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Building the Foundations of Shared Prosperity



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Through programs such as the Belt and Road Initiative and the Global Development Initiative, China has extended development assistance to more than 160 countries as part of President Xi Jinping's stated ambition to promote shared growth and bridge the development gap in Global South countries. "The international community must pursue the interests of all countries and restore development to the centre of the international agenda," Xi said at the BRICS-Africa outreach conference in 2023.

Two countries emblematic of this strategy are Mauritius and Antigua and Barbuda— island economies who have built transformative partnerships with China. At the heart of these burgeoning diplomatic relationships are key infrastructure projects that have benefited from Chinese funding, expertise and assistance. In Antigua and Barbuda that includes the redevelopment and expansion of its crucial economic engine—St John's Harbour—and a new terminal at V.C. Bird International Airport. While in Mauritius, Chinese-backed projects include the 2.5-kilometre Bagatelle Dam, which will provide drinking water for up to 30% of the population, Bruno Cheong Hospital and Côte d'Or Sports Complex.

While infrastructure development is central to these relationships, ties extend into a variety of other areas. Zhu Liying, China's

ambassador to Mauritius, encapsulated the scope of the bilateral partnership saying, "The two countries have deepened their practical cooperation in agriculture, manufacturing, investment, finance, high and new technology, construction and other fields." The China-Mauritius Free Trade Agreement that came into force in 2021 saw a growth in bilateral trade of 25.8% in year one, with Mauritian exports to China increasing 35.1% in the same period. For Mauritius, the agreement is a key component of its wider strategic positioning as a gateway to Africa for Chinese investment. Trading on its reputation as a stable financial centre with robust political, legal and regulatory frameworks, the island nation hopes to attract more Chinese businesses and entrepreneurs looking to benefit from Mauritius' preferential trade agreements with continental African states.

For Antigua and Barbuda, the ambition and opportunities are much the same. The country's proximity to the United States makes it a prime entry point to both North and South American markets, as does its strategic location close to international shipping lanes. And similarly to its Indian Ocean counterpart, one of Antigua's goals in forging closer ties with China is to propel the development of its tourism sector by attracting greater levels of both Chinese visi-

"The international community must pursue the interests of all countries and restore development to the centre of the international agenda."

Xi Jinping
President,
People's Republic of China

tors and investment. As a key driver of Antigua and Barbuda's economy—tourism accounts for more than half of GDP—drawing more of the estimated 130 million Chinese tourists who travelled overseas in 2024 represents a significant pathway to growth. "Attracting Chinese tourists remains a challenge due to visa and air connectivity issues, but improving access is a priority," notes the country's ambassador to China, Brian Stuart-Young.

With climate change projects another pillar of these partnerships—China is collaborating with Mauritius on coral-regeneration and providing photovoltaic power generation systems to Antigua and Barbuda, to cite just two—the realities of a shared global future are sharply in focus.



Photo: Unsplash

China's Gateway to Africa



Photo: Emma Norden

The commencement of the China-Mauritius Free Trade Agreement in January 2021 characterised the growing diplomatic and economic ties between the two countries in recent years. The deal—comprising the four main components of trade in goods, trade in services, investment and economic cooperation—is China's first with an African country.

"This underscores the privileged relationship between Mauritius and China," says one of the pact's architects, Mauritius Minister of Foreign Affairs

Maneesh Gobin. "The key to Africa's economic transformation lies in adding value through processing," he continues. "Mauritius positions itself as a hub for processing, providing a gateway to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)." The world's largest free trade bloc by area and member states, AfCFTA gives preferential access to goods and services made and processed in Africa—emphasising the economic potential Mauritius offers to Chinese investors seeking an entry point to African markets.

Antigua and Barbuda Cement Chinese Ties



Photo: Shutterstock

When Antigua and Barbuda's Prime Minister Gaston Browne met with Chinese President Xi Jinping in January 2024, he used the occasion to thank the Chinese government for its valuable support. "China's assistance and cooperation have greatly promoted the development of Antigua and Barbuda and helped with its poverty alleviation efforts," Browne said, noting that relations between the two countries are based on mutual trust and respect.

The delegation from Antigua and Barbuda, which also included Ambassa-

dor Brian Stuart-Young, made the state visit to mark the official opening of the nation's embassy in China. Signalling a determination on both sides to expand their partnership, ten memoranda of understanding were signed during the trip, covering climate change, visa exemptions and the notable agreement of the Water Rehabilitation Project, which will see China replace Antigua and Barbuda's outdated water pipelines. "This initiative will greatly enhance Antigua and Barbuda's water security," said Stuart-Young.

INTERVIEW

Maneesh Gobin

MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE



Q: How does Mauritius use international trade to strengthen its economy?

There is a golden thread in the foreign policy of Mauritius: economic diplomacy. It weaves through the various sections and departments of the ministry as well as the entire government. We have always been champions of an open economy, welcoming engagement with the world, and this is reflected in our foreign policy. It is truly a whole-of-government approach.

Q: What makes Mauritius attractive to Chinese investors?

There are two key concepts for Mauritius: stability and consistency. These are essential qualities that investors look for and value before committing to an investment. Importantly, stability is not limited to political stability; it also encompasses

governance, democratic values, and the ability to resolve disputes effectively. A stable framework for dispute resolution—whether through arbitration or the court system—is critical. Mauritius has consistently offered such stability. And in terms of political stability, Mauritius has demonstrated over decades that regime changes do not disrupt the country's stability. Elections come and go, but stability has remained a constant feature.

The second pillar is consistency—specifically, consistency in policy-making. Mauritius has maintained an open-market policy without wavering. Regardless of which government is in power, there has never been any indication of a shift away from this open-access policy. Investors seek destinations free from such risks; Mauritius is committed to ticking all the necessary boxes.

Q: How is Mauritius leveraging its partnership with China under the 2021 free trade agreement?

Our relationship with China is not solely about economic diplomacy, investments, or business; it is deeply rooted in over 200 years of people-to-people

connections, dating back to when the first Chinese settlers arrived in Mauritius. Given this historical and cultural foundation, it was only natural to conclude an FTA with China. A noteworthy recent development is the establishment of the Renminbi Clearing House. There are only three such facilities in Africa—in South Africa, Zambia and Mauritius. Moreover, during the recent Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, the central banks concluded a currency swap agreement for the renminbi. This development is significant in facilitating smooth and seamless business transactions.

Q: What is your message to Chinese investors considering Mauritius?

Mauritius remains a premier investment destination, offering stability and consistency in its policies. No investor plans for the short term; investments are always made with the long term in mind. And long-term investments are impossible without a stable and predictable environment. This is why institutions like the Bank of China have established a presence here. If you are seeking such stability and consistency, look no further—Mauritius is your destination.

INTERVIEW

Brian Stuart-Young

NON-RESIDENT AMBASSADOR TO CHINA



Q: How has Antigua and Barbuda's partnership with China evolved over time?

Since 1983, I have been deeply involved in fostering relations between Antigua and China. Over the years, I have witnessed China's remarkable transformation, driven by the resilience of its people and government. Today, China stands as Antigua and Barbuda's closest partner in economic development, surpassing all other nations in the scope of its contributions. Chinese firms have played a pivotal role in major infrastructure projects, including the airport, hospital, stadium, port and the University of the West Indies. This cooperation highlights our interlinked futures, but we must expand from a government-to-government relationship to a people-to-people connection.

Q: How about trade and exports?

Trade has been a growing focus, especially since the pandemic reshaped our supply chains. During the pandemic, we began importing directly from China, reducing costs and fostering greater trade efficiency. To advance this, we are establishing a trade desk at our embassy to support businesses in sourcing directly from China. However, balancing this trade requires us to export services like tourism.

Antigua and Barbuda's unique geography also offers opportunities in the blue economy. With 40,000 square miles of marine territory, we can develop sustainable fishing, leverage our carbon-absorbing seagrass for carbon credits, and explore other maritime opportunities. China can play a critical role in realising these potentials.

We are also exploring new air routes, such as connecting China to Antigua via the Middle East. Diplomatic efforts, including a potential consulate in Riyadh, aim to make Antigua a hub for Asian, Chinese and Middle Eastern visi-

sitors. Under China's Belt and Road Initiative, we have proposed the establishment of cruise ships homeported in Antigua to extend visitor stays and boost regional tourism.

Q: What role can Chinese investors play in developing the tourism sector?

The goal is to establish Antigua as a hub for tourism and investment, which is crucial for our future. Attracting major Chinese hotel brands is a key part of this strategy. Recently, China's largest travel agency visited Antigua and engaged with our tourism officials, expressing interest in exploring opportunities here. Antigua has the potential to become an all-year-round destination, addressing low-traffic months like September. Additionally, we can capitalise on the growing popularity of cruises and yachting, offering unique experiences to attract visitors. These efforts are expected to drive significant transformation in Antigua's tourism landscape over the next decade.

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EMBASSY OF ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

Office Building 1-52
Sanlitun Diplomatic Compound
No. 1 Gongti North Road
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Tel: +86 10 6532 0148
Fax: +86 10 6532 0149
Email: olga.diaz@ab.gov.ag

STRENGTHENING THE BONDS OF FRIENDSHIP
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Antigua & Barbuda

安提瓜和巴布达

Antigua Tourism Enjoys Record Year



Photo: Unsplash

Antigua and Barbuda are embracing a boom in tourism, bolstered by innovative strategies, sustainability initiatives, and a focus on luxury. As a nation heavily reliant on the sector – tourism accounts for more than 50% of GDP and 46% of national employment – recent achievements hold strong significance. The first half of 2024 broke all previous records for visitor arrivals, seeing a 15% rise year on year to 177,000 and surpassing 2019's previous highest total. Boosted by the hosting of the ICC Cricket World Cup, the sector saw increases across all arrival categories, including air, cruise and yachting. Commenting on the success, Minister of Tourism Charles Fernandez said, "We knew we were going to have a record year."

The recent visa-free travel agreement with China exemplifies the government's determination to be proactive in driving growth. The arrangement officially came into force in May 2024, enabling citizens of both countries to visit for up to 30 days with just a passport. A statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs marking the commencement noted that the deal would be beneficial in "facilitating increased people-to-people exchanges and fostering enhanced cooperation across various sectors." As well as encouraging more Chinese tourists to visit the twin-island nation, the government anticipates the agreement boosting travel arrivals for conferences, events and investment opportunities. "It is expected to bring about several benefits, advantages, and opportunities for citizens of both countries, particularly in terms of

tourism, business, and cultural exchange pursuits," the statement continued. Given China's status as one of the world's largest sources of outbound tourists, the chance to drive growth from a relatively untapped market offers huge potential.

Antigua's hosting of the Caribbean Travel Marketplace in 2025 represents another milestone for the island's tourism industry. Bringing together around 1,500 delegates, the conference is a chance for the sector to highlight the many investment opportunities that exist, particularly in new hotel and accommodation offerings and destination events. One area that will come into focus will be the nation's airlift capacity – a key topic of discussion at the 2024 conference, held in Jamaica. "With all these events that are coming up, regional travel in particular is very important for Antigua and Barbuda," Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority CEO Collin James said. "Once you put the airlift in place, the ability to get people to take that lift is easy." With that goal in mind, developments have been positive: Sunrise Airways has announced a new Eastern Caribbean service, with flights connecting Antigua with Dominica, St Kitts and St Lucia six days a week. On the international front, meanwhile, British Airways is increasing its number of flights for the 2024-25 winter season, while the return of Condor will provide a link to the Central European market. With Fernandez leading a concurrent drive to establish direct flights from China, Antigua's tourism industry looks poised to continue to thrive.



人物专访
Charles Fernandez
 MINISTER OF TOURISM,
 INVESTMENT AND
 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Q: How will visa-free travel agreements with China impact tourism and investment?

Currently, and for some time now, we have been working with a major travel agency in Beijing. Both I and our Chinese ambassador, Brian Stuart-Young, had a meeting with them to discuss Antigua and explore the possibility of charter flights to Antigua. So, we have already initiated that conversation. On the investment side, it is significant. We believe there are many opportunities for investment coming from China. I know that several Chinese companies are looking to invest outside of China, and we see this as an opportunity to attract some of that investment. Additionally, there are many Chinese citizens or people of Chinese descent living in the diaspora, whether in the UK, Canada, or the US, who would have access to this information online. We will also be targeting them.

So, it is not just about direct flights from China, but also about reaching people of Chinese origin in the diaspora.

Q: What does hosting the Caribbean Travel Marketplace in 2025 mean for Antigua?

The fact that Antigua can host this event shows that we are not just a small, insignificant state. About 1,500 stakeholders will be attending, ranging from hotel owners and restaurant owners to those involved in every aspect of the hotel industry, including investment, construction, food and beverage, tours, and airlines. Every facet of the industry will be represented at this event. It is a unique opportunity for us to showcase Antigua to everyone and engage with

"We believe there are many opportunities for investment coming from China. I know that several Chinese companies are looking to invest outside of China, and we see this as an opportunity to attract some of that investment."

various stakeholders to address their questions regarding investment. We can also connect them with our own hoteliers to explore potential solutions and suggestions for improving Antigua's offerings.

On top of all this, having 1,500 people visit during the slower season is already impactful for us. Additionally, the real bonus is the tremendous amount of media coverage it will generate, which is something you cannot measure in dollars and cents. The marketing benefits alone will make it worthwhile.

Q: How is Antigua addressing sustainability through the Green Corridor?

Antigua is generally a relatively dry pla-

ce. In fact, we rely on reverse osmosis to provide most of our water. However, there is a region known as the Green Corridor, which tends to receive most of the rain. This area stays green year-round, and we are working to enhance it. For those who want to see a different side of Antigua, beyond the areas that tend to look dry, they can visit the Green Corridor. Along the way, there are many vendors selling fresh fruits, vegetables, local drinks, and more, offering a unique experience you will not necessarily find outside of this region. In terms of Antigua's efforts regarding climate change, we have been proactive. We were the first to ban single-use plastics, and the government also banned Styrofoam products. Currently, we have two reef restoration projects underway—one in Barbuda and one in Antigua—and we are looking to expand these efforts. We take the issue of climate change very seriously. While our actions may not physically change the world, our goal is to send a message: even though we are small, we are taking the lead wherever possible because we understand that we are on the front lines of climate change.

We often say that "the beach is just the beginning" in Antigua, but we face rising sea levels, ocean warming, and acidification. As a result, we are losing our reefs, which are critical in protecting our beaches. In Barbuda, for example, we have installed structures underwater that promote coral growth, and we are able to monitor this process with cameras. In Antigua, we partnered with the Mill Reef Club on a project where they collect pieces of living coral that have survived the challenges of climate change. These coral pieces are incubated, and as they grow, they are transplanted into dead coral, allowing them to reproduce. This process helps bring back more fish, which benefits our local fishing communities.

Q: What is the significance of new developments in Barbuda's high-end tourism?

On the island of Barbuda, there's a lot of high-end investment happening. The Rosewood property is being developed, and the Nobu property as well. In fact, Barbuda has the only Nobu restaurant in the entire Caribbean. Its tagline is that it is the only Nobu restaurant in the world where you

Industry Voices

THE ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA TOURISM AUTHORITY



"When you see images of our beaches and landscapes, it's a powerful draw."

Colin James
 CEO, The Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority

Q: What sets A&B apart from other Caribbean destinations?

Our natural beauty is a strong pull from a tourism standpoint. When you see images of our beaches and landscapes, it's a powerful draw. One of our unique selling points is our remarkable beaches—365 of them, one for every day of the year—and we have both pink sand in Barbuda and white sand in Antigua.

Q: What is your target market?

We are not a mass-market tourism destination, nor do we want to be. We target the mid-to-upper end of the market, which has more disposable income and is willing to pay higher rates for vacations here. The types of resorts and hotels we have—boutique properties and 4.5- to 5-star accommodations— attract a higher daily rate. This generates more revenue for the government and, by extension, more funds for marketing and attracting visitors.

Antigua is also known as the Mecca of Caribbean yachting. Yachting, as one of our strategic thrusts, provides substantial revenue. The average yacht staying in Antigua for a week spends about \$20,000 on provisions, fuel, chandlery services and more. This type of high-value tourism has boosted arrivals and spurred economic growth.

Q: How will the recent visa exemption arrangement boost Chinese tourism?

The ability to travel without a visa naturally increases the likelihood of travel. China, with its vast population and large, upwardly mobile middle class, represents significant potential for us. Even if just a small fraction—say, half a percent—of Chinese travellers choose Antigua and Barbuda, the numbers would still be substantial.

Educating the Chinese market about the Caribbean, and specifically about Antigua and Barbuda, is key. Partnering with Chinese firms for marketing and promotion is essential because their preferences and habits differ from those of North American or European travellers.

Chinese tourists enjoy tours, exploration and experiential tourism—doing things they can't do in China. That's where our opportunities lie.

Q: What about air connections from China?

Airlift is crucial for us as an island nation, and over the years, we've worked to grow and expand airlift capacity, making it easier for people from nontraditional markets, such as China, to visit. A key attribute is our easy access via direct flights from major cities like London, New York, Miami and Atlanta. Visitors can reach us from most parts of the globe, often within 24 hours.

Q: What about safety?

Safety is of keen importance to us. We have a situation where law enforcement and the community collaborate to ensure a safe environment, not just for our visitors but for the population as well.

It's an intangible but crucial aspect for visitors, knowing they're safe when they come to the destination. One of the things we pride ourselves on, and what contributes to our low rate of crime, is that our visitors can leave their hotels and experience everything the country has to offer. Whether they're going on tours, excursions or exploring our restaurants, it's easy to rent a car, get around and enjoy the island without worrying about crime.

Q: How are you addressing sustainability?

Sustainability is a key issue for us—it's not just a buzzword. We've realised that many travellers make their vacation decisions based on how sustainable a destination is. Our efforts aren't just talk—we actively implement practices to preserve the environment for future generations. We were the first country in the Western Hemisphere to ban single-use plastic bags and Styrofoam. We also have reef restoration projects. A lot of plastic waste generated on an island inevitably ends up in the ocean, so we've taken measures to prevent that. Protecting our coastline, beaches, mangroves and natural habitats is crucial for the sustainability of our tourism industry.

SIBONEY BEACH CLUB



"We aim for a more inclusive and authentic experience."

Roy Bento
 General Manager,
 Siboney Beach Club

Q: What was your vision for Siboney Beach Club and how have you achieved it?

Three entrepreneurs, all with our own businesses, had been discussing starting a collaborative project for some years. After exploring a few options, we found a business opportunity—a property owned by an aging gentleman who preferred selling locally rather than to out-of-state buyers. We acquired it, accommodating his request to remain on the property. Thus, Siboney 2016 Limited was born, carrying on the name and legacy of the original establishment.

Located on Antigua's main beach, close to the airport and other key areas, the property was well-situated but small, at only an acre. Over time, we expanded significantly, adding 18 rooms, a conference facility, a gym, a spa, a second restaurant (Starfish Beach Bar) and essential infrastructure like laundry, sewage systems, generators and staff accommodations.

Q: What sets the hotel apart from others on the islands?

Unlike large, gated resorts, we aim for a more inclusive and authentic experience. Guests can book directly with us for perks like free breakfast, rent cars for exploration and get personalised recommendations for sightseeing and tours. We offer options like catamaran cruises and horseback riding, always ensuring a smooth and enjoyable experience for everyone who visits.

Q: What role does the local community play in your operations?

Integrating with the local community is a core value for us. For example, we host events like reggae nights, jazz evenings and steel band performances that cater to both guests and locals, fostering a wel-

coming atmosphere.

We have built Siboney into a four-star property with a commitment to being 100% locally owned and operated. We prioritise local talent, even for high-level roles. All managers, supervisors and staff are Antiguan—a unique achievement for Antigua and Barbuda's hospitality industry. We remain committed to developing our local talent, and training has been a key focus. We send staff to local and international programs, ensuring continuous improvement.

Q: How are you tackling the environmental impact of tourism?

Environmental issues in Antigua remain a challenge. Antigua still lacks a national recycling program, relying instead on initiatives like the Rotary Club's recycling effort, which handles only plastics and cans. Materials are processed locally but must be exported for final production, raising questions about the environmental benefits. Nonetheless, recycling matters to many guests, so we make an effort. For instance, we have banned plastic straws and bags in line with national policies.

Q: What strategies are you adopting to drive future growth?

Operating an independent hotel on a small island is challenging. Without a major brand like Marriott or Hilton, we must convince international travellers to trust us. To build confidence, we emphasise quality and professionalism. Our website features tools like 360-degree room tours, and we invest heavily in Google advertising. We have also partnered with a company to send automated booking confirmations and communications, assuring guests of our professionalism. We strive to minimise reliance on third-party platforms like Expedia, which charge hefty commissions, and focus on direct bookings. Our reviews speak for themselves, and we continually improve to stay competitive. We also have ambitious plans to expand the property, potentially tripling its size. However, we have decided to focus on maintaining a high-quality four-star experience rather than pursuing the complexities of a five-star rating. Our journey has required risk, investment and resilience, but we are proud of what we have built and remain optimistic about the future.

FALMOUTH HARBOR MARINA



"Our hallmark is service-oriented operations paired with unparalleled facilities."

Bobby Reis
 General Manager,
 Falmouth Harbor Marina

Q: What makes Falmouth Harbour Marina unique in the Caribbean yachting industry?

Our hallmark is service-oriented operations paired with unparalleled facilities. We offer massive concrete docks that accommodate luxury needs, like direct limousine access to yachts, and enable efficient deliveries and maintenance. Our marina also provides utilities—electricity, water and fuel—right at the dock. In fact, we have the fastest fuel pumps in the Caribbean, capable of delivering 150 imperial gallons per minute. Beyond that, we provide complimentary high-speed Wi-Fi, which has become a top priority for yacht crews.

Q: How do you keep up with the evolving needs of superyachts?

We improve and adapt every year. As yachts grow larger and their technology becomes more advanced, we stay ahead by upgrading our services. For example, many yachts now travel with containers housing spare parts or even machine shops, and we've created a container park to accommodate these. Maintenance, security and staff training are also top priorities.

Q: How do you maintain a high level of repeat business?

We invest significantly in development and maintenance each season. Repeat clients never see things run down—we ensure everything is top-notch. Additionally, our staff is trained to prioritise exceptional customer service, making every experience safe, enjoyable and memorable. Even unusual requests, like sourcing kangaroo meat, are met with a can-do attitude.

Q: Given Antigua's recent visa exemption agreement with China, do you see potential in the Chinese yachting market?

While we currently have no experien-

ce with the Chinese yachting market, it's an area that requires exploration. Government and private sector collaboration will be essential to open opportunities, possibly through mutual visits between yachting communities in Antigua and China. Developing a summer market, when European yachts aren't active, could be key to attracting this market.

Q: How does the marina balance its growth with environmental responsibility?

Environmental compliance is mandatory for our expansions. For instance, the addition of our 535-foot dock—the longest in the Caribbean—required extensive environmental and fisheries studies. We ensure safe fuel handling, maintain equipment to prevent spills and manage waste responsibly, including certifications for yachts on proper disposal. However, Antigua's recycling infrastructure remains limited.

Q: How does your diplomatic experience influence your management?

My diplomatic background helps in handling immigration and logistical issues for diverse yacht crews. From visa assistance to notarising documents for families, my experience enables me to offer practical solutions. This enhances the marina's reputation for excellent customer service and reflects positively on Antigua as a destination.

Q: What role does your staff play in the marina's success?

Our long-tenured staff is our secret weapon. They're highly trained and go above and beyond to ensure smooth operations. During events like the Antigua and Barbuda Sports Fishing Tournament, their dedication—from dawn till late night—earns high praise. Their professionalism leaves a lasting impression on our clients.

Q: How do you contribute to Antigua's local charm and culture?

We host events and participate in community initiatives, like Antigua's Christmas lighting competition, where we've placed among the top entries. Simple gestures, like inviting yacht crews to decorate a Christmas tree, make a big difference. Our goal is to create a welcoming environment that feels like home.