

Violence Disrupts Flights to Jamaica

By ANNA PRIOR



Montego Bay, Jamaica. Flights to this part of the island are unaffected.

The State Department renewed a travel alert for Jamaica on Monday in the wake of the violence in the capital city, Kingston. Shootings and civil unrest erupted after it was announced that drug and arms dealer Christopher "Dudus" Coke would be extradited to the U.S. The U.S. embassy in Kingston was closed on Wednesday.

Access to Norman Manley International Airport in Kingston has been blocked intermittently by gun battles between Mr. Coke's supporters and police, the alert said.

As a result, airlines have canceled and rescheduled flights to Kingston, or offered waivers for customers looking to change their flights. Flights to and from Montego Bay, a popular tourist destination about 100 miles northwest of Kingston, have not been affected.

"We have this situation in Kingston, which is contained and we are trying to work through it, but the rest of the island is fine," says John Lynch, Jamaica's director of tourism.

Chaos in Kingston

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For the 4th day in a row Jamaican forces have fought armed supporters of a fugitive and alleged drug lord in a battle that has killed nearly 50 people. Video courtesy of Reuters.



"People flying to Montego Bay should be cognizant of what's going on in Kingston, but it shouldn't have an impact in terms of cancellations," says Samuel Logan, regional manager for the Americas at iJet Intelligent Risk Systems, a global intelligence and travel-risk management firm. "Tourists flying into Kingston definitely have to confirm their

flights, especially if the flight arrives after dark," noting that many of the flights canceled since Monday have been the ones arriving or departing later in the evening.

Air Jamaica has canceled flights JM079 and JM078 between Kingston and Toronto on Thursday, as well as flights JM036 and JM031 between Ft. Lauderdale and Kingston on Saturday and Sunday, respectively. Multiple flights for Thursday have been rescheduled. Customers should call 1-800-523-5585 for more information.

American Airlines canceled six flights between Miami and Kingston earlier this week. It also canceled flight 1049 scheduled for Thursday and Friday and flight 1504 for Friday and Saturday. The two remaining daily flights in and out of Kingston are still operating normally, says American spokeswoman Minnette Vélez. For more information, go to www.aa.com, or call 1-800-433-4300.

JetBlue Airways has not yet canceled its daily flight between JFK International Airport in New York and Kingston. Travelers scheduled to fly through Thursday who booked flights on or before May 24 can rebook without additional cost new flights that depart through June 2, as long as the rebooking is done before the flight's originally scheduled departure. Call 1-800-538-2583 for more information.

Spirit Airlines flights to Jamaica, including Kingston, are operating normally but customers with flights to and from Kingston scheduled through May 31 can rebook for travel on or before June 10. Spirit will waive the change fee and difference in fare, and the change must be made before the date and time of the original reservation. Flights rebooked for travel after June 10 will not be charged the change fee but the difference in fare will apply. For more information call 1-800-772-7117.

Tourists should secure a trusted and knowledgeable driver in Kingston, says Mr. Logan, the travel-risk manager. Roadblocks erected by both police and Mr. Coke's supporters have popped up around the city, and a driver should know the area "in case you are rerouted," he says.

Hotel Rates Are Likely to Rise

Demand for hotel rooms is expected to continue to recover this year, and hotels should be able to start increasing room rates in 2011, according to the updated U.S. lodging industry forecast from PricewaterhouseCoopers to be released Thursday.

Hotels are starting to see demand pick up after two consecutive years of decline as business travelers begin to get back on the road.

"We know in the hotel industry, based on historical performances that in cycles like these, it's demand that recovers first followed by room rates, and that's the pattern we see unfolding here," says Scott D. Berman, principal and U.S. industry leader of hospitality and leisure for PricewaterhouseCoopers.

"Spending on lodging in 2009 was substantially reduced, but some of that is proving to be temporary. In the first quarter of 2010, room nights have increased by over 5% compared to the same period in 2009," Mr. Berman says.

For travelers, this could mean less room availability and less ability to bargain for a lower rate.

Room availability "certainly will be more difficult than last year, and it's really a market-by-market situation," says Mr. Berman. "There will certainly be times when there's no room at the inn and that is likely to be in major cities where commercial business and convention business are converging, which we hardly saw in 2009."

And while this demand will likely push prices higher (average daily rates at hotels are expected to increase 3.5% in 2011, according to the report), travelers won't be seeing pre-recession rates for some time.

The industry "won't recover everything in a year or two," says Mr. Berman. "It starts with demand. By no means will rates be back to where they were in 2008."

Ratings Handed To Hunting Lodges

Beretta USA Corp, a division of Italian arms maker Beretta SpA, recently launched a ratings system for hunting lodges and resorts, called the Beretta Trident Program.

Jonathan Sherrill, co-founder of Sporting Heritage Corp., the organization that developed the idea for and administers the Trident rankings, said the program is similar to the Michelin Star system used to rate restaurants.

Hunting professionals and wildlife experts evaluate a lodge or hunting venue while the game is in season, judging the property on the quality of hunting, guest services, food and wine, and the hospitality and professionalism of guides. Properties can earn up to three tridents. Beretta's logo includes a trident.

In the works for the past three years, the ratings system was launched with the awarding in February of a single trident for excellence in wing shooting to Cheyenne Ridge Signature Lodge in Pierre, S.D. The property offers pheasant shooting, coaching and instruction, as well as a cigar and cognac bar and a spa.

Three more properties have been rated since: Highland Hills Ranch in Oregon, Pine Hill Plantation in Georgia and Joshua Creek Ranch in Texas. They, too, received one-trident ratings.

