



The Caribbean: FOCUSED ON THE BUSINESS OF MEETINGS

The gentle people of the Caribbean islands are not immune to the economic storm that has affected the entire meetings and travel industry. Although there were a few bright spots, most islands were affected by a downturn in arrivals, a slowdown in meetings and incentives, and a trimming of expenditures by those who did plan events in the region.

"There is an overall decline in meeting and incentive business for the Caribbean, in general, but there is still business out there," says Vicki Denfield, U.S. groups director for Barceló Hotels & Resorts, with properties in the Dominican Republic and Mexico. "We are seeing smaller groups and more price-conscious, value-oriented shopping by meeting planners."

Meeting and incentive groups that continue to choose the Caribbean are doing it in a toned-down fashion. "None of my clients are doing extravagant parties this year, and they are staying more within the all-inclusive 'limitations,'" notes Jennifer Kern, CMP, event marketing manager at Atlanta's dynamo group.

The Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and Aruba are some of the bright spots in the region, drawing healthy business because of good value, plentiful airlift, and a variety of hotel product. Recently the U.S. Virgin Islands joined that group as well. "The U.S.V.I. are as busy as they've been in years—the result of business relocating out of Mexico. There is an incredible demand there through 2010," says Patrick T. Shook, director, account sales Marriott and Renaissance, Caribbean & Mexico Resorts (MARCAM). ➡