



Donna Banks, Chairperson of the Anguilla Tourist Board

Anguilla on agent outreach and the possibility of direct flights

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TORONTO — The little island that could is making a big push in Canada following a 10% increase in visitation this year over its best-performing year ever in 2014.

At an industry dinner at Toronto’s Fairmont Royal York hotel last night, part of a three-city roadshow that also stops in Ottawa and Montreal, Donna Banks, Chairperson of the Anguilla Tourist Board, told Travelweek that a total of 2,910 Canadians arrived in destination up to the end of July 2019, a promising figure that will bolster sales efforts in 2020.



Meads Bay

“We are very thankful and appreciative of the Canadian market for supporting Anguilla over the years,” said Banks, adding that the multiple-city roadshow is a first for the Anguilla Tourist Board. “This shows our dedication to the Canadian market. We expect with our increased activity in Canada and various other markets that we’ll see even greater performance out of Canada.”

Attributing this uptick in visitation to an increase in public relations and social media efforts, Banks said the Tourist Board is specifically reaching out to travel agents through fam visits, webinars and a specialist program that’s currently being developed for the U.S., which will possibly be modified for the Canadian market.

“There was that myth that travel agents aren’t that important anymore because everybody now is booking online. That’s not true, people still want their agents and want the safety and security in knowing there’s a person they can contact if there are any issues or challenges,” she said. “Travel agents are super important, which is why we’ve increased our sales activity and continued with our fam visits so that they can experience Anguilla firsthand and better sell the destination.”

When asked how travel agents should sell Anguilla to clients, Banks cautioned not to pigeon-hole it as simply luxury.

“Luxury is a relative term, it’s not what it used to be in years gone by when luxury equated a hotel room,” she said. “Studies have shown that the first aspect of a luxury destination is its authenticity and unique experiences, so if you’re looking at luxury from that standpoint then yes, Anguilla is still a luxury destination.”



Banks added that the Tourist Board is working to modify this messaging, however, to make Anguilla more inclusive without compromising what it’s most known for – its accommodations.

“We have a wide range of accommodations, not just for the rich and famous, whether you’re a single, a couple, family or travelling for business. Anguilla is for anyone who can appreciate our laidback lifestyle,” she said.

Hotel updates on the island include the new Tranquility Beach Anguilla on Meads Bay, opening on Dec. 21 with 15 beachfront 1- to 3-bedroom luxury condominiums, and the Zemi Beach House Hotel, which will rebrand on Dec. 3 as an LXR Hotel, part of Hilton’s Luxury Collection brand. The Four Seasons has also renamed its main restaurant, Coba, to Salt in honour of Anguilla’s salt industry, while Malliouhana, An Auberge Resort is opening 11 new beachfront suites, four garden suites and a two-bedroom beachfront villa for the winter 2019 season.

As for flights, Anguilla continues to use nearby St. Maarten (SXM) as its main gateway as it’s still without an airport large enough to accommodate direct international flights. SXM is currently serviced by Air Canada, WestJet, Sunwing and Transat from both Toronto and Montreal.

But could there be direct flights to Canada one day?

For now, Anguilla has set its sights on enhancing service to the U.S., its #1 market.

“We’re looking at expanding our runway to be able to accommodate some direct flights. Right now we’re actually speaking to one or two airline companies and looking into direct flights out of Fort Lauderdale to begin with, sometime in the new year,” said Banks. “We’ve been discussing the airport for a while and it’s definitely a serious consideration because we understand that to grow our numbers, it means that we have to really ensure more direct access.”

Banks was quick to assure Canadians that Anguilla will still be serviced via the gateways of St. Maarten and San Juan, adding that she doesn’t foresee a new international airport any time soon.

“Airlines are going to look where there is the greatest demand and supply and rooms, so you won’t see a 380 coming in or the jumbos because they won’t come unless you have X amount of rooms. We don’t have the capacity to sustain X amount of rooms, which would require additional manpower and the import of labour. When you do all that, you spoil the whole character of the island,” she said.

So Anguilla is looking to start out small, with smaller jets in addition to its thriving private jet business, that can carry 100-150 passengers from places like Fort Lauderdale and cities along the U.S. east coast. This, said Banks, will achieve the destination’s goal of continued growth without coming at the expense of what she loves most about the island: its warmth and tranquility.

“I like the peace and relaxation and the freedom of Anguilla, I like being in a peaceful place where you don’t hear sirens all the time and see any fast-food chains,” she said. “If you ask guests what stands out most about Anguilla, it’s not our rooms or the beaches or the food – even though all three surpass most in the region. It’s the warmth and friendliness of the people, our willingness to help and make you feel a part of our lives. It’s not just business to us, you become our friends and family.”