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**With Caribbean Tourism Growth Outpacing the World, Travel Experts Break Down The Region's Top Travel Destinations for 2014**

*Houston, TX, August 21, 2013* – Citing World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) statistics, Beverly Nicholson-Doty, chairman of the Caribbean Tourism Organization, saw Caribbean tourism growth “outpace the rest of the world” in 2012. After all, over one billion international tourists vacationed in the region in 2012 alone. With visitor traffic growing rapidly this year, the Caribbean continues to be the number one destination of choice for international travelers and will remain the world’s most popular hot spot in 2014.

The Caribbean travel experts at Prohotel International, the Houston based hotel management company behind such award-winning properties as the Riviera Maya’s Hotel Esencia, are announcing their picks for the region’s top travel destinations for 2014.

**Honduras and the Birding Boom**

Declared the ‘toucan capital of the world’ by The Lodge at Pico Bonito’s head naturalist, James Adams, Honduras is a natural paradise on the brink of discovery and is expected to gain ground on other popular eco-destinations in the coming year. According to statistics derived from a Birding Trends survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Forest Service, birding ranks as the 15<sup>th</sup> most popular and the fastest growing outdoor recreational activity in the United States. Additionally, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reports that 40 percent of birders are willing to travel to discover new bird watching opportunities.

Situated on 400 acres of tropical wilderness in the country’s second largest national park, the Lodge at Pico Bonito is a dream destination for nature enthusiasts of all kinds, particularly those with an interest in birding. Offering guests access to a multi-story canopy observation tower and naturalist guides, over 400 species of birds have already been spotted on site.

“We expect a 15% increase in bookings next year,” says Gabriel Cambon, General Manager of the Lodge at Pico Bonito. “Part of this forecasted increase will come from more repeat visits to the Lodge, building interest in destination weddings, and partnerships with the major birding festivals and events that we are targeting.”

For more information visit [www.picobonito.com](http://www.picobonito.com), or call (888) 428-0221.

## **The Rich Culture and Archaeological Wonders of Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula**

One thing is clear -- travel to Mexico is still as hot as ever, particularly to such regions as the Yucatan Peninsula. In 2012 alone, over 20 million U.S. tourists visited the country with more than 20% of travelers visiting the Riviera Maya. The Riviera Maya Tourist Board cited an 8% increase in travelers to the region in 2012 alone and is well on its way to exceeding that growth in 2013.

Perfectly situated on an unparalleled stretch of private white sand Caribbean beach only a short distance from Mexico's most enchanting archaeological sites, Hotel Esencia, once the private retreat of an Italian Duchess, is the region's top boutique hotel. The property features the Riviera Maya's first world-class organic spa offering an array of new healing spa rituals, unrivaled gourmet regionally inspired cuisine and 29 sumptuously outfitted rooms and suites. Witness some of Mexico's most jaw dropping ruins on trips to nearby Tulum, Chichen Itza, and Uxmal among many more.

For more information visit [www.hotelesencia.com](http://www.hotelesencia.com) or call 877-528-3490.

## **Dominican Republic's Emerging Hot Spots**

### ***Santo Domingo's Ciudad Colonial***

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Ciudad Colonial, the colonial city of Santo Domingo, will experience an increase in leisure and business travelers next year – particularly with recent growth in the city's global banking and film industries.

"The completion of the Coral highway in November 2013 will link a vast number of tourists to one of the new world's densest cultural heritage sites, The Ciudad Colonial," says Marc Dalet, General Manager of Las Casas del XVI. "A new initiative by the Ministry of Tourism will convert a significant part of the colonial city into pedestrian only, which will enhance the traveler's experience. This action by the government has prompted a significant increase in private investment in restaurants, bars, shops and local excursions. These two factors combined will result in a definite increase in travel to old Santo Domingo –making it the Caribbean's newest hot spot."

The area's first luxury hotel, Las Casas del XVI, will open in November offering guests access to nine rooms and suites in newly renovated houses dating back to the sixteenth century all located within walking distance to area attractions. After all, as the oldest city in the new world, Santo Domingo is home to the first church in the Americas, countless museums, fine restaurants and vibrant nightlife.

For more information visit [www.casasdelxvi.com](http://www.casasdelxvi.com) or call 713-528-7862.

### ***The Samana Peninsula, a Secluded Undiscovered Hideaway***

This longtime undiscovered hideaway of the French is as authentic a Caribbean destination as they come. Spectacular beaches stretch for miles with no developments in site, as mountain ranges provide the perfect backdrop to a landscape teeming with natural wonders. Offering guests a tremendous amount of privacy while still a close distance to the lively, European influenced community of Las Terrenas, Sublime Samana Hotel & Residences, a 20-room boutique resort located on six miles of private beachfront, is the area's top luxury hotel.

Located just outside of town, guests can take a 10-minute drive to experience some local Dominican culture and fine French cuisine. Between January and March, travelers can enjoy some of the world's best whale watching as Humpback whales arrive to mate.

With a new highway providing easy access from Santo Domingo and a new JetBlue route from New York City directly into Samana's El Catey Airport, travel to the region is only expected to increase in 2014, according to Bruno Gaudio, General Manager of Sublime Samana. Since the JetBlue route's November 2012 debut, flight occupancy has increased by over 30% with 95% of the seats on the bi-weekly flights booked today.

For more info visit [www.sublimesamana.com](http://www.sublimesamana.com) or call 888-896-9416.

### ***Sustainable Tourism on the Secluded Southwestern Coast***

For eco-conscious travelers, there is no region of the Dominican Republic more captivating than the Sierra Barahuco mountain range of the Southwestern coast. While the region is quite a distance from the island's bustling tourist enclaves, it offers an ecological immersion unlike any other with sustainable boutique hotels leading the trend in green luxury.

Casa Bonita Tropical Lodge, a 12-room eco-lodge surrounded by the area's impressive mountain range overlooking the Caribbean Sea, is the ideal retreat for those travelers looking to minimize their carbon footprint and get away from it all. A thrilling canopy tour takes guests flying along cables suspended beneath the jungle's towering trees and culminates at a hydroelectric plant situated on a river that runs through the property and supplies the hotel with 30% of its electricity. A large sustainable garden provides the produce for use in the property's restaurant and enchanting organic river spa.

Area excursions include opportunities to tour nearby national parks within the Jaragua, Bahoruco and Enriquillo Biosphere Reserve, experience an organic coffee plantation, visit the Casa de Tarzán (Tarzan's House), Las Aguilas Bay, Oviedo Lagoon and Lake Enriquillo, or explore caves with ancient tribal art.

For more info visit [www.casabonitadr.com](http://www.casabonitadr.com) or call 800-961-5133.

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