



**Ministry of Tourism
& Trade Development**

Cayman Islands Government

**Statement by Hon. Gary Ruddy
Deputy Premier and Minister for Tourism & Trade Development
On
The Cayman Islands Tourism Industry Performance for March 2026**

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Mr. Speaker,

I rise today with great pride to report on our tourism industry's performance for the first quarter of the year, and to deliver the results for the month of March, which are truly exceptional.

I say exceptional because March 2026 broke two historical records.

64,213 stayover visitors were welcomed to our shores – which is 5,816 more persons than March 2025 - making this March the best month in our history for stayover visitation.

It was also the very first time in our recorded history that stayover arrivals surpassed the 60,000 mark in a single month.

When combined with cruise arrivals, total visitation reached **221,731 persons**, representing an increase of **24,748 persons**, or a **12.6% increase** year over year.

Mr. Speaker, these results are not an isolated occurrence. They reflect the continuation of a strong and sustained upward momentum that has been building over recent months.

In **December 2025**, we recorded **54,830 stayover visitors**, setting the tone for what has become our strongest winter season on record.

In **January 2026**, air arrivals reached **47,047**, a **13.6% increase year over year**, making it the strongest January in our history.

In **February**, we welcomed **49,075 stayover visitors**, which was an increase of **10.1% year over year**, making February 2026 the second-highest February on recorded.

Taken together, the first two months of this year delivered **95,112 stayover visitors**, an **11.8% increase over 2025** and March's exceptional performance builds directly on that strong foundation. Stayover arrivals for March have surpassed all previous records, setting a new national benchmark.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, when we look at our results over the traditional winter period, the Cayman Islands welcomed **215,165 stayover visitors over four months**, making this the best winter season in our history.

This consistent growth speaks to more than demand. It reflects confidence in the Cayman Islands as a destination, and it underscores the effectiveness of our tourism strategy, which is built on strong leadership, sound policy decisions, and the tireless efforts of our Ministry and Department of Tourism, along with our industry partners.

Mr. Speaker, these results are also a reflection of deliberate choices and decisions to prioritise strategic airlift development, invest in high-quality marketing, and ensure that our tourism product remains competitive at the highest level. This Government has taken a disciplined and forward-looking approach to tourism, and the outcomes we are seeing today are the direct result of that focus and experience.

Mr. Speaker, the benefits of our tourism industry's success are being felt across our economy and, importantly, among our people. We see it in the obvious signs:

- Rental cars fully booked;
- Restaurants operating at capacity;
- Retail outlets experiencing strong turnover;
- Attractions alive with activity;
- Hotels achieving higher occupancy and commanding premium daily rates.

But beyond those visible indicators, there are deeper and equally important measures of success, such as:

- Increased employment opportunities for Caymanians across hospitality, transport, and service sectors;
- More sales and revenue for small business owners, especially watersports and tour operators, souvenir shops and artisans;
- We see greater confidence among Caymanians willing to invest in tourism-related ventures, or to expand and hire;
- And there are more training and professional development opportunities aimed at building a more skilled and resilient workforce.

My ultimate goal Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times, is to see Caymanians not only participating in tourism, but being leaders within it; managing properties, operating successful enterprises, and shaping the visitor experience at every level - just like it used to be years ago when our people were at the forefront and at every level in between.

That is the kind of inclusive growth I am committed to delivering, so that Caymanians are not just spectators in the tourism economy, but are active beneficiaries of its success.

Taking our attention back to March arrivals and to our tourism source markets, March delivered strong performance from every sector across the board.

The **United States**, our primary market, recorded its strongest month ever with **53,050 visitors**, representing a **6.0% increase year over year** and surpassing the previous high set in March 2019 by **3.2%**.

Canada continues to emerge as a powerful growth engine, having registered **6,711 stayover visitors** in March, equating to a remarkable **49% increase year over year** and surpassing the record set just one month prior, in February. This sustained, impressive growth reflects not only increased demand, but also a structural strengthening of the market, supported by increased seat capacity from the new nonstop services from Toronto and Ottawa.

March also brought strong double-digit growth from the **UK & Ireland**, which recorded a **32.2% increase year over year** and is the second-highest March on record from that area.

Visitors from **Mexico** increased by **33.2%** largely due to the success of targeted marketing and trade engagement, while **Continental Europe** recorded steady growth of **4.5%**.

Mr. Speaker, while I am sure you will agree that these results are outstanding, they also reinforce a key principle, which is that tourism growth requires a delicate balance of several key elements:

- Convenient and reliable airlift from prominent gateways;
- A diverse range of accommodations at different price points;
- A compelling and high-quality tourism product;
- A welcoming and professional industry;
- And targeted marketing to bring all of these elements together.

The Cayman Islands is excelling on each of those fronts.

In fact, increased **airlift capacity** in March, which was up **5.9% year over year**, played a critical role in driving demand. Growth was supported by additional seats from key gateways including Chicago, Miami, New York, Toronto and Ottawa, and is a sign of the tremendous confidence that international airlines have placed in our destination.

With that said, I know the industry is looking forward to the launch of Cayman Airways new seasonal service from Austin, Texas beginning in late May. Austin is one of the fastest-growing metropolitan areas in the United States, and already contributes approximately 6,000 visitors annually to our destination. This new route presents a meaningful opportunity to increase those arrivals.

Mr. Speaker, as I round up my report on stayover tourism I should mention the high performance of our accommodation sector.

- Hotel occupancy increased by **14%** in March compared to last year, while average daily rates rose by **5.5%** and revenue per available room increased by an impressive **20.3%**.
- Year-to-date through March, average daily rates are up **6.9%**, and revenue per available room has grown by **15.3%**, reinforcing tourism's broader contribution to business performance and the wider economy.

Looking ahead, we await the opening of two new hotel properties, which will add nearly 500 additional rooms to our inventory. This expansion has already created new employment opportunities for Caymanians, while also generating increased business for local suppliers, service providers, and entrepreneurs across the tourism value chain. Once opened, the new properties will expand our ability to attract more visitors, no doubt leading to more record-breaking results.

Mr. Speaker, turning our attention now to the cruise sector:

Cruise arrivals remain steady and continue to contribute meaningfully to our economy. In March, we welcomed **157,518 cruise passengers**, a **13.7% increase year over year**. For the first quarter, total cruise arrivals reached **463,142 passengers**, representing an increase of **10,368 passengers**, or **2.3%**, over the same period in 2025.

Looking ahead, current projections indicate **1,287,523 cruise passengers and 422 ship calls** by the end of this year, with **1,431,049 passengers and 445 ship calls** already confirmed for 2027, demonstrating continued confidence in Cayman as a premier cruise destination.

The Ministry's strategy for cruise tourism development remains focused not simply on volume, but on maximizing the quality and value of each visit. This approach aligns with the Cayman Islands' position as a premium destination and ensures that growth within this sector will be sustainable and beneficial to our people.

Earlier this month I attended the Seatrade Cruise Conference along with the Minister for Ports, and together, we held meetings with all of the major cruise lines. I was encouraged by their continued interest in Cayman, and at least one line revealed plans for increased calls in the coming years, which was also very heartening.

Going forward, my Ministry staff and I will continue to actively explore ways to enhance the visitor experience to ensure that we can safely and efficiently accommodate cruise passengers, while maintaining the high standards expected of our destination.

Mr. Speaker, as I bring this statement to a close, I hope that the results I have outlined today will give confidence to every Caymanian, every Member in this Honourable House and every person hearing my voice that our tourism industry is strong, healthy and is advancing with purpose.

It is being guided by experienced leadership, supported by strong partnerships, and driven by a clear vision of inclusion, coordination and commitment. Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, it is delivering opportunity and prosperity to our people – which is the reason why we are all here: to make their lives better.

Feedback from the industry has also been positive Mr. Speaker. I am proud to say there is trust in the leadership and expertise within the Ministry and Department of Tourism, and confidence in the vision and stability of government; which stems from sound policy being matched with consistent execution.

On that note Mr. Speaker, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to:

- The management and staff of the Ministry and Department of Tourism;
- Our industry partners across the private sector;
- My colleagues in Government who continue to support our destination and our Cayman Islands tourism industry;
- And to you Mr. Speaker for allowing me this opportunity to update the Country on these exceptional tourism performance results.

Mr. Speaker the Ministry and Department of Tourism are responsible for promoting the Cayman Islands as a first-class destination. It is up to each of us in this Honourable House and every single Caymanian and resident person living in these Islands, to deliver the best possible experience for our visitors when they get here. Thank you.