



From left: St. Maarten's marketing representative for Brazil Ricardo Roman, Silviene Johns of Office du Tourisme and Interim Director of St. Maarten Tourism Bureau Edward Dest.

## Dest says St. Maarten being outspent in South America

**BRAZIL**—The joint delegation of St. Maarten, St. Martin and Anguilla that recently participated in the Brazilian Travel Agencies Association ABAV, Travel Trade Fair and Tourism Fair of the Americas, came up against a harsh reality in trying to generate business for these destinations: others are outspending the three destinations by far.

The fact that Caribbean destinations outspend St. Maarten in terms of marketing and promotion did not just dawn on Interim Director of the St. Maarten Tourism Bureau Edward Dest. However, what did strike Dest as astounding in Brazil is how much resources destinations like Barbados are committing to the market.

"We went to push business, but it became clear that while other destinations are pumping in lots of money, our budgets remain minimal," Dest said, adding that though some of these destinations welcome fewer passengers than St.

Maarten annually, they are still committing more money to the South American market.

He said "everybody is on a tight budget," referring to St. Maarten, St. Martin and Anguilla yet trying to keep up to pace with the competition. The three destinations are trying to increase the marketing initiatives for Copa Airlines, which is vital for South American connections, but this too is being hampered by minimal funding.

Dest added that there is interest from a major South American tour operator in executing a charter flight during the high season, though this depends, again, on marketing funding being available. Any hopes of seeing GOL Airlines resume charter services to the destinations can also be classified as doubtful at present.

Most of the South American carriers are seeking significant injections of cash and guaranteed seats from Caribbean destinations to serve those destinations. St.

Maarten's policy towards airlift has never been one of paying airlines to service the destination, rather providing marketing support. The problem is funding for the marketing support is not there.

Nonetheless, Dest also explained that St. Maarten has to come up with incentives to attract new airlifts and all beneficiary destinations, St. Martin, Anguilla, Saba and Statia, should be involved. He said an air service development agreement with the SXM Airport is being worked on.

Dest declined to delve in any details on the trip and other observations until he has presented his report to the Minister of Tourism.

More than 50 countries, 454 buyers, 1,500 exhibitors, 5,500 training events, 28,000 travel industry visitors and 50,000 consumer visitors were at ABAV 2013.

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