

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



CHIEF 2026 ANNOUNCES SPEAKER LINEUP FOCUSED ON STRENGTHENING CARIBBEAN HOSPITALITY BUSINESSES

Industry leaders and experts will share real-world experience and fresh perspectives to help Caribbean hospitality businesses lead smarter, operate better, and grow stronger; CHIEF Awards nominations extended to Oct. 19

Fort Lauderdale, Fla. – Oct. 15, 2026 – The [Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association](#) (CHTA) today announced the speakers confirmed to date for the 2026 [Caribbean Hospitality Industry Exchange Forum](#) (**CHIEF**). Hospitality professionals from across the region will gather at CHIEF to address the business decisions and opportunities that matter most today and take home insights they can apply within their own organizations. Taking place **Nov. 16-18** at the Wyndham Grand Barbados Sam Lord's Castle All-Inclusive Resort, CHIEF 2026 features more than 50 speakers across 24 sessions, with more to be announced.

Previously announced keynote speaker Bruce Poon Tip, Founder, G Adventures, opens the event. His experience building a global travel company by challenging traditional tourism models sets the tone for a forum focused on innovation and future readiness.

"We've brought together an exceptional group of hospitality leaders and industry experts who understand the realities of operating and growing businesses in the Caribbean," said Patricia Affonso-Dass, CHIEF 2026 Program Chair and CEO/Group General Manager Ocean Hotels, Barbados. "What makes CHIEF valuable is the opportunity to learn from real experiences and explore approaches already working across the region. Our focus is on ensuring attendees leave with ideas and connections they can put into action in their own businesses."

A Program Built Around Today's Business Priorities

Sessions are organized around six topic areas, each led by professionals who bring hands-on experience to the conversation:

Talent and the Workforce

Strong teams start with engaged, healthy employees, and these sessions explore how leading employers attract and develop talent while building workplace cultures that support wellbeing and performance. Insight comes from James McAnally, Regional Managing Director, Northern Caribbean & Curaçao, Sandals Resorts International, and President, Turks and Caicos Hotel and Tourism Association; Nicole Antonio-Gadsdon, Founder & Human Magic Systems Architect, Banana Pepper HR; and Dr. Kerriann Peart, Founder & Principal, Peart Consulting LLC.

Sales and Marketing

As traveler preferences evolve, this track looks at where the Caribbean's next wave of demand will come from, including emerging source markets and high-value segments. Leading these conversations are Andrea Franklin, Chief Executive Officer, Barbados Tourism Marketing Inc.; Michaela Guzy, Travel Journalist, Documentary Filmmaker and Founder of "Oh The People You Meet"; and Chris Davidson, Executive Vice President, MMGY Travel Intelligence; and Jack Newkirk, Senior Enterprise Sales Executive, Revinate.

Technology and AI

Attendees will learn where AI can improve efficiency and guest satisfaction, from automating routine tasks to supporting better day-to-day decisions, and how to adopt it while keeping the authentic hospitality that distinguishes the Caribbean. The track features Manny Melendez, Director, Direct Bookings and Distribution, Amadeus; April Andras Cantu, Vertical Vice President of Sales for the PMS portfolio, Fullsteam; and Timothy Williams, General Manager, Blue Horizon Hotel.

Sustainability and Regeneration

Sustainability and profitability go hand in hand, and this track shows how smarter operations and regenerative practices can strengthen both the bottom line and long-term resilience. Speakers include Dr. Bridget Baumgartner, Co-founder and CEO, ReefStarter; Michael Eugene, Certified Trainer of Tour Guide Trainers, Caribbean Tourism Organization (Dominica); and Marie S. McKenzie, Senior Vice President, Government & Destination Affairs, Carnival Corporation.

Operational Management

Rising insurance costs, crisis preparedness, and brand affiliation all shape a property's long-term viability, and these sessions offer guidance on managing risk and positioning the business for sustained growth. Guiding these discussions are Andy Ingraham, Founder, President, and CEO, National Association of Black Hotel Owners, Operators & Developers (NABHOOD); and Maya Wiltshire, Area President, Gallagher Caribbean Group.

New Business

Revenue growth increasingly comes from beyond the room, and this track explores how hotels can create new income streams across the guest journey, from pre-arrival offers to on-property experiences. Sharing their perspectives are Sanovnik Destang, CHTA President, and Executive Director, Bay Gardens Resorts; Albert Vazquez, Vice President of Sales, Americas, Triptease; and Reynaldo A. Malik Jr., Chief Operating Officer, Muy'Ono Resorts and President, Belize Hotel Association.

Beyond the topics themselves, CHIEF offers the chance to learn from and network with hospitality professionals working across the Caribbean, each bringing distinct operating experience and market perspective.

To obtain the full speaker lineup and schedule, visit chtachief.com/speakers and chtachief.com/schedule-of-events.

CHIEF Awards Nominations Extended

CHTA has extended the nomination deadline for the 2026 CHIEF Awards, which recognize outstanding initiatives by Caribbean hotels and tourism organizations, to Oct. 19. Hotels and industry organizations are invited to submit nominations at www.chtachief.com/chief-awards.

Register to Attend

Hospitality owners, operators, executives, and industry professionals are invited to join their peers in Barbados to gain practical insights, exchange experiences, and build connections that can strengthen their businesses. Registration is open to CHTA members and non-members at www.chtachief.com/registration.

CHIEF 2026 Platinum partners include ABA Global Marketing, Alliants, GAIN, Interval International, Maestro PMS, Mastercard, Miles Partnership, and Silverware. Gold partners include MyBookingRewards.com and taConnect. Supporting partners include Amadeus, Carnival Corporation, Lighthouse, monday.com, Reefstarter, and Revinate. Airline partners include interCaribbean Airways and Winair.

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About the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA)

The Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA) is the leading voice of the Caribbean hospitality and tourism private sector. For more than 60 years, CHTA has brought together national hotel and tourism associations, hotels, resorts, and other accommodations, and allied businesses across the region. Through the collective strength of this regional network, CHTA represents the industry's interests, connects businesses and partners, and delivers the insights, resources, and opportunities members need to navigate challenges, make informed decisions, and grow their businesses. From advocacy and business intelligence to people development, sustainability, emerging technologies, and market opportunities, CHTA helps members address the issues that matter most to their businesses while strengthening the Caribbean hospitality and tourism industry.