



PLANTING SEEDS OF HOPE IN ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA



The sun-kissed, dual-island nation of Antigua and Barbuda has long been the destination of choice for visitors to the Caribbean seeking white sands, azure waters, and sublime tranquility. Originally born from a volcano, Antigua has since developed into a mecca for romantic and luxury getaways, ringed by coral reefs and buoyed by the famously hospitable spirit of its people. Barbuda remains mostly unspoiled, its lagoons home to a tremendous diversity of natural habitats, including the largest colony of the balloon-throated Magnificent Frigatebird in the Western Hemisphere.

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When the emergence of the global COVID pandemic necessitated a near-cessation of international travel, few destinations felt the economic fallout more acutely than Antigua and Barbuda. For a small island nation of fewer than 100,000 people, losing the primary tourism industry was more than a blow to the GDP: it was a fundamental threat to the tight-knit community. The seemingly overnight evaporation of tourism hurt resorts and restaurants, of course, but also the excursion and tour operators whose success was critical for supporting conservation efforts. Perhaps most pressingly, it meant facing the stark reality that Antigua and Barbuda's populace, employed overwhelmingly in the tourism sector, would struggle to secure access to food and daily necessities.



Visit Antigua and Barbuda, where we've got the sun, the sea and plenty of much-needed space. Antigua's shoreline is washed almost exclusively by the Caribbean Sea and is hugged by 95 miles of superb coastline. Her sister Barbuda, is surrounded by protective reefs, and features a large lagoon and Frigate Bird sanctuary.



Though its Caribbean neighbours shared the predicament faced by the people of Antigua and Barbuda, their response to the emergent situation stands out as singularly inspiring. Spurred on by Aidan McCauley, a tourism industry operator and Wellness Ambassador for the destination, the community rallied around the Tree Tribe: an innovative, eco-friendly program founded with the lofty goal of planting 2000 fruit-bearing trees across the islands by year's end. In doing so, the Tree Tribe would address two distinct crises, providing food in the short-term for Antiguan and Barbudans through the pandemic and striking a blow against climate change and deforestation through the expansion and stewardship of the islands' beloved green spaces.

Trucks sped across otherwise idyllic beaches and spades struck soft earth as community leaders, government reps, and volunteers organized a sprawling distribution and planting effort, targeting community beacons like churches, gardens, and schools. With businesses, families, and public figures on board, what began as something intended to be small but meaningful quickly became a profound source of lasting change. The Tree Tribe empowered the inhabitants of Antigua and Barbuda to take control of their food security and safeguard the vulnerable habitats of the islands' wildlife, keeping their home beautiful for future generations to enjoy.

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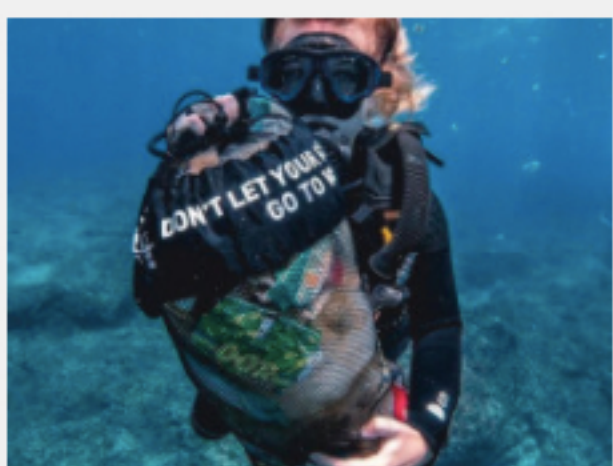
Today, as commercial tourism takes its first careful steps towards resumption, Antigua and Barbuda are standing strong with arms wide open, ready to welcome travellers old and new back to its world-class beaches, luxe resorts, and lush rainforests. That Antigua and Barbuda could navigate the crisis with a community-led, grassroots effort is a testament to the power and spirit of its people and their shared desire to emerge from the pandemic stronger than they entered it. As they continue to close on their goal of 2,000 trees, the Tree Tribe should serve as a tremendously positive blueprint for other destinations needing that last, little push to galvanize their communities about realizing sustainability with change that starts from the bottom.



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