

ttg luxury

for premium travel professionals

SPRING 2012 # 1750
ttgluxury.com

At the luxury end of the market, the Caribbean can always be relied upon to spring into life over the high season with the likes of Kate Moss and Grace Jones bringing in the New Year at GoldenEye in Jamaica, and Daniel Craig chilling out at Eden Rock in St Barths. But as the rush for Blackwell Rum and luxury yachts subsides into the spring, what picture is forming for 2012 and beyond?

While Alec Sanguinetti, director general of the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association, predicted doom and gloom last April when he suggested that the industry is "half dead already", Carol Hay, director of marketing UK and Europe for the Caribbean Tourism Organisation, remains upbeat.

"The Caribbean is still in vogue. We have not yet got full visitor numbers for 2011, but the European ones we do have are looking strong, and we anticipate visitor numbers to be up overall," she says. "This continues the trend from 2010 when tourist arrivals were up – with cruise arrivals particularly strong – and the average spend in the region had recovered to 2004 levels.

"What's more, Air France, Virgin Atlantic and KLM are all increasing their flights to the region, so we see no indication that visitor numbers will drop in 2012."

ITC Classics is equally optimistic about Caribbean sales for 2012, reporting that private islands in particular are very much in fashion.

Helen Tabois, ITC's senior product and marketing manager for Caribbean, Cruise and The Americas, says: "Peter Island in the British Virgin Islands is a resort where we've seen fabulous growth in 2011, up 74% year-on-year. The key is that it gives clients a feeling of exclusivity, not only because they're staying on a private island but also because they're in a destination that is a little bit off the beaten track."

Tabois also believes there is a growing trend of villa stays for extended family groups. "We've been seeing this in recent months," she says. "Family groups can

holiday together yet still enjoy time alone by staying in private residences."

She adds that somewhere like Peter Island is also a wise choice for sailing, with guests having the option of an "Ashore Afloat" package, giving them the opportunity to book a week at the resort and to spend two of those days sailing onboard a crewed yacht.

New ideas such as this are just what the region needs in order to keep offering innovative initiatives for clients. Others include the Sleep School at LaSource in Grenada and the new bootcamp holidays at Smugglers Cove in St Lucia.

In Jamaica, meanwhile, Jakes is offering complimentary (for seven-night stay guests) two-hour "Way Back When" tours, where a local takes guests off to explore nearby Black River on the south coast to get a taste of real life in the area.

There are also new operators in the luxury bracket offering the Caribbean for 2012. Travel 2's new standalone product, Simply Luxury, for example, is selling exclusively via independent agents.