



**Statement by the
Deputy Premier and Minister for Tourism and Ports
on**

**The Cayman Islands Tourism Industry's
Year-End Performance**

Third Meeting of Parliament 2024-2025

Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to rise today to provide a very brief update on the performance of our tourism industry, now that the year-end results for 2024 have been received.

Members may recall that at the last meeting of this Parliament I provided comprehensive results on the tourism industry's performance for the first three quarters of the year. In that statement, I outlined the positive growth that had been recorded in each of the industry's key performance indicators. I am pleased to report that year-end results are equally as positive, and the top line synopsis is as follows:

Mr. Speaker, in 2024 stayover visitation increased by 2 percent compared to the previous year (2023), marking another year of growth and resilience for this important sector of our economy.

Two percent may not sound like much, but when we consider that the 2024 hurricane season was particularly active, causing our airports to close at some of the busiest times for travel, the fact that the industry has still been able to register growth, is a noteworthy accomplishment.

Looking at the numbers, 437,842 stayover visitors were welcomed to the Cayman Islands between January and December of 2024, reflecting an increase of 8,558 individuals over the previous year.

Our core tourism markets showed steady growth throughout 2024, with strong U.S regional performance particularly evident in December, which recorded the second-highest visitation on record - surpassed only by December 2019.

In fact, March 2024 saw the second highest number of arrivals ever recorded for the Cayman Islands, with 57,040 stayover visitors, while December was our second-best month of the year with 52,046 stayover visitors.

I would be remiss to speak of record-breaking success without mentioning that our islands repeatedly experienced record-breaking visitation from Canada, in multiple months, while European markets also showed consistent growth throughout the year.

You would be aware Mr. Speaker that the Cayman Islands is marketed as a high-value, high expectation destination, and in this regard the industry's performance in the luxury sector did not disappoint. When this niche sector performs well it means that our Islands are successfully attracting more affluent, higher spending visitors - which is in keeping with the Ministry's philosophy of quality over quantity.

In terms of contribution to the Cayman Islands economy, proceeds from the accommodations sector have also registered positive results. The government has collected over \$43.3 million in revenue from tourism accommodations tax between January and December 2024, which is \$3 million more than budgeted.

Mr. Speaker, throughout 2024, the Cayman Islands have benefitted from a notable increase in airlift. This has served as a gamechanger for the industry, by providing greater accessibility to our shores from over 24 international gateways across the United States, UK, Europe, Canada and Latin America.

Mr. Speaker, these results are just a few of the many, many, positives that have been achieved within the tourism sector in 2024. And candidly speaking Mr. Speaker, they are a testament to the sound decision-making, exemplary commitment and meticulous interpretation of market data and trends, by the staff within the Ministry and Department of Tourism.

With that said Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to recognise the contributions all of the dedicated civil servants within those two entities who have been the backbone of these achievements. Whether they are:

- drafting policies to make lives better,
- managing projects to empower entrepreneurs,
- showcasing our islands at trade shows,
- hosting journalists whose articles inspire travellers to choose us, or speaking at conferences to elevate our profile..... their expertise and collective efforts have been instrumental to the industry's success.

I also want to acknowledge the personal sacrifices they make, spending significant amounts of time away from their spouses, children, and families, to promote our islands to the world and encourage travellers to visit our shores.

Often times, we overlook or simply aren't aware of what it takes behind the scenes to keep the wheels of the tourism engine constantly turning. And so, I would like to say to all of the staff in the Ministry and Department of Tourism and Ports, you are the unsung heroes behind this statement of positivity and success, and I extend my heartfelt thanks to each of you.

As the late Steve Jobs, the visionary founder of Apple once said, *"Great things in business are never done by one person; they're done by a team of people."* We are truly fortunate Mr. Speaker to have a great team of people working on behalf of the Cayman Island tourism industry.

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Mr. Speaker, while the stayover sector is thriving, it would be a dereliction of duty if I did not address the pitiful performance in the cruise sector. Passenger arrivals are still declining—and not just slightly, but at a staggering rate, month after month, on an ongoing basis.

To illustrate the severity of the situation Mr. Speaker, the projection for cruise passenger arrivals in 2024 forecast a reduction of 100,000 passengers, compared to the previous year. Sadly, the actual decline was closer to 200,000 passengers.

If anyone had any doubts as to the seriousness of the situation within this sector, these results should help to underscore the reality that we are dealing with - and the urgency with which it must be addressed.

I will not go into further detail on the cruise sector at this time, Mr. Speaker, as I have already fully ventilated my thoughts on this matter during the referendum debate. Instead, I will end this tourism update on a more positive note by revealing our stayover visitation and revenue collection targets for 2025. They are:

- to achieve over 15.21% growth in stayover visitation, equating to 504,470 visitors, and to generate 44M in revenue from accommodations taxes and fees.

Throughout this year, irrespective of who is at the helm of decision-making for the tourism industry, I feel confident that the overarching goals will be to continue:

- building on the industry's successes,
- addressing its challenges,
- and positioning the Cayman Islands tourism industry for long-term, sustainable growth.

Mr. Speaker, I am also confident that through sound policies, strategic investments, and the dedication of our exceptional staff, those goals will be achieved. Tourism remains the lifeblood of our economy, and when the industry does well, our people do well and the country does well. And at the end of the day, that is what we are all striving for.

On that encouraging note, I extend my heartfelt thanks to all of our industry stakeholders, for their partnership and collaboration during the year, and throughout my term in office. They too are deserving of recognition and thanks for their contribution to the growth of our tourism industry.

Should I have the honour of being re-elected to serve the good people of George Town Central, and the privilege to serve again as the Minister of Tourism, I look forward to continuing the spirit of partnership and collaboration that has existed over this term, and to accomplishing even bigger and better results for the industry, and our beloved Cayman Islands, well into the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.