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Costa Rica committed to staying green

SAM STEUBER

Costa Rica's tourism minister says a country that has become synonymous with ecotourism will be careful not to kill the goose that lays the golden egg, as it further develops its vacation offerings in a time of heightened environmental concerns.

Maureen Ballestero told the audience attending the recent Costa Rica tourism show Expotur that her beloved country ranked the world's "eleven nations declared and second adventure destination by the World Economic Forum.

"Clearly, we're here positioning ourselves very well," she told her 600-plus audience. "What we want to do is look at that."

Over a third of Costa Rica's 51,000 square kilometres is protected from development by both government and private interests, and Costa Rica offers numerous adventure experiences, among them zip-lining, which originated in the Central American country.

But the country has also seen the arrival of large resorts, with the Guanacaste region on its Pacific northwest coast home to properties belonging to major lodging chains and which provide a very different type of vacation than the jungle-overlaying, many-waterfalls Costa Rica with.

"Costa Rica still has a lot [of area] to develop," Ballestero said, adding the government is "closely paying attention" to development and working to safeguard green areas.

Ballestero said tourism restrictions in the 2013 to 2017 period now 17%, and the government is looking at 30 percent through 2021. That would mean capped for 7% of 17% growth in tourism revenue the government wants to see in the same period.

Government plans call for increasing room numbers during the low season.

Ballestero labelled his nation a "multi-destination country," noting tourists often move from one Costa Rican locale to another during their vacations.

Alberto Rodriguez of the Costa Rica Tourism Board (l) was on hand to greet Patricia Pena and Camilo Aguilar of Canadian International during Costa Rican tourism show Expotur

Nonetheless, in particular, spread long periods in the country, with the average European stay being 17 days, he continued.

Ballestero added that Costa Rica is eager to host meetings, and to every open enable it to cater to those interested in wellness vacations.

Cowabunga, amigo!

SAM STEUBER

The Costa Rican town/community of Puerto Viejo is tending a tourist following, many of them young surfing dudes and dudettes drawn by the Caribbean surf-hunting shore.

Puerto Viejo was populated in part by people who are Canadians who have from Caribbean islands, with English last across commerce in the community.

And, says two guide tourism Cubans Hanover, the Caribbean influence is partly evident by the numerous bars in the community offering reggae music.

"This is like a little Jamaica," he says.

Ethiopian flags — often flown by Rastafarians, whose religion tends to be associated with Jamaica — can be seen at some parts in town.

Images of reggae legend Bob Marley can also be seen around the town.

Puerto Viejo has slowly gone the tourism route, with its streets lined with bars, restaurants, hotels and boutiques.

Visitors will also find numerous shops renting bicycles, a popular mode of transportation in town, and surfboards. Surfing lessons are easily available.

Lodging options in the Puerto Viejo area include the three-star Cocalito Beach & Jungle Resort, which has guest rooms found in a tropical garden setting that's home to different creatures, among them birds, butterflies and monkeys.

Rooms are cozy in large part that have such amenities as a safety box, WiFi, A/C, ceiling fan, cable TV, hammock, balcony, hair dryer, and a refrigerator.

The resort has the likes of a swimming pool, a bar, a pool bar, restaurant, souvenir shop, and a fitness area.

Among tours available for hotel guests are a canopy tour, horseback riding, whitewater rafting, bird-watching, hiking, and snorkelling.

More information can be found at www.cocalito.com

Surfboards are available to fuel at home in Puerto Viejo

HAWAII

Canadians still heading to Hawaii

SAM STEUBER

Hawaii Tourism Canada doesn't expect ongoing volcanic activity on the island of Hawaii to put a significant dent in travel to Hawaii.

Kilauea Volcano has been erupting green and lava since early May, prompting the evacuation of a nearby residential district and governing multiple closures.

But Maxine Hanover of Hawaii Tourism Canada says Kilauea doesn't seem to be dampening Canadian interest in Hawaii.

"Thankfully, the Hawaii Tourism Authority and Hawaii Tourism Canada have been very accommodative to the media regarding the latest news, updates and information to travellers," Hanover said. "As such, we have had very few calls to our team, mostly regarding the status of flights and airport of the area affected."

"We, at Hawaii Tourism Canada, do not foresee any significant issues stemming from the volcano of the island of Hawaii," he continued of an island often called the Big Island. "In fact, our Canadian media partners have been very strong in front across other islands, and we don't expect this to be a deterrent whatsoever."

Hanover said those who have planned Hawaii trips shouldn't be nervous about going, leaving "all of the Hawaiian islands are unaffected by Kilauea-usage; it remains area on the island of Hawaii's east side. Out of the islands, just opens miles, only less than a 10-minute-drive area of Indian Kaiona and Lava are Hawaiian Volcanoes in Peru is different."

Air traffic into Hilo at Ondonta Kona International Airport and Hilo International Airport are operating normally, Hanover said. Accommodations, activities and attractions are also operating normally, with the exception of those in the area affected by lava activity.

Hanover also said air capacity on the island is "largely unchanged." However, air quality when lava is flowing can be hazardous, and so, officials are keeping people out of affected areas.

"There's no reason at this time for travellers to change or alter their lives or business plans," Hanover insisted. "The affected area was in an area known for its volcanic activity and makes up a remarkable part of the island of Hawaii. We are thankful no injuries have resulted from the volcano and are happy to report that travellers planning to visit the island will not be affected by the recent news story. The same goes for those visiting the islands of Oahu, Maui, Kauai, Lanai, and Molokai."

Impacts of Hawaiian volcanoes are generally gentle, due to highly fluid lava compositions, which tends to flow freely both beneath the surface and upon emplace, Hanover continued.

Travellers planning a trip to the island of Hawaii who have questions or concerns can contact the Hawaii Tourism United States Call Center at 1-800-464-HAWAII (1-800-464-2924).

For other options, visit hawaiitourismcanada.com/news/volcanic-eruptions/

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