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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Haiti: All Hands on Deck, Not Business as Usual**

Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines' decision to go forward on schedule with visits to Labadee, its private peninsula in Haiti, is more than a colossal public relations faux pas. It is also an unsound tool for economic recovery. The Center for Responsible Travel (CREST) strongly disagrees with both Royal Caribbean officials and some tourism experts quoted in the press who contend that resuming cruise tourism is "critical to Haiti's recovery."

This is a time for all hands on deck, not business as usual.

The unsightly image of thousands of cruise passengers lounging on beaches, sipping margaritas, and shopping for trinkets while being heavily guarded by Haitian forces hardly looks like a recipe for economic recovery. If anything, the humanitarian crisis is worsening -- the January 27 *New York Times* describes Haiti as a "world of unfathomable chaos" -- and security forces are desperately needed to protect relief supplies and distribution of food and water.

Royal Caribbean has shown that it's not totally off course. It offloaded some food donations along with cruise passengers and pledged to provide \$1M in aid and 100% of the net from its visits to Haiti. But it could do and should do much more. The cruise industry has long been one of the most profitable sectors of the tourism industry. Royal Caribbean recently invested \$55M to turn Labadee into a luxury playground and launched the world's largest and most expensive cruise ship ever built -- the \$1.4 billion, 5400 passenger Oasis of the Seas -- whose itinerary includes Haiti.

A more robust Royal Caribbean response to Haiti's humanitarian catastrophe might include:

1. Dedicate several of its ships to ferry food, medicine and other supplies and relief workers (but not vacationers) from the U.S. and help take the strain off the Port-au-Prince I airport.
2. Use one or more cruise ships as shelter for Haitian refugees, as a hospital for the injured and sick, or as housing for the thousands of relief, security, and development

workers pouring into the country. (There is a precedent: A cruise ship was used to house evacuees from New Orleans after Katrina.)

3. Use Labadee and its facilities to house (in tents or other temporary shelters) displaced Haitians who have lost their homes, livelihoods, and loved ones.
4. Purchase Haitian crafts from the Labadee vendors and sell them in the U.S. – and donate these funds to the relief efforts. (Royal Caribbean says that scores of craft vendors are dependent on sales to its cruise passengers.)
5. Keep the several hundred Haitians said to rely on Labadee for their livelihoods on payroll until it is appropriate to resume cruise visits.

The UN's World Tourism Organization says tourism can be "a useful instrument" for the "reconstruction process in Haiti" – but some forms of tourism are far more beneficial than cruise tourism. According to the Caribbean Tourism Organization, the number of cruise and stayover tourists visiting the Caribbean is roughly the same, yet stayover travelers spend 13 times more in-country than cruise passenger and governments in the Caribbean receive 800% more in taxes from stayover tourists than from cruise passengers. Similarly, CREST's field studies of various ports of call found that cruise visitors on day trips put far less into the local economy than do stayover travelers by a ratio of about 15 to 1 and countries overall earn far more from land-based tourism than from cruise tourism. (The studies are available at: <http://www.responsibletravel.org/resources/reports.html>.)

Yes, there is an opportunity for tourism to be one of the tools for reconstruction and sustainable development in Haiti, but that will come when immediate needs are met, order is restored, and rebuilding begins. Tourism should be done in Haiti in ways that provide well paying and permanent jobs, build on the country's natural and cultural assets, stimulate locally owned businesses, and create many and diverse linkages within the island's overall economy.