

British Airways returns to Montego Bay

After a seven-year absence from the tourism capital, the Caribbean's number one United Kingdom carrier, British Airways (BA), has returned to Montego Bay, St James, renewing investor confidence while offering huge access to the One World Alliance market.

The airline reportedly pulled out of the Second City in 2002 because of low yield during a time when it received stiff competition from the many charter flights that operated into the Sangster International Airport. In addition, Air Jamaica became its main rival out of London.

Hopes boosted

The market has grown considerably since 2002, and the airline's return two months ahead of the winter tourist season has boosted hope for an industry that has seen a decline in its UK market by 3.5 per cent from January to August 2009.

Making its return yesterday with a full capacity of 280 passengers, BA will operate twice-weekly to the resort city on Thursdays and Saturdays with a three-class Boeing 777 aircraft. This brings BA's service to Jamaica to five-weekly, augmenting the existing three-weekly flights to Kingston from London, Gatwick.

Addressing stakeholders at a welcome reception at the airport, Minister of Tourism Edmund Bartlett said the expansion by the airline was pivotal.

BA's arrival, Bartlett said, heralded several "inaugurals" that would mark the tarmac of the Sangster International Airport as of the first week of December.

"We will have one million seats from across the world for this winter," he boasted, confident that in addition to BA's presence in the Second City, his ministry and the Jamaica Tourist Board would continue to grow the European market way beyond Western Europe.

Wayne Cummings, president of the Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association, one of the organisations that has been calling for the return of the airline, said this was long overdue.

"British Airways has a history with the people who love Jamaica," he noted. "The diaspora traffic believes it is the only way to travel. British Airways is like the proxy to Air Jamaica in a lot of Jamaican minds."

Richard Tams, BA's head of UK and Ireland sales, who was at the airport yesterday, said: "We're delighted to be starting new flights to Montego Bay, along with our other new routes this week, which underlines our commitment to the Caribbean and represents a response to our customers for whom the Caribbean is a very popular destination."