

# THE AIRLIFT WONDER OF THE CARIBBEAN

News / Airlines



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It was founded 1991 as InterIsland Airways with a single small Cessna aircraft operating on-demand charters. Now, in 2022, it has a fleet of 21 aircraft and additional aircraft are expected to enter in service. In that same time span of interCaribbean Airways' growth, many regional airlines were started and went out of business. Its network of destinations spans from Cuba to Guyana. It is a the largest privately owned airline in the Caribbean and it is the leading regional airline serving more destinations across the Caribbean than any other airline; more than twenty cities.

In a time where Government honorables and tourism executives in the Caribbean are screaming for needed inter-island services, they seem to forget or are not aware of this regional airline, that offers just that, has a track record of successful growth and continuously improving services. The governments even suggest that they should put their heads together and start an airline and hoping that private investors will support their efforts. It shows how little they know of operating and growing an airline, yet they want to have a say in it. Putting heads together may be a good idea but it is depending on what is in these heads.



The founder/chairman of InterCaribbean Airways, Lyndon Gardiner, states: "I believe what is needed in the Caribbean is for us to have a network that complements each other. We need to have schedules and networks that are integrated and that will offer the best opportunity both in terms of travelling and will also offer them a certain level of redundancy, which I think is quite important," Governments and tourism executives may share that belief, but they only talk about it but don't make it happen, whereas Lyndon performs and moves ahead. What may be another reason for his success is that he spent the first 10 years of his business career in finance. And the others?

To go a little deeper in the story behind the story. Lyndon Gardiner, who, whilst working for a bank, took a loan from his employer to purchase an aircraft in order to visit his girlfriend at weekends. He later started an informal air taxi service flying visitors around the islands during the day and some Medevac flights at night. He loves flying, but also realized it could be lucrative, so he gave up his job at the bank.

Lyndon also made a smart move by bringing in Trevor Sadler as CEO to run the operation. Trevor has over 30 years of experience in the airline industry over 4 continents in the UK, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Aruba, Turks & Caicos and the USA. His experience includes traditional full-service airlines, hybrid and low-cost airlines including several airline startups, and who has a substantial understanding of the moving dynamics of the environment it operates in. One of the changes that Trevor made was changing the operation from point-to-point into a hub airline.

But setting up an airline was one thing. Lyndon also created the InterIsland Aviation Services Group that provides a scope of aviation services. It consists of Caribbean Aviation Maintenance Services, Provo Air Center (FBO), and FlightSupport, Ltd.

Typical for InterCaribbean Airways is that it always has done things from the ground up and adjusted to the demand and to opportunities with growing the fleet and its network of destinations. It simply is a healthy way of conducting and growing a business. The less successful often make the failure to setting things up big with PR that almost sounds grotesque but failing to perform and

end up in financial difficulties.

### *Where do governments in the Caribbean fail?*

Number 1, Passenger taxes! In several cases the taxes are greater than 100% of the base fare that the airline charges. But by taxing passengers at the front end, they lower the number of visitors by therefore sending them to competitive destinations and they are losing the benefits of indirect taxes and the other end.

Number 2, no 'open sky'. It really blocks the desired inter-island connections. Inter and Open go hand-in-hand; no open, no inter.

It is typical to call upon others to improve inter-island airlift, yet, being a blockage for it themselves. Summits on improving airlift between top politicians are held. The top-meetings conclude with all agreeing and just publishing a press release accordingly. But no follow-up that leads to realization. Maybe they are hoping for the psychosociological phenomena called 'self-fulfilling prophecy' whereby one expects something to happen because one anticipates it. If the governments would seriously tackle these two hurdles, then they would get the oh-so desired improved inter-island connections and an increased passenger flow, also resulting in increased interisland trading. Maybe mini-summits with a few actual do-ers who make firm commitments, and set deadlines for realization would be a solution.

And when it comes to Governments putting their heads together to set up a new regional airline and seeking private investment. What would be the best bet to invest in? Government operation with no trackrecord of success, or an existing successful private operation?



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