islands is still too expensive for many people?

We've not engaged some of our key people, including the airline stakeholders, as effectively in recent years. So, part of the mandate we've given ourselves is to reach out to them much more effectively and we're doing that, right now. We've done some research on price

elasticity and at one point we lose market share because of the high cost of airfare. So, one of our goals around advocacy is to reduce the high cost of airfare. One of the major contributors to the high airfare costs to the Caribbean are the high tax levels. Taxes and fees have gone up incredibly in the last several years. The U.S. taxes and fees have pretty much held their own, but, for example, if you buy a ticket to the Bahamas, which is a quick hop from Florida, over 51 percent of the cost of your ticket are taxes and fees. And that translates into most jurisdictions in the Caribbean – they can be quite high. So, when you factor that in, our argument has been that that adds to the increased costs of supply. The airlines' cost have actually held their own or gone down a bit, but it's the taxes and fees that are the big bugaboo, here. So, we started an outreach, working with our Caribbean Tourist Organization, to look at ways we can help to reduce the cost of travel to the region. It's an advocacy initiative that's part of a three-year plan. We won't get it done overnight, but we have done a lot of groundwork, already; we've built some collaborative efforts around it both with the airline industry and with the Caribbean Tour-

ism Organization to help address, not only the costs, but also the ease of travel, as well. It should be much easier than it is.

To sum up, what are some of the salient points that you would like our readers to take away from an article about the CHTA?

"The core of the message is that in the Caribbean, tourism is everyone's business. And if people understand better the connection of how it affects everything – the socioeconomic aspect of everything in almost all the destinations in the Caribbean – they can see how we can better connect the dots. We need much more friendly policies and collaborative initiatives to protect and enhance the industry. It's the single quickest way to generate employment and tax revenue for the governments of the Caribbean. Bumping up our arrivals and our occupancies a few points has tremendous value; the tourist dollar has a multiplier effect that touches just about every aspect of life. And the Caribbean Hotel and Tourist Association is an active and engaging partner, working at the local and regional levels to help market, develop, enhance, and protect the

