

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Caribbean tourism attempts to woo travelers back 1 year after Hurricane Maria

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A number of major hotels have begun renovating their Caribbean hotels. Image credit: St. Kitts Tourism

By DANNY PARISI

The Caribbean has typically been a go-to destination for luxury travel, yet a year after Hurricane Maria ravaged many of the islands, the region is still working to win back some of the tourists who have steered clear following the storm's destruction.

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Puerto Rico is undergoing a major campaign to get more travelers interested in vacationing to the island by highlighting the major progress that has been made in the year since the storm. Discover Puerto Rico, one of the companies leading the charge, said more than 50 percent of travelers had their perception of Puerto Rico as a viable destination negatively impacted by media reports of the island's damages.

Caribbean reconstruction

Last year, Hurricane Maria hit the Caribbean, causing massive loss of life and damage to homes and properties on many islands across the region.

Flooding, damaged roofs and uprooted trees were some of the many problems facing islands such as Puerto Rico, Hispaniola and Martinique.

Widespread media reports highlighted the hardships this storm caused to the people of the Caribbean along with the lackluster relief response from the U.S. government.



The St. Regis Bahia Beach Resort in Puerto Rico. Image credit: St. Regis

However, this coverage had the unintended side effect of turning away valuable tourism from other countries.

Discover Puerto Rico is hoping to bring back tourism by encouraging media outlets to cover the progress that has been made towards rebuilding the island and making it an appealing destination for tourists.

Numerous luxury hotels across the region have renovated and updated their properties in an effort to encourage more tourism. For example, the St. Regis Bahia Beach Resort in Puerto Rico has completely redesigned itself with a new spa and a \$30 million expansion.

Similarly, the El San Juan luxury hotel has also undergone a major renovation to attract new customers.

Luxury reconstruction

In the year since Hurricane Maria, not only have existing luxury hotels renovated and redesigned their properties, but other brands with no presence in the Caribbean have begun investing there.

For example, Mandarin Oriental is branching out in the Caribbean with its first property located in the Cayman Islands.

The new property on Grand Cayman will be a 100-room beachfront resort equipped with all the same modern amenities as the standard Mandarin Oriental experience. As the demand for luxury travel grows, Mandarin Oriental is looking to meet that demand with an expanded portfolio of properties ([see story](#)).



El San Juan Hotel in Puerto Rico. Image credit: Hilton Hotels

Similarly, The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company is expanding its brand to the island of St. Kitts.

Slated to open in 2021, the property is located on the St. Kitts' Southeast Peninsula facing the Caribbean Sea. This upcoming debut will add to Ritz-Carlton's presence in the Caribbean, which currently includes properties in locales such as Puerto Rico, Grand Cayman, Aruba and St. Thomas ([see story](#)).

The Caribbean was hit hard by Hurricane Maria, and for many travelers its status as a luxury destination was harmed. But thanks to strong investment from luxury hotels, the region is on its way to attracting more luxury customers.

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