

Visa Requirement Waived for Eastern European Nationals

Jamaica's Minister of Tourism and Entertainment, the Hon. Dr. Wykeham McNeill has disclosed that Cabinet has approved the waiving of visa requirements for nationals of Russia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine visiting Jamaica for purposes of tourism and cultural exchange for periods of thirty days or less.

In addition, Cabinet has also approved the indefinite extension of the current visa waiver requirement in place for nationals of Colombia, Panama, and Venezuela. This will be subject to the outcome of periodic reviews of the situation.

"This is all tremendous news as we continue to make positive headway towards removing barriers to travel while creating ease of access to visitors from these new and emerging market frontiers Jamaica is so aggressively forging into," said Minister McNeill of the decision by Cabinet.

Minister McNeill pointed out that "the continued removal of the barriers to travel, such as improving the visa regimes, is all a part of our strategy to diversify our markets while improving airlift security. These initiatives will certainly work towards boosting our visitor arrivals."

The Minister went on to note that "having waived visa requirements for nationals from Colombia, Panama, and Venezuela, the increases out of these and other Latin American markets has been spectacular. For the period January to December 2012 an increase in stopover arrivals of 50.9% over the same period last year was recorded."

The Minister further pointed out that the growth trend in the Latin American market was expected to continue, Copa having doubled its capacity from December 2012, with four flights per week using a larger aircraft. The flights are out of Panama City which is the major hub in Latin America. The JTB are working alongside Copa to tap into the markets of Chile, Argentina, and Brazil through joint promotional activities.

At the start of the year, January 1, Jamaica welcomed the inaugural Transearo Airlines flight from Moscow, Domodedovo to Montego Bay's, Sangster International Airport with over three hundred passengers and crew from Russia. Of particular note is the fact that visitors from the Russian market stay a minimum of ten nights, which is twice the average stay of visitors from traditional markets such as the US. It is anticipated that this will provide significant returns through increased visitor spending.

Transearo Airlines is Russia's second largest carrier and flies to 40 countries on 130 routes and has hubs in Moscow, St. Petersburg and Yekaterinburg. They operate flights between Moscow and Belorussia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

The timely Cabinet decision came days before Dr. McNeill left the island, on Saturday, for the world's largest travel trade show and buyer/seller meet, ITB Berlin in Germany, for meetings with tourism travel partners. The Minister travelled via London.