CARIBAVIA 2025 - PROGRESS IN CARIBBEAN AVIATION - HON. MINISTER CHARLES FERNANDEZ

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Progress in Caribbean aviation was, of course, one of the most talked-about issues at Caribavia 2025. The Honorable Minister Charles Fernandez of Antigua is the Minister of Tourism, Civil Aviation, Transportation and Investments discussed aviation industry's development, challenges and future prospects for Caribbean aviation.The Minister highlighted region's advancements airport infrastructure upgrades and environmental initiatives. The entry into the market of new and low-cost companies has not only increase intraconnectivity between the islands, but has also impacted costs to make them more affordable.

Minister Fernandez recently announced that Antigua and Barbuda has recorded a significant surge in private jet traffic, with arrivals doubling those of commercial flights in 2024. With private jet arrivals consistently outpacing commercial traffic, Antigua and Barbuda is strengthening its position as a Caribbean hub for luxury aviation.

The Minister named planned, completed or ongoing airport infrastructure modernization projects :

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- Lynden Pindling International Airport Bahamas – estimated costs 200M US ;
- Hewanorra International Airport St Lucia, planned to be completed in 2028 - estimated costs of 270M US ;
- Sangster International Airport Jamaica- estimated costs 200M US ;
- Grantley Adams International Airport Barbados - estimated costs 300M US
- Princess Juliana International Airport St. Maartine – works completed for 100M US ;
- ANR Robinson International Airport in Tobago - estimated costs 180M US ;
- Maurice Bishop International Airport Grenada - estimated costs 200M US ;
- Owen Roberts International Airport Cayman Islands – started 6M US upgrade project ;
- Douglas-Charles Airport Dominica - estimated costs 175M US ;
- V. C. Bird International Airport Antigua - estimated costs 50M US ;
- In october 2024 Barbuda opened new International Airport, boosting island's connectivity.

So, we are talking about 2 billions US dollard investment in region aviation infrastructure improvement and modernization projects. This confirms Caribbean commitment to aviation upgrades. To enhance visitor's safety and comfort. Caribbean aviation sector increasingly adopted ecofriendly practices. There is obviously an ambition to grow the industry. In order to achieve a real Open Sky in the Caribbean, it is still necessary to remove the obstacles preventing islands and governments from working together smoothly.

In my life, I have to say that I never met a minister that not only attended all three days of Caribavia, but also took notes during every presentation. He also went to Girls in Aviation Day, which was a special event. It's great to see the Minister taking an active part, listening to the aviation industry's stakeholders, understand their needs and challenges, and, most importantly, take the necessary actions to facilitate the development.

I had the chance to ask the Minister further questions at the conclusion of the conference:

T.O.. You've stated Caribbean region is committed to aviation development and you've shared impressive numbers of investment. Would you say that the reason is that Caribbean is the most depending of aviation region or there are other aspects?

C.F. The Caribbean is one of the most Tourism Dependent Regions in the world, therefore aviation is a key factor in bringing visitors to the region since we're all surrounded by water - therefore either air or sea. Of course sea is not a practical alternative - apart from cruises.

T.O. During this conference, as well as during precedent, a lot of speakers and guests were pointing out the real need of cooperation between islands/countries. In your opinion, why it is not happening on the level needed so far and what solutions we could suggest on the very short term to advance even further aviation development?

C.F. I think cooperation has started - the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) is playing a major role in this effort. I think now - more than ever there seems to be a willingness to work together. There is still some work to do apart from regional marketing - including harmonized aviation regulations, charges, and taxes.

T.O.. Obvious question - if we talk about last year development of aviation in Antigua & Barbuda, what are things you're proud of?

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C.F. We opened the Barbuda International Airport in October last year. This is a significant game changer for larger jets being accessible to fly directly into Barbuda.

T.O. Do you think that administrations unable to cooperate are a real brake for faster and intelligent development of aviation and new technologies, new solutions? Within Caribbean region and maybe globally?

C.F. I am convinced that cooperation is the panacea for faster development in new technologies and advancement of aviation worldwide. Conferences like the CARIBAVIA is a great opportunity in this vein.

Special thanks to Theo Questel from Comité Territorial de Tourisme St Barth!

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