

Scoring a win for tourism

By **Shomari Scott** July 28, 2010

Worth more than \$600 billion annually, sports tourism has plenty of fans.

That's because sports-related tourism is poised to play a major role in the recovery of the global travel industry this year. And the Cayman Islands is well positioned to be on the competitive playing field.

Once regarded as a niche market, sports tourism has captured the world stage to become one of the fastest growing sectors in the travel industry. Industry experts are billing 2010 as "the year of sports tourism". Four major sporting events – the Winter Olympics, FIFA World Cup, Asian Games and Commonwealth Games – all take place during the year, bringing athletes and fans together, both in the host destinations and via worldwide television and online coverage.

So what does the growth of sports tourism mean for the Cayman Islands?

Trending research has long shown sports tourism as a prosperous market. The Department of Tourism has therefore been working diligently with the government and local sports groups to maximise the use of existing infrastructure and lay the groundwork in order to fully capitalise on the business of sport.

However, though there is recognition of the need to service this sector, criteria exists to ensure that the events that are accepted not only support our country's brand, but also fit within our target market and attracts an audience that sits well within our demographic. So far, expectations in terms of benefits to the destination and the potential growth of this sector have been exceeded and we anticipate that this trend will continue for the foreseeable future.

With a year-round temperate climate and a healthy marine environment, the Cayman Islands is the ideal destination for a wealth of sporting events – from football, swimming, tennis, squash and cricket to rugby, biking, fishing and more – all played at professional, amateur or high school levels. The government of the Cayman Islands has long promoted sports as an integral part of the educational curriculum, helping to foster a love of sport among all Caymanians.

In 1947, "Sports Day" was recommended at every school and the first interschool sports events were held in 1949. Since then, the Cayman Islands has participated in numerous worldwide sporting events including the CARIFTA Games, Pan American Games, the Commonwealth Games, Islands Games, Olympic Games and the World Cup qualifiers in Football to name but a few.

In 1987, the Sports Office was created and in 1994, the then Minister for Sports McKeeva Bush, tabled in the Legislative Assembly a document entitled “Sports Development in the Cayman Islands – A National Policy Statement”, outlining the benefits of sports to the Cayman Islands and a course of action to be pursued. In 2008, in a further effort to move the islands forward in its quest to facilitate both local and international events, a massive reconstruction of all of the major sporting facilities in the Cayman Islands was set underway.

Understanding the vast potential and true value of sports tourism, at a time when traditional leisure and business tourism is still recovering from the 2009 recession, the Cayman Islands have had the foresight to plan for and develop this sector. While larger cities around the world are content with seeing sports tourism as merely a “good thing” without entirely seeing the real benefits, the Cayman Islands has been investing and strategising in the sector for years; with the objective to establish the destination within our target market as a preferred sports tourism destination, with long-term sustainable benefits to the Caymanian population.

The Truman Bodden Sports Complex stands as a testament to the commitment from the government to growing sports tourism. A multi-use complex with a 25-metre outdoor swimming pool, full purpose track and field facility, boxing gym and basketball/netball courts the centre is also used for football matches and other field sports with a stadium that holds 7,000 spectators.

The certification of the IAAF track at the Truman Bodden Sports Complex is significant, making it the first internationally certified track in the Cayman Islands, permitting the hosting of officially IAAF sanctioned international track meets, such as the recently held CARIFTA Games. Records made at the track are also officially recognised, providing Cayman’s aspiring Olympians with a world class track to train on. In time, it is hoped the facility will also be used by international teams in preparation for their outdoor seasons as part of an overall sports tourism marketing plan. The Class Two IAAF designation of the track also provides Cayman with the means to host grand prix meets, opening new revenue streams for the further development of sports in the Cayman Islands.

Other sporting facility developments in the Cayman Islands have included the addition of artificial turf at the T.E. McField ‘Annex’ in George Town. The turf, rated FIFA two star, allows for any level of international football matches to be played on the field and maintenance costs are minimal. Most recently, Rani Jarkas of Cedrus Investments, who is a former United States #1 squash player, generously purchased a glass court for the purpose of promoting his beloved sport in Cayman.

In addition to allowing a spectacular 360-degree view to spectators, the court is portable and can therefore be moved to various locations as required, such as Camana Bay, where it was used during the Cayman

Open tournament. The event, which attracted several of the world's top male and female players is set to take place again in the Cayman Islands next April.

Cayman's vast natural resources combined with numerous facility upgrades and improvements ensure that major sporting event planners are attracted to our shores. The NORCECA Volleyball Competition CARIFTA Games and Olympic Youth Sailing qualifiers are recent events held in Grand Cayman that have helped the destination claim its share of the sports tourism market. Many more opportunities exist to host other events on an annual basis.

The CARIFTA Games in particular were a triumph for the Cayman Islands by bringing the destination to the world and providing a significant cash injection into the economy in just three days. Locally organised events like the Annual Flowers Sea Swim, Cayman Islands Marathon, Jet Around Cayman and the East End Surf Challenge have also all grown from humble beginnings to attract international attention, athletes and spectators.

Sports tourism vacations have the benefit of bringing large groups of people together in the celebration of sport, promoting cultural exchange and having a direct and sizeable effect on our economy. Whether amateur athletes or "weekend warriors", sports tourism visitors have disposable income and fall within the demographics for the typical Caymanian visitor. The average sports visitor brings along two or three friend and family representing a real opportunity for us to share branded tourism messages and create additional opportunities with this captive audience. The initial impact is cash injection to the economy but the real impact is tourists for years to come, via strong word-of-mouth endorsement and repeat visitation.

As we move towards the future of sports tourism in the Cayman Islands, we feel well positioned to take full advantage of the opportunities that now lie before us. We're continuing to develop a sustainable sports tourism strategy in conjunction with the local tourism community, building upon current sporting event assets and creating new experiences that serve to expose Cayman to both a global and Caribbean audience. What's more, the development and commitment to sport tourism leads to a more active and healthy population of adults and children; a positive spill over effect that strengthens our community at large.

The quality and sustainability of sports related tourism in the Cayman Islands is dependent upon our willingness to integrate plans into future policies and our ability to allocate resources – both human and financial. The benefits far outweigh the costs for both the destination as a brand and for our tourism private sector as a whole. The Cayman Islands has a winning formula and there has never been a better time to get in the sports tourism game.

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Cayman Islands Department of Tourism

The Department of Tourism was established in 1974 and falls under the mandate of the Ministry of Financial Services, Tourism and Development. This Ministry organises and directs the activities for many departments all of which have similar goals; to protect the environment, support the economy,

promote the islands as a premier destination for visitors and to support local businesses and business people.

Departments:

- Tourism (www.caymanislands.ky)
- Planning (www.planning.gov.ky)
- Fire Service (www.cifs.gov.ky)
- Public Transportation Board
- Liquor Locensing Board

Authorities, Boards & Committees:

- Port Authority of the Cayman Islands
- Cayman Islands Airports Authority Cayman Turtle Farm Ltd.
- Cayman Airways Ltd.
- Hotel Licensing Board
- Liquor Licensing Board
- Public Transport Board
- Tourism Attraction Board
- Land & Sea Co-operative
- Tourism Advisory Council
- Cayman Islands Tourism Association
- Sister Islands Tourism Association
- Tourism Apprenticeship Training Programme Council
- National Tourism Management Policy Steering Committee
- Miss Cayman Committee
- National Festival Committee & District Committees
- Film Commission Advisory Board
- Development Control Board
- Electrical Board of Examiners
- Planning Appeals Tribunal
- Central Planning Authority.

For additional information about the Ministry of Financial Services, Tourism and Development visit www.gov.ky.

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