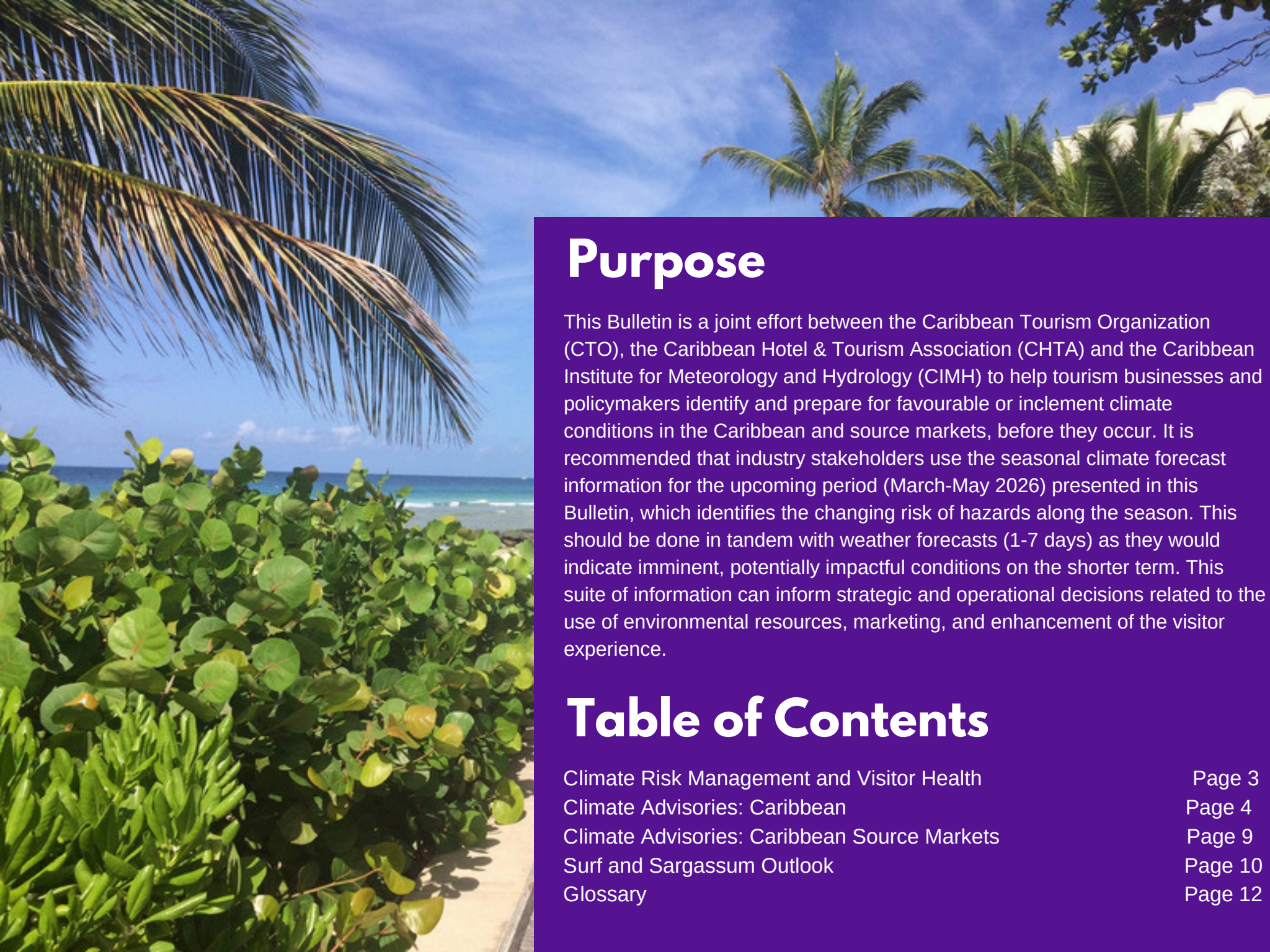
A Joint Bulletin of the CTO, the CHTA and the CIMH

CARIBBEAN TOURISM CLIMATIC BULLETIN

for Tourism Businesses and Policymakers

March–May 2026 I Vol 10 I Issue 1



Purpose

This Bulletin is a joint effort between the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO), the Caribbean Hotel & Tourism Association (CHTA) and the Caribbean Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology (CIMH) to help tourism businesses and policymakers identify and prepare for favourable or inclement climate conditions in the Caribbean and source markets, before they occur. It is recommended that industry stakeholders use the seasonal climate forecast information for the upcoming period (March-May 2026) presented in this Bulletin, which identifies the changing risk of hazards along the season. This should be done in tandem with weather forecasts (1-7 days) as they would indicate imminent, potentially impactful conditions on the shorter term. This suite of information can inform strategic and operational decisions related to the use of environmental resources, marketing, and enhancement of the visitor experience.

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CLIMATE RISK MANAGEMENT & VISITOR HEALTH

Climate risk management remains a critical factor in ensuring tourism sector resilience and managing the overall visitor experience. Tourism interests across the region should be prepared to deal with weather and climate emergencies in addition to ongoing concerns related to managing respiratory issues and dengue, as well as other possible threats as they arise.

The CTO, CHTA, and CIMH will continue to closely monitor the situation.

Climate Advisories: Caribbean

March through May marks: 1) the transition between the dry season (up till April) and the start of the wet season (in May) in the Bahamas, Belize, the Greater Antilles and the Guianas; 2) the second half of the dry season in the Lesser Antilles; and 3) the long dry season in the ABC Islands. What should you do?

Climatically, March to May forms the late Dry Season in Belize and the Caribbean Islands.

This season is typically characterised by relatively few **wet days** and a small number of **wet spells**, but many **dry days** and quite a few **dry spells**. The resulting drier surface and foliage increase **wildfire potential** and the concentration of **local dust**. At the same time, incursions of Saharan dust into the Caribbean typically increase in frequency.

In The Bahamas, the Greater Antilles, and the Guianas, the **Wet Season** usually tends to start in May, with a return of heavy rainfall. Largely fueled by drier soils, the onset of the Caribbean **Heat Season** – is characterised by the occurrence of excessive heat, at times culminating in **heatwaves**. The Heat Season typically starts in April or May. Nonetheless, in recent years, the onset has occurred as early as March (in Belize, Trinidad and inland portions of the Guianas) or April (elsewhere).

Climate Advisories: Caribbean

In addition, though the 2026 Atlantic **Hurricane Season** officially starts on 1 June, **severe weather** events, including storms and hurricanes have occurred and are increasingly common before that date. Severe weather events can come with a range of hazards, including high winds, landslides, long-term flooding, flash floods, coastal flooding, among others. Despite the fact that rain showers occur less often during the late Dry Season than in other seasons, their intensity does tend to sharply increase towards May. When **excessive rainfall** events occur, they can trigger floods and cascading impacts – such as land slippage, rock fall, soil erosion, river damming, mud flows – in flash flood-prone areas.

Flash flood potential is the chance of occurrence of excessive rainfall events in a period of interest. During the March to May period, flash flood potential is *extremely high* (i.e., at least 80% chance of occurring) in the Guianas, *high* (i.e., at least 50% chance of occurring) to *extremely high* in The Bahamas, Belize, the Greater Antilles and mountainous areas of the Lesser Antilles. In most other areas of the Lesser Antilles, this potential is *moderate* (i.e., 20% to 50% chance of occurring) to *high*, while the potential is *slight* (i.e., less than 20% chance of occurring) in the ABC Islands. Zooming in on March – the peak of the Dry Season –, *high* to *extremely high* flash flood potential is restricted to French Guiana, while being *moderate* to *high* in The Bahamas, southern Belize, Greater Antilles, Guyana, high elevations in the Lesser Antilles and only **marginal** to *slight* potential in most other areas.

Climate Advisories: Caribbean Cont'd

Tourism operators are advised to **constantly monitor weather advisories** issued by National Meteorological Services and other information provided by the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (http://cdema.org/) and the US National Hurricane Center (https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/), and abide by any official advisories issued by the National Meteorological Service in their country. At all times, tourism operators should maintain a state of readiness, including communication plans and response protocols to deal with sudden eventualities.

This year, **ocean temperatures in and around the Caribbean** are forecast to remain warmer than average.

Due to these unusually warm waters in the Tropical North Atlantic Ocean, **air temperatures** and **humidity** are likely to be higher than normal, resulting in the *likely* return of episodes of significant heat stress by April or May. In addition, cooler than average temperatures in the tropical Pacific Ocean, signifying weak La Niña conditions are *very likely* to subside and make way for near average temperatures - i.e., ENSO neutral conditions. The warm Caribbean waters can drive an early and *possibly* rapid transition into the wet season – this year particularly in the Lesser Antilles – and an early onset of an active Atlantic Hurricane Season.

Climate Advisories: Caribbean Cont'd

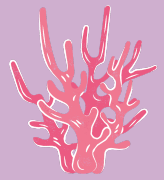
Though there is considerable uncertainty on how much rain will fall over the entire three-month period, large rainfall deficits have occurred in many places in the Eastern and Southern Caribbean during the 2025 Wet Season. Hence, **long-term drought** is *imminent* in Grenada, *evolving* by the end of May in the ABC islands, Dominica, Martinique and St. Vincent (*high confidence*), and *might possibly develop* or *continue* into the end of May in northern parts of the Dominican Republic and the islands of Saint Martin and St. Barts (*medium confidence*). Long-term drought (on a 12 months timescale) affects water availability across a multitude of socio-economic sectors in countries where the main freshwater resource is from very large rivers, large reservoirs or groundwater.

Despite the pre-existing long-term drought, **short-term drought** is not expected to be a major concern by the end of May, with the *possible* exception of northern parts of the Dominican Republic and the islands of Saint Martin and St. Barts (*medium confidence*). Short-term drought may impact food production, water quality and quantity from small streams, small ponds and other surface sources.

Tourism facilities should (i) continue to enhance/upgrade their water conservation practices, (ii) rainwater harvesting and repairs to leaky pipes, etc., and (iii) advise staff and guests of the need to monitor water usage and systematically prevent water wastage.

Climate Advisories: Caribbean Cont'd

In view of the *very high* to *extremely high* exposure to **harmful UV light** on sunny days, visitors should be encouraged to apply high SPF sunscreen lotion regularly (preferably reef safe), and avoid sun exposure between the hours of 10 AM and 3 PM. Outdoor tourism operators and staff should also be mindful to minimise skin exposure during these times, and to wear sunscreen and protective clothing when they work outdoors.



Ocean temperatures are not expected to become as warm as to trigger **coral bleaching** between March and May 2026. It should be noted that a portion of the corals that experienced bleaching in 2025 in cooler, clear and clean water can recover. Therefore, it is imperative to minimise runoff of pollutants into coastal waters and to encourage the use of reef-safe sunscreen by guests and locals alike. This can increase the survival chances of coral reefs. This is also a good season to engage in coral reef restoration activities, especially in destinations where there is an ongoing standalone program or partnership between tourism practitioners and coastal managers.

The frequency of **Saharan dust** incursions into the Caribbean tends to increase during this period to peak starting in May. It should be noted that, in some years, significant Saharan dust episodes also occur in March and April. (Access more detailed forecast information on dust and air quality in the Caribbean here: http://dafc.cimh.edu.bb/). **Local dust levels** should be increasing during prolonged dry spells and towards the end of the dry season. Tourism practitioners should be aware that there may be an increase in visitors and staff experiencing respiratory and eye-related concerns.

Climate Advisories: Caribbean Source Markets

March to May marks the spring season in the source markets. What should you do?

Inbound Tour Operators are recommended to monitor the weather forecasts in the source markets. They should be on the lookout for reports of inclement weather in Canada, northern US and northern Europe (e.g., cold spells, torrential rains, prolonged periods of gloomy skies, etc.).

In addition, some competing markets in the ASEAN region of Southeast Asia will experience the hottest part of the year and the late dry season in this period (i.e., Vietnam, The Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia), with a high chance of extreme heat and recurrent wildfires. These conditions would result in high concentration of smoke haze and its degrading impact on air pollution. Marketing efforts could focus on attracting visitors to the generally sunny, warm and breezy weather, and general health and safety in the Caribbean region. Additionally, they should differentiate themselves through innovative package offers, memorable customer service (bearing in mind appropriate health protocols where applicable), and activities that take advantage of the pristine natural environments on offer.

Surf and Sargassum Outlook

Surf's Up

Surfers, divers, fishers and marine craft operators should consult the 7-day wave forecast before planning activities. Click here to access this product: http://ww3.cimh.edu.bb/

Sargassum Outlook

Tourism operators may consult the University of the West Indies / Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (UWI/CERMES)'s Sargassum sub-regional Outlook Bulletin for the Eastern Caribbean or the monthly University of South Florida (USF)/NASA Sargassum Outlook Bulletin for the entire Caribbean before planning activities. Click here to access the latest UWI/CERMES product: https://www.cavehill.uwi.edu/cermes/projects/sargassum/outlook-bulletin.aspx.

Click here to access the USF/NASA product: https://optics.marine.usf.edu/projects/SaWS.html.

Additionally, a Sargassum resource guide is available from the Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism (CAST) and can be accessed here: https://caribbeanhotelandtourism.com/publications/

Additional resources and publications for Sargassum management are also available from CTO here: https://www.onecaribbean.org/our-work/sustainable-tourism-dept/sargassum-resources/

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Upcoming Events

1. CTO: Sustainable Tourism Conference, April 27-30, Ambergris Caye, Belize. See: STC 2026 – OneCaribbean.org
2. CHTA: Caribbean Travel Marketplace, May 12-15, Antigua & Barbuda. See: Home - Caribbean Travel Form- Marketplace
3. CIMH hosted 2026 Wet/Atlantic Hurricane Season Caribbean Climate Outlook Forum, May 25-28 2026, The Bahamas

Websites

Caribbean Tourism Organization:
www.onecaribbean.org

Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association:
www.caribbeanhotelassociation.com

Regional Climate Centre:
http://rcc.cimh.edu.bb

Glossary

Seasonal climate forecast - the guidance offered by a forecaster or forecast centre on climate conditions during the coming months. Forecast information in this Bulletin pertains to the 3 months highlighted in the Issue.

Short-term drought – A rainfall deficit over a total period of 6 months.

Long-term drought – A rainfall deficit over a total period of 12 months.

Dry day – A 24 hour period during which the rainfall total is less than 1 mm.

Dry spell – A succession of at least 7 consecutive dry days.

Wet Day – A 24 hour period during which the rainfall total is at least 1 mm.

Wet Spell – A multi-day period during which the rainfall total is large enough to cross a certain threshold.

Extreme wet spell – 3 consecutive days of which the total rainfall is extremely high, with increased flash flood potential.

Caribbean Heat Season - most heatwaves and the associated spikes in heat stress occur between April or May and October in the Caribbean

Caribbean Cool Season - occurs between December and February or March when the Caribbean experiences comfortably cool weather

The Guianas – French Guiana, Guyana and Suriname.

US Caribbean Territories – Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands.

Leeward Islands – Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, British Virgin Islands, Guadeloupe, Montserrat, Saba, St. Barthélemy, St. Eustatius, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Maarten and St. Martin.

Windward Islands – Dominica, Grenada, Martinique, St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Lesser Antilles – Leeward and Windward Islands along with, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago.

Greater Antilles – Cayman Islands, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica and Puerto Rico.

ABC Islands – Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao

Lucayan Islands – The Bahamas, Turks and Caicos Islands.

For more technical climate terms: https://rcc.cimh.edu.bb/glossary-of-terms/