



The ultimate marketing playbook for the Caribbean



CARIBBEAN DEMAND & TRAVEL OUTLOOK

BY JANINE YU

As travel picks back up with more countries easing restrictions every day, one region is particularly poised for a comeback: The Caribbean. According to multiple surveys, travel readiness among North Americans is increasing and many plan to take an international trip this year, but will do it closer to home. According to ForwardKeys, a company that analyzes tourism and travel trends, most USA departures in 2021 are to the Caribbean and Mexico.

“We have seen sun and sea destinations recover the fastest, and that’s what the Caribbean has to offer.”

OLIVIER PONTI, VP OF FORWARDKEYS

Adam Marks, President of Tourism Economics, concurs: “As we’ve seen the coastal destinations of the US have done well during the pandemic, the Caribbean is next as it is a very similar offering. Marketing to the US is an exclusive opportunity right now, and where it would be wise to spend marketing dollars.”

Marketing the Caribbean has its specific challenges, such as distinguishing your resort from the abundance of options across multiple and distinct countries often just lumped as one concept. Marketing during a pandemic even more so. Here are the best strategies for success.



Top 5 Strategies You Have to Employ

STRATEGY 1

Identify and understand your feeder markets, and how they have changed over the last year

The United States and Canada represent the most important feeder markets for the Caribbean, with the US alone representing 77% of all international arrivals in the Caribbean. “Any change in US travel policies has a tremendous effect on the region,” said Ponti. Luckily, they are also countries with high vaccination rates. As of mid-May, 60% of American adults and 46% of Canadian adults have had at least one vaccination shot.

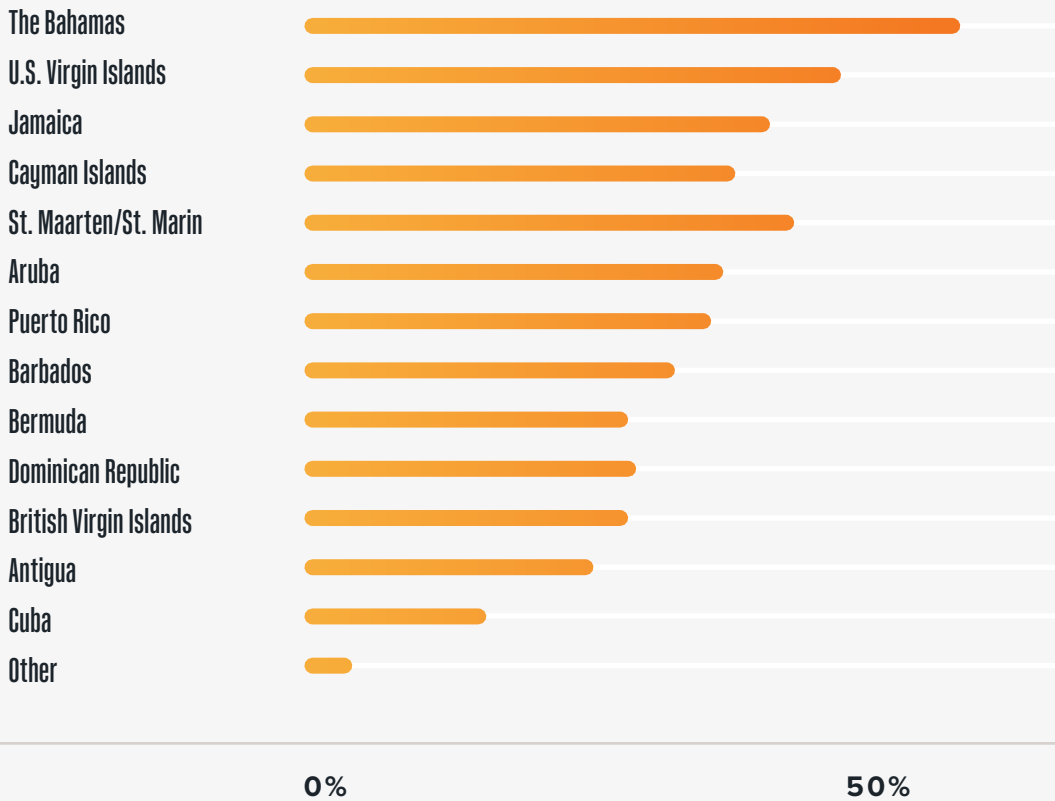
Vaccinations change the landscape in more ways than one. It matters that the source market

is mostly vaccinated, which means easing of outbound travel regulations. Vaccinations also open up destinations which were previously closed off or highly regulating entry for these markets since the onset of the pandemic. Just recently, the Bahamas no longer requires a negative PCR test for vaccinated travelers. It is currently the number one Caribbean destination travelers are interested in visiting in the region. Destinations that require quarantine and stricter Covid-19 protocols are less attractive to potential guests.

Caribbean destinations of interest in coming years

Among active travelers, these are the top destinations they mentioned wanting to visit in the next two years.

Top – 2% Very // Extremely Interested



Source: MMGY Global 2021's Portrait of American Travelers

STRATEGY 2

Segmentation and personalization

Over the past 30+ years, NAVIS has developed the optimal reservations call script to gather information that is essential to segment and personalize marketing. Among the data collected are questions on why people are staying at a particular property, what their emotional triggers are, and what policies they are not willing to abide by. “This gives insights to regrets and denials, which provide full insight to your unconstrained demand,” said Amir Rashid, a Consultant at NAVIS. “Marketing Teams then takes all this info and deploy campaigns to supplement efforts.” Even guests that don’t book are a remarketing opportunity – you can keep nurturing them with relevant messaging to increase the chance of winning business back. “It’s all about relevancy and rapport,” said Rashid.

Michael Orrison at GCommerce, a digital marketing agency, finds that NAVIS’s email marketing and lifecycle emails are really important coming out of the pandemic. This allows his company to hit guests with relevant messaging. He also believes in the power of heat mapping on hospitality websites, a tool that is especially helpful in understanding what specials work (or don’t), and how to improve the user experience to influence consumer behavior.



How Heat Mapping Works:

Heat mapping analyzes user behavior on a website, and it primarily tracks three things:

- **CLICKS** – Where on the page are they clicking? This is also recorded by link tracking.
- **MOUSE MOVEMENT** – Which quadrant of the page are they moving their mouse to?
- **SCROLL** – How far down the page are they scrolling before abandoning the page or clicking on something?

If you’re running a special on your Caribbean property on your website, it’s helpful to track and analyze if people are not seeing your call to action, or if a photo needs to be moved to a different section of the page, in order to drive bookings.

STRATEGY 3

Transparent messaging

Traveling in the time of COVID-19 can be a fraught undertaking, especially if there is mixed messaging around a destination. Travelers are having to stay informed on safety protocols, entry requirements, and cancellation policies, as there is the expectation that things can change up until the last minute. Ease of entry is critical, and when government-mandated protocols are not particularly friendly, it's the property's job to communicate clearly what is required and the best way to do it.

Many international hotels have experienced cancellations from PCR tests not coming back in time for a departure flight. The onus is on properties to set their guests up for success by offering clear and constant messaging related to their trip. Besides on-property protocols, guests want to know how accessible hospitals and medical facilities are from your hotel or vacation rental. They also want assurances that their investment is safe – that if for some reason their vacation is canceled, there are clear guidelines around refunds or credits.

Read Marc Liu's article on [Consciously Marketing International Destinations to US Travelers](#).

Key Concepts to Communicate:

► SAFETY OF THE DESTINATION

Local Covid-19 case counts as well as vaccination rates are a top concern among U.S. travelers.

► COVID-19 PROTOCOLS

Every Caribbean destination has its own regulations for quarantine and testing, so be very clear about what your government requires, as well as pandemic protocols your property has in place.

► ONSITE TESTING

TravelZoo found that properties that offered Covid-19 testing on property creates consumer confidence. It also offers convenience for travelers who don't have to leave your property to comply with regulations, either locally or for their return home.

► FLEXIBILITY ON BOOKING POLICIES

This past year has set a new standard for flexible booking policies, and while the pandemic continues on, travelers expect to have some sort of flexibility with cancellation and rescheduling.

► ACCESSIBILITY

As more flight routes return, your destination's frequency of direct flights from major hubs is an important aspect to highlight.

STRATEGY 4

Upsells and Add-ons, Not Discounts

According to a report from STR, a hospitality analytics firm, none of the Caribbean properties cut their rates at the height of the pandemic because it was clear that travelers were not willing to get on an airplane, no matter how low rates were. In fact, hotels have seen demand for higher room categories and private villas, as well as VIP airport service and private transfers.

Guests want high-touch experiences and are paying a premium for safety and security. NAVIS’s own data supports this, showing that rate resistance is down. In 2021, it accounted for 12.5% of regrets and denials. In 2019, it was at 23.1% As ELMNTL’s Liu pointed out, “If you’re competing on rates, it’s a race to the bottom, and no one wants that.”



5 Keys to Drive Business:

- ▶ **COMPELLING PRICE** – According to leading travel research firm MMGY, 77% of prospective Caribbean guests say travel deals will have either an extreme or some impact on their decision to travel in the next six months. All-inclusive properties are particularly popular with Canadian travelers.
- ▶ **UPSELL OPTIONS** – The “revenge travel” trend has seen travelers splurging more on upgraded rooms, spa treatments or other ways to indulge. Seize this opportunity by offering upgrade options and packages at the point of sale. NAVIS’s LifeCycle emails nurture guests by sending automated, personalized, and targeted messaging to prospective guests based on key moments in their booking journey. [Read more about Revenge Travel.](#)



- ▶ **LONG TRAVEL WINDOW** - TravelZoo’s recent survey among its members found that Canadians in particular are keen on Book Now, Stay Later packages, locking in deals now for stays as late as 12-18 months from the time of booking.
- ▶ **SAFETY GUIDELINES** – Having Covid-19 safety protocols in place is as important as communicating them to guests.
- ▶ **FLEXIBILITY** – Make it as easy as possible for travelers to book without a commitment that will cost them. Encourage them to book and provide credit card details, while emphasizing that they can cancel without penalty.



STRATEGY 5

Track your marketing channels closely, both online and offline

“There’s a lot of pressure on hotels in the Caribbean, as tourism is the backbone of these economies,” said Rashid. “You need to know how to gather information and drive guests back to direct channels.”

“NAVIS is a crucial part of the analytics picture,” said Liu. “With general digital advertising and marketing tools, we can see if our campaigns generated bookings, but we can’t see offline bookings through voice channel, which NAVIS provides. Without that piece of the puzzle, we would miss crucial data.”

“The most powerful marketing strategy is in offline tracking,” said Orrison. “A lot of times people will see an ad, go to the hotel’s website, then they want more information, so they pick up the phone. NAVIS gives us the tools to be able to connect these two points, to figure out what digital campaign led to their call and measure the impact of what works and doesn’t work.”



Tips from Digital Marketing Experts:

“There are two levels of audience you want to measure. First is looking at the traffic – who is coming to your website. Just because you get a lot of traffic from San Francisco doesn’t mean you want to put all your marketing dollars there. You need to also look for deeper levels of intention. Who’s going to your booking page, searching for certain dates, then not booking? Are they visiting the specials page? That’s the best way to identify those feeder markets because you don’t want to just spend money on remarketing to anyone who’s just “walking into your store” but on those people who have the highest chances of spending.”

– MIKE ORRISON, GCOMMERCE

“Real tracking is in the conversations. Often marketers rely on converted revenue from online channels; it’s difficult for them to see their efforts attributed to offline reservations as well. To really understand what’s driving people to book, it’s important to track interaction with reservation agents. Listen to conversations to know how guests feel about packages you’re offering and gain insight into what’s working with your digital campaigns.”

— AMIR RASHID, NAVIS

“We’re no longer in a world where we blanket-target based on location and income level — it isn’t the most effective way to reach people. Travelers are more discerning and savvy, and they are looking for messaging that is specifically catered to their needs. You need information on those audiences. Marketers need to be smarter about building those micro audiences, nurturing them, and targeting them.”

— MARC LIU, ELMNTL

Be smart with your marketing dollars

Everyone agrees that the Caribbean is on an upward growth and now is the time to devote marketing dollars to the region’s biggest source market, North Americans. There are definitely ways to quickly burn through your budget without thoughtful and strategic analysis of your approach. “Think about the cost proposition,” said Orrison. “There’s a big wave of demand that everyone’s expecting. When the cost for acquisition goes up, your advertising dollars go up as well. If you’re increasing marketing dollars and increasing revenue, you’re not necessarily making more money at end of the day.”

Contributors



MARC LIU

Co-Founder, ELMNTL

Marc Liu is a tourism and hospitality marketing strategist and entrepreneur with over 14 years of experience in hospitality digital strategy, performance marketing, social media, branding and technology.

Marc co-founded and sold ELMNTL, a marketing and communications agency specializing in travel, hospitality, spirits, and lifestyle brands. Previously, Marc Liu co-founded and sold Gourmet Marketing, a digital agency specializing in hospitality brands.

Born in China, raised in Australia, and educated in France, Marc specializes in cross-cultural storytelling and is fluent in French, Mandarin Chinese, and English.

MIKE ORRISON

Business Insights Analyst, GCommerce

Mike has been in the Digital Marketing space since 2009 and started with GCommerce in 2014 as a Search Marketing Specialist. He quickly found a passion for Search Marketing and moved up through the department as a Strategist and Senior Strategist. Upon some new opportunities at GCommerce, Mike took on the role of Business Insights Analyst. While this new role has him working closely with client data to find efficiencies and areas for growth, he is still working directly with accounts at GCommerce in Search Marketing and Account Management. With an interest in automation, Mike has also led a number of projects at GCommerce to eliminate tasks and remove labor hours from operation teams.

Mike is a native of New Mexico but has spent the majority of his life residing in Park City, Utah. He graduated with degrees in Biology and Communications from Lake Forest College and is a proud alumnus of the Rugby Football Club.



AMIR RASHID

Solutions Strategist, NAVIS

Amir is a highly skilled SaaS Consultant with 10 years of technical experience, adept at managing technology-based implementations, aligning technical solutions with business process objectives, and generating analyses that pinpoint incremental revenue growth opportunities. He has worked within multiple Hospitality focused technology organizations. He's also helped small to midsize businesses in the Central Florida area grow their sales & marketing efforts as a Digital Project

Manager & Business Intelligence Consultant through his own digital consulting firm, SFG Consulting. Amir started his career at NAVIS guiding revenue generation teams at Hotels, Resorts, and Vacation Rental Management companies on how to drive revenue growth interdependently through the NAVIS CRM as a Client Success Strategist for 3 years. In 2018 he transitioned over to the NAVIS Sales Department as a Solutions Strategist and Territory Sales Consultant to help properties identify the gaps in their leisure revenue generating related systems, databases, and processes and to showcase how NAVIS can fill those gaps.



Chart Your Course.

For hospitality professionals, getting and keeping profitable guests is tougher than ever. NAVIS has created the only complete Direct Booking Platform with a proven plan to help Reservations, Revenue Management, and Marketing truly operate as one team, and make more profit.

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