

Caribbean travel disrupted by U.S. military action in Venezuela

The U.S. military action in Venezuela on January 3 triggered airspace restrictions and widespread flight cancellations across the Caribbean during a peak holiday travel weekend. While most airports remained open, rerouting and FAA restrictions disrupted flights to Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Aruba, British Virgin Islands, Bonaire, Barbados, Curaçao, Martinique, Grenada, Dominica, Guadeloupe, Trinidad and Tobago, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Maarten.

Several key airports were not affected, including those in The

Bahamas, the Cayman Islands, Jamaica, Turks and Caicos, Belize and Cancun.

Nevertheless, the U.S. action left thousands of travelers stranded during the winter season in the Caribbean, and also impacted cruise travel in the region, especially at those Caribbean cruise itineraries which depart and conclude from local ports like San Juan or Bridgetown, Barbados.

The FAA allowed the total flight prohibitions for Venezuelan airspace and the Caribbean corridor to expire this past Sunday. They were replaced by advisory notices for the same areas, which remain in effect until Feb. 2 but don't prohibit flying, and airlines have resumed

flights in and out of the region.

Many of the affected airlines have added extra seats to handle the disruption. An announcement from Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport said that Delta had added more than 2,600 seats through extra flights for the Caribbean.

American Airlines also announced it has added a total of nearly 7,000 seats with 43 extra flights in an effort to bring more people back home.

According to media reports, travelers are voicing concerns regarding travel to the Caribbean and Latin America and travel agents are reporting cancellations and itinerary changes.

CTO confirms that Caribbean is “open for business”

The Caribbean Tourism Organization says it has been closely monitoring recent geopolitical developments in Venezuela and the temporary airspace disruptions that affected some travelers over the past weekend.

In its January 7th statement, the CTO reports that cruise and air travel across the Caribbean are fully operational, and advance bookings continue to be strong. CTO encourages travelers to proceed with their plans and assures partners and visitors that the Caribbean remains open for business and ready to welcome travelers.

“We are grateful to our airline partners for adding capacity to ensure travelers were able to continue with their plans, and to the accommodations sector for its flexibility in supporting affected guests, while safeguarding the region’s vital economic engine,” said the organization.

The CTO also emphasized that the Caribbean has extensive experience managing external disruptions and has consistently demonstrated the resilience of its tourism industry.

ASUTIL 25th Conference – FLOW, Punta Cana 2026

Exclusive early-access registration for the 2026 ASUTIL Conference is now available to attendees who participated in last year’s event.

ASUTIL says that this private registration window exclusively for 2025 participants will remain open for a limited period before general registration is released.

The conference will take place June 2-5 at the **Paradus Palma Real / Meliá Punta Cana**, an **ALL-INCLUSIVE** resort where all conference activities will be hosted within a single venue.

The 25th edition takes place in **Punta Cana**, a market that reflects the current momentum of duty free and travel retail—passenger growth, new investments, and an increasingly demanding shopper.

For information, go to <https://asutil.org/flow/>

DFS to close all Hawaii stores after 63 years

Following a tenure of 63 years in business, DFS has announced that it is closing its three stores in Hawaii this year.

The company has confirmed to travel retail media that it will close its Waikiki downtown store on January 28 and its Honolulu International Airport store on March 31. It will also be closing its store at Kahului Airport, where the lease will end on August 31.

In its statement, DFS said: “After 63 remarkable years in Hawaii, DFS has made the difficult decision to exit the market.

“Hawaii has played a significant role in DFS’ history since we opened our Honolulu airport store in 1962 – the first duty free shop in the US, establishing DFS as a leader in travel retail.

“Our downtown store in the heart of Waikiki has also been our home in Hawaii for decades, and we extend our best wishes for the next evolution of growth realized in Waikiki in the coming years.”

“We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our employees in Hawaii, many of whom have long tenures with DFS and have returned after DFS Waikiki’s post-Covid reopening. Their dedication has underpinned our success, and we are committed to supporting them through this transition.”

“We also thank our partners and customers for their trust and support over the decades. The relationships we have built are integral to DFS’ legacy in Hawaii.

“DFS is committed to providing exceptional service to our customers in Hawaii until our last day of operations.”



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US-CANADA CROSS-BORDER TRAFFIC

OAG: Canada continues to reduce airline capacity to the U.S.

The traditional “snowbird” winter season of travel between the United States and Canada continues to be impacted negatively by Canadian sentiment to actions by the current U.S. administration, with airlines adjusting capacity downwards, reports OAG.

Canadian airlines have reduced USA-bound capacity by nearly 10% for Q1 2026, representing 450,000 seats. Capacity shifts away from traditional U.S. sun destinations reflect a change in leisure travel demand, says OAG.

Canadian airlines are increasing capacity to Costa Rica and Mexico, however.

Canada’s international capacity for Q1 2026 is set to be 1% less than in 2025, with 75 international country markets served, one more than in 2025. New services to Israel and Nicaragua are planned.

The ten largest international markets departing from Canada represent 8 million seats, comprising 75% of total international capacity.

The **United States** represents 39% of this capacity. However, scheduled airline capacity to the United States has declined by nearly 10% year-over-year, resulting in a 4% reduction in its share of Canada’s overall international capacity.

The increased capacity to Costa Rica (+14%) and Mexico (+5%) likely reflects a shift in leisure travel demand from traditional U.S. sun destinations, says OAG.

In addition, Japan is growing in appeal, and the destination saw a 13% rise in capacity. WestJet doubled its capacity to Japan and ZIPAIR added 6,000 additional seats to their schedules.

WestJet has also added 40% more capacity to Mexico year-on-year, adding five new seasonal destinations to their network. Cancun now accounts for half of its Mexican services.

The airline also expanded further into the Dominican Republic, where, aside from existing service to Punta Cana and Puerto Plata, new flights to Samana and La Romana have been launched.

Air Canada made a conscious strategic choice to develop more connecting traffic from Mexico to Europe. As a result, it increased capacity to Cancun by 20%, launched new services to Monterrey, San Jose del Cabo, and two other leisure destinations and has seen a 30% increase in traffic from Mexico to Europe. While this does not fully offset the loss of US “snowbird” revenue, additional capacity to the Dominican Republic and Italy has also helped to close part of the gap.

Half a million lost airline seats to the U.S.

The 10% reduction in U.S.-bound capacity year-on-year equates to almost 450,000 fewer seats in Q1 2026, or nearly 5,000 fewer seats each day. Notably, over 95% of these cuts have come from Canadian airlines: WestJet has reduced its capacity by 19%, Air Canada is down by 7%, and Flair Airlines has made the most significant change with a 58% decrease in its U.S.-bound capacity.

Markets with significant leisure travel have been most affected by capacity cuts:

Las Vegas is seeing a reduction of approx. 82,000 seats (900 per day); and Orlando will see a decrease of nearly 79,000 seats from Canada. Major hub airports like Newark, Atlanta, and Los Angeles are also among the top ten in terms of capacity losses.

Destinations such as Las Vegas, Orlando, Tampa, and Fort Myers will face substantial economic challenges due to this drop in Canadian demand, and finding alternative sources of capacity to offset these losses will be challenging in the short term, says OAG.

Tourism coalition calls for policy changes as U.S.-Canada border travel declines

A coalition of major **North American** tourism associations is urging government leaders to reconsider policies affecting cross-border travel between the **United States** and **Canada** as industry data shows significant declines in visitor numbers and mounting concerns about long-term damage to the bilateral tourism relationship.

The **Beyond Borders Tourism Coalition** reports that Canadian trips to the U.S. by car dropped nearly 20% in 2025, with some states reporting campground reservations from Canadians down more than 70%.

International group bookings have declined 30%, according to coalition figures.

Canadians previously made more than 20 million trips annually to the United States.

In regions like **Montana** and **New Hampshire**, businesses that historically relied on Canadians for up to 80% of international visitors are reporting reduced flight capacity and empty accommodations.

U.S. ski resorts are experiencing decreased Canadian bookings, while border towns that measured success in sold-out weekends are now offering deeply discounted shoulder season rates.

The coalition points to several factors contributing to the downturn, including a new \$100 per-person surcharge for international visitors at select U.S. national parks, layered on top of existing entrance fees.

International visitors will also pay more than triple the previous rate for annual passes, while U.S. residents maintain existing pricing.

Tour operators who sold 2026 trips 12 to 18 months in advance are now absorbing these unexpected costs or attempting to pass them to clients mid-contract.

Group travel via motorcoach generated nearly \$70 billion in direct traveler spending and more than 890,000 U.S. jobs in 2024, according to industry data.

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Top 10 International Markets By Capacity From Canada

By Seat Capacity

Arriving Country	Q1 2025	Q1 2026	% Change
USA	4,632,244	4,183,169	-9.7%
Mexico	1,457,249	1,532,102	5.1%
Dominican Republic	572,665	559,781	-2.2%
United Kingdom	348,139	360,978	3.7%
France	330,474	347,196	5.1%
Cuba	309,614	313,191	1.2%
Germany	232,518	221,270	-4.8%
Japan	178,547	202,498	13.4%
Hong Kong (sar) China	158,251	168,011	6.2%
Costa Rica	146,071	167,271	14.5%

Carnival Corp.'s Josh Weinstein named Chair of CLIA's Global Executive Comm.

Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) has named Josh Weinstein, CEO of Carnival Corporation & plc, as Chair of CLIA's Global Executive Committee (GEC) for a two-year term from 2026 through 2027. Weinstein succeeds Jason Liberty, Chairman and CEO of Royal Caribbean Group, who served as Chair during a period of continued industry recovery and growth.



Josh Weinstein

According to the CLIA announcement, Weinstein brings decades of leadership experience in the global cruise sector and will work closely with the GEC to advance the industry's shared priorities, including safe and reliable operations, responsible growth, and constructive engagement with governments, ports, destinations, and other stakeholders worldwide.

As Chair, Weinstein will lead the direction that the GEC provides CLIA, including helping to shape the association's strategies and ongoing efforts to advance policies that enable responsible operations, foster innovation, strengthen stakeholder trust, and support initiatives that allow the cruise sector to continue delivering economic and social benefits in key markets worldwide.

SEA names Wendy Reiter as new managing director

Wendy Reiter has been selected as the new Managing Director of Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (SEA), effective January 7.

A veteran leader at SEA and longtime partner to key federal aviation agencies, Reiter currently leads Security, Fire, and Emergency Preparedness for SEA. Over the last 35 years she has held key management roles with airports and airlines in Seattle and in the Midwest.



"Wendy Reiter brings an exceptional combination of leadership, industry knowledge, and genuine commitment to the people who work at, live near, and rely upon SEA," said **Port of Seattle Executive Director Steve Metruck**.

"Reiter will guide a leadership team tasked with completing our current Upgrade SEA program, in time for the FIFA World Cup. She will also be responsible for launching a new phase of development on our airport master plan and continuing to pursue excellence in our service and our facilities to ensure a safe and accessible travel experience for all."

Reiter steps into the role as SEA turns its efforts toward a vision for the future. SEA is the 11th busiest airport in North America by passenger volume and among its best connected in terms of service. In its 2026 budget, the Commission authorized the Aviation Division 2026–2030 capital plan at \$3.75 billion, with \$847 million in spending expected in 2026.

René Machon joins Blue Caterpillar as Commercial Director Europe

International boutique spirits distribution company Blue Caterpillar has announced the appointment of **René Machon** as **Commercial Director Europe** as of January 1, 2026. Based in Hamburg, Germany, Machon will lead Blue Caterpillar's European expansion and development efforts.

René Machon brings more than 20 years of international experience in the spirits industry, with a strong focus on global travel retail, market entry, and brand scaling across Europe.

"We are pleased to welcome René as Commercial Director Europe," said Christoph Henkel and Michael Gebrael, Co-Founders of Blue Caterpillar. "René combines deep commercial expertise with an exceptional network across

European travel retail and domestic markets. His hands-on entrepreneurial approach and strong alignment with our values make him a natural fit for Blue Caterpillar as we continue to expand our platform internationally. With René based in Hamburg, we now have an even stronger platform to build our European presence."

Machon will work closely with brand partners, retailers, and distribution networks across key



European travel retail and domestic markets to establish a strong footprint for Blue Caterpillar.

"Blue Caterpillar offers a unique platform for brands looking to scale internationally," said René Machon.

"I'm excited to work closely with founders and brand owners who are looking for hands-on commercial support and a clear pathway into European travel retail and key domestic markets."

Since its founding in 2021, Blue Caterpillar has grown rapidly across the Americas, Caribbean, South America, and the global cruise channel. Europe now represents the company's next strategic growth frontier, with a clear ambition to build a meaningful, long-term European enterprise — without losing its entrepreneurial DNA, say the founders.

Tourism coalition calls for policy changes as U.S.-Canada border travel declines

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The coalition notes that tariffs and cross-border policy uncertainty have created challenges for an industry built on long lead times and contractual commitments.

The situation affects travel in both directions.

While Canadian travel to the U.S. has declined sharply, U.S. travelers are also questioning their welcome in Canada, with Canadian tourism marketers working to reassure American visitors.

The coalition also raised concerns about potential social media screening at border crossings, warning that the practice could create a "chilling effect" on tourism as travelers choose destinations where their social media activity is not part of the customs experience.

The Beyond Borders Tourism Coalition brings together United States Tour Operators Association, Canadian Association of Tour Operators, American Bus Association, United Motorcoach Association, Adventure Travel Trade Association, National Tour Association, International Inbound Travel Association, Student & Youth Travel Association, Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada, American Indigenous Tourism Association, Destination Original Indigenous Tourism and Destinations International.

The organizations collectively represent thousands of businesses and hundreds of thousands of workers throughout North America.

The coalition is asking leaders in Washington, Ottawa and border states and provinces to treat the U.S.-Canada tourism relationship as a valuable economic asset rather than a source of policy uncertainty.



TFWA reveals “New Era of Innovation” theme of reimagined Asia Pacific Exhibition & Conference for 2026

TFWA says that it is set to redefine the future of travel retail with the launch of a completely reimagined **TFWA Asia Pacific Exhibition & Conference 2026**, taking place in Singapore from May 10-14. Designed to inspire, connect, and elevate the industry, the new edition introduces concepts that expand both the business and creative potential of brands and operators.

The transformation involves two major concepts: the **World of Innovation** and **Taste of the World**, dynamic new platforms designed to reflect the evolving expectations of travelers and the rapid growth of the Asia Pacific market.

“TFWA’s Singapore edition continues the spirit of modernity introduced in Cannes. With a refreshed format and new dedicated spaces, the TFWA Asia Pacific Exhibition & Conference 2026 in Singapore is designed to support meaningful conversations, creativity and collaboration,” noted TFW President Sarah Branquinho.

“We are delighted that leading global brands across all categories, including Estée Lauder, Brown-Forman, Mondelez, JT International, Lacoste, Travel Blue and Thélios have already reconfirmed their participation, reflecting strong support for this ongoing evolution. We look forward to welcoming brands and partners to Singapore for an engaging and inspiring Asia Pacific edition,” she continued.

A new exhibition experience for a new Travel Retail landscape

The 2026 edition features an entirely redesigned layout with **category-focused halls**, offering exhibitors enhanced visibility and visitors a more intuitive experience.

Each “World” is marked by a central icon acting as a natural meeting hub, with Level 1 dedicated to Perfumes & Cosmetics and Fashion, while Basement 2 houses Wines & Spirits, Confectionery, Tobacco, and the new major initiatives.

For the first time, brands will also benefit from **high-impact LED screens** integrated into these central hubs, delivering powerful, high-visibility communication opportunities that drive traffic and reinforce brand messaging.

World of Innovation

The World of Innovation offers a forward-looking showcase of cutting-edge technologies, new retail concepts, and breakthrough products. This dedicated space features a large **amphitheatre for talks, events, workshops, start-up pitches**, and exclusive product reveals, positioning it as a magnet for buyers seeking fresh insights and new commercial opportunities, presented by pioneering brands.

Taste of the World

Recognizing the growing importance of F&B in the traveler journey, now accounting for 20% of total airport dwell time and up to 50% of non-aeronautical airport revenues, TFWA introduces Taste of the World, a dynamic gastronomy hub celebrating global culinary culture within travel retail.

Designed as a compact, high-energy, multi-purpose space, Taste of the World will bring together curated brand presence, live demonstrations and immersive experiences, anchored by a central experience hub and beverage-led formats. The full integration of the TFWA Asian Pacific Lounge within the space will further enhance footfall, engagement and premium hospitality.

Showcasing the growing convergence between gourmet experiences and travel retail, particularly appealing to Gen Z and Millennial audiences, who demonstrate strong engagement with food-led brand storytelling, Taste of the World offers a flexible and accessible platform for premium and international F&B brands to connect with industry stakeholders through content-driven participation and experiential sponsorship opportunities.

Networking Highlights include: Sunday, May 10 - Welcome cocktail at 7.30pm at the Flower Dome, Gardens by the Bay; TFWA Asia Pacific Lounge evenings at *Taste of the World*, from 6pm to 8pm, Monday, May 11 and Tuesday, May 12: featuring live show cooking. Wednesday, May 13 - Closing event at 7.30pm at the Alkaff Mansion

More details, including speaker announcements and program highlights, will be revealed soon. Visitor registration will open in mid-February 2026.



Jim Beam shuts down production at Kentucky distillery for 2026

Jim Beam has announced that it is halting production at one of its distilleries in Kentucky for at least a year. Bourbon makers across the country have been reacting to declining drinking and tariffs.

Monthly data released by the Treasury Department showed that through August, whiskey distillers had produced under 142 million proof gallons, 55 million less than the same period in 2024.

Jim Beam says the decision to pause bourbon making at the Clermont, Kentucky location will give the company time to invest in improvements at the distillery.

In a statement, the company said:

“We are always assessing production levels to best meet consumer demand and recently met with our team to discuss our volumes for 2026. We’ve shared with our teams that while we will continue to distill at our Fred B. Noe craft distillery and at our larger Booker Noe distillery in Boston, we plan to pause distillation at our Clermont distillery on the James B. Beam campus for 2026 while we take the opportunity to invest in site enhancements.

“Our visitor center at the James B. Beam campus remains open so visitors can have the full James B. Beam experience and join us for a meal at The Kitchen Table.

“Our bottling and warehousing are still operating at Clermont. We continue to assess how best to utilize our workforce during this transition, and conversations with the union are ongoing.”

The company says it continues to invest heavily behind Jim Beam and shifting production from our older and smaller Clermont distillery, which has been operating since the end of Prohibition, to its largest and most modern, efficient and sustainable distillery at Booker Noe allows it to invest in quality and sustainability improvements at Clermont during this pause.

Jim Beam is not alone in shutting down production. A number of smaller distilleries have filed for bankruptcy, while in September Diageo announced it was halting production at Balcones and George Dickel.

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LAX Tom Bradley International Terminal to modernize in time for 2028 Olympic Games

Los Angeles World Airports (LAWA) has announced plans and unveiled renderings for the modernization of the Tom Bradley International Terminal at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX). The project received approval from the Board of Airport Commissioners at the Dec. 18 meeting, allowing construction to begin in January 2026, and be completed in time to welcome guests to Los Angeles for the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The planned improvements will modernize the departures and arrivals levels of the terminal, improving passenger flow and the overall guest experience, in addition to infusing it with elements that put the “LA” in LAX.

The approach for the refresh is designed to channel Los Angeles’ retro beach culture and Hollywood cinema, says LAWA.

This project will be led by Clark Construction as part of the \$5 billion Multiple Award Task Order Contract for Construction Services

approved by the Los Angeles City Council in February.

This MATOC had the highest local hire requirement at 30% and xBE requirements ever included in a LAWA contract — including 30% to small businesses, 20% to Local businesses, 15% to Local Small businesses, and 3% to Disabled Veteran businesses.

With construction anticipated to commence this month, plans are in place to mitigate disruptions to international travel, especially during the 2026 World Cup next summer.

LAWA says that the new construction builds on the authority’s vision for delivering the excellent airport Los Angeles deserves over the next three years, including: architecture and design focused LA-themed terminals that pay homage to culture, history, seasons, sports and more; shopping and dining offerings that reflect the flavors, styles and tastes across Los Angeles; and branding that distinguishes LAX as a modern, world-class destination reflecting the vibrancy of the region.



Architectural rendering of Tom Bradley International Terminal Arrivals Level

Avolta wins 10-year contracts for Hudson and HMSHost at Palm Beach International

Avolta’s Hudson division has been awarded a 10-year contract to develop four specialty retail and travel convenience stores at Palm Beach International Airport (PBI), as the airport undergoes a significant expansion and modernization program.

Beginning in 2026, Hudson will begin to unveil its new retail program, which will bring a hyper-local, artfully curated shopping experience to PBI, covering more than 3,200 sq-foot of concessions space.

The new concepts include:

Bit & Bridle, a curated specialty coffee and food market that will give a nod to Palm Beach County’s equestrian heritage, with a menu inspired by local farms.

Palm Beach Illustrated – named for the magazine that has covered the region for nearly 75 years, this unique shop will blend travel essentials and convenience with bespoke goods that prominently feature local artisans as well as a diverse range of books by local literary talent, including Palm Beach resident and bestselling author **James Patterson**.

TOM FORD, M·A·C, and Jo Malone London – a specialty retail boutique that will pay homage to Palm Beach’s Lauder family by bringing together three of Estée Lauder’s most iconic brands.

The Palms Market – A hyper-local shopping experience that will offer travelers last-minute travel essentials alongside a Grab & Go snacks, gourmet treats, and locally sourced products.

The new shopping experience at PBI will include Avolta’s digital engagement, with in-store technology such as self-checkout, as well as access to the Club Avolta loyalty program.

In 2024, PBI welcomed more than 8.5 million passengers and travelers voted PBI the 5th Best Airport in the U.S. in *Condé Nast’s* 2024 Readers’ Choice Awards.

Travel + Leisure also named PBI the 3rd Best U.S. Airport in 2024 and the airport was named 5th Best Medium-Size Airport in the 2025 J.D. Power North America Airport Satisfaction Study.

Hudson will operate the new locations with three local partners: Montes & Pitkonen LLC (Jose Montes), Chandler Campbelle & Daschle (Darrell Searcy), and Pioneer Concessions, LLC (Kristina Korge).

In addition to the four Hudson stores, Avolta’s HMSHost will open multiple dining venues in Concourse B and the Main Terminal. From Summer 2026, HMSHost will introduce a lineup of full-service, fast casual, and quick-serve concepts.

PortMiami sets new passenger record

PortMiami set another passenger record for its Fiscal Year 2025, while also achieving significant cargo performance.

PortMiami welcomed a record 8,564,225 cruise passengers in FY 2025, up from 8,233,056 the previous fiscal year, a 4.02% increase the highest annual passenger count in the seaport’s history.

The port also recorded a significant cargo performance, reporting 2.35% growth and marking 11 consecutive years exceeding one million TEUs.

PortMiami’s Fiscal Year 2025 started October 1, 2024 and ended September 30, 2025.

The upcoming 2025-2026 cruise season is filled with new cruise ships and projects. Among the new lineup of ships departing from

PortMiami are Cunard’s *Queen Elizabeth* and *Virgin Voyages’ Brilliant Lady*, October 2025; Holland America’s *Zuiderdam*, Oceania Cruises’ *Allura*, November 2025; MSC Cruises’ *Grandiosa*, December 2025; *Windstar Cruises’ Star Seeker*, January 2026; Holland America’s *Eurodam*, February 2026; Norwegian Cruise Line’s *Norwegian Luna*, March 2026; and Silversea Cruises’ *Silver Nova*, May 2026.

“PortMiami’s dual achievements highlight its dynamic role as both a cruise and cargo powerhouse, contributing billions to the local economy while advancing a future-ready vision of innovation, resiliency, and global connectivity,” said Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava.