

Spanish Hotel Firms Will Build Jamaica Worker Housing says Tourism Minister

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Spanish hotel companies operating in Jamaica will build 2,000 residential units for local hotel workers and their immediate families said Edmund Bartlett, the country's minister of tourism.

In a meeting held at last week's FITUR tourism conference in Madrid, Bartlett said the growth of Jamaica-based resort properties operated by Grand Palladium Resorts, RIU Hotels & Resorts, Secrets Resorts & Spas, Iberostar Group, The Excellence Collection, H10 Hotels, Melia Hotels International and Bahia Principe Hotels & Resorts over the last several years have created a "serious and worsening shortage of appropriate" employee housing.

"Through Spanish hoteliers and other hotel investors combined, we are now seeing firm commitments for the housing for hotel workers," he said in a January 21 Jamaica Observer interview.

Bartlett said the Spanish operators have "recognized" the need for "appropriate" worker housing that is "comfortable" and within proximity of employees' jobs.

Hoteliers acknowledge their resorts cannot operate "at an optimal level" without new worker housing options as Jamaica's visitor arrivals grow, Bartlett said.

He said labor, worker housing, agriculture and infrastructure will be "primary focus areas" to ensure "sustainable growth in Jamaica's tourism sector in coming years."

Bartlett and Spanish hotel owners also discussed "labor, global and local supply chain challenges, agriculture and road infrastructure issues," according to the Observer report.

He said Jamaica has launched several road construction initiatives, including a \$274.5 million Montego Bay Perimeter Road Project that will build 15 miles of roadway and an \$800-million agreement with the International Finance Corporation to construct a new four-lane highway from Rose Hall in Montego Bay, St James, to Mammee Bay, St Ann.

The highway would bypass congestion-prone spots in the Priory, Runaway Bay and Discovery Bay districts of St Ann parish, Bartlett said.

Jamaica will also build bypass roads around Hopewell and Lucea in Hanover parish; Bartlett said 4,000 new hotel rooms are planned for Hanover in the coming years.

