

MINISTRY OF TOURISM

HERITAGE AUTHENTICATION WORKSHOP

FEATURE ADDRESS

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MINISTER OF TOURISM
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

Date: Friday March 11, 2011

Venue: The Ballroom, Cascadia Hotel and Conference Centre

Time: 8.00am

- The Honourable Winston Peters, Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism
 - Mrs. Melba Dedier, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism
 - Mr. George Stanley Beard, Chairman of the Tourism Development Company Limited (TDC) and other TDC Directors
 - Travel Professionals of Colour National Association (TPOC) Representatives
 - Presidents of the various tourism associations
 - Workshop Participants
 - Members of the Media
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Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning.

I will like to especially welcome the representatives from the Travel Professionals of Colour Association (TPOC) - Dr. Kevin Mc

Pherson, La Tanya Austin and Karen Little. I am proud to welcome you to my country, which I naturally believe is the most beautiful in the world.

The tourism industry of Trinidad and Tobago now accounts for some 4% of total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 14.9% of our employment, equivalent to about 88,000 direct and indirect jobs.

These statistics, published by the world renowned World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) in a report prepared in 2009 for Trinidad and Tobago, reinforced the great importance of the tourism sector and the need for all of us, together, to take our tourism industry that much more seriously because of the impact it has on the lives of so many of our citizens.

This is why we are here today.

The potential visitor, be they living in the United Kingdom, in Germany, in the United States, in Canada, in fact in any country, has the freedom to choose from thousands of destinations for their next vacation or convention experience.

What will make the potential traveler pick Trinidad and Tobago from the host of other Caribbean destinations?

People generally want to travel to a foreign location to enjoy new and different experiences.

Trinidad and Tobago is one such destination; with a festival or cultural event occurring virtually every month.

Trinidad and Tobago is justly renowned for its great variety of culture and heritage. A mere four (4) days ago we celebrated the Biggest Street Party in the World – Trinidad and Tobago Carnival. And what a bumper Carnival it was - with accommodation facilities in Trinidad registering high occupancy and widespread satisfaction with several different facets of the festival.

With an estimated 900 million international arrivals visiting the 890 World Heritage sites in 2009, heritage tourism has become an important niche market. Today's tourists are more conscious of, and interested in, the protection of the natural, historical, cultural and social environment.

And it is to address this issue of enhancing our cultural wealth that we are here today for this workshop.

This heritage authentication workshop is indeed quite timely as we face challenging times due to the global economic crisis. It is critical that we carefully examine our tourism product and the packaging and marketing of our offerings in order to influence the travelling preferences of new visitors.

The Ministry of Tourism is pleased to collaborate with TPOC in the process of authentication and certification of Trinidad and Tobago as a heritage site; with the ultimate aim of capitalising on the burgeoning global heritage tourism market.

By reviving and promoting historic culture as an important marketing tool to attract travelers with special interest in heritage and arts, the benefits can be significant. Heritage tourism, if promoted consistently and effectively, can help preserve our country's heritage.

This one-day workshop, following fast on the heels of a TPOC site inspection visit in October 2010, will provide an overview of heritage tourism as well as highlight the needs of the international heritage travelers.

It is my understanding that the presentations will also include an overview of the pre-requisites for packaging and marketing of our potential heritage tourism assets.

Our likely heritage sites, such as the Banwarie Settlement, Nelson Island, Cleaver Woods, Toco Lighthouse and the Stokely Carmichael home in Belmont, can now come more alive.

In this regard the Ministry of Tourism is also leading a multi-agency team for the establishment of a Sugar Heritage Village and Museum at Sevilla House in historic Caroni. The Museum will contain information and exhibits about one of the most significant and influential periods in Trinidad and Tobago's history.

Additionally it will not only capture and protect the history and heritage of our sugar industry but will look at sugar's influence on our society.

In order to reap the full benefit of our certification and authentication as a Heritage Destination by TPOC, we need also as a nation to make a concerted effort to continually increase our levels of hospitality and friendliness, and the general level of service. The international tourist market places a very high premium on these aspects.

I want to challenge our local tourism industry to make 2011 a year of all-round improvement of our service quality.

Moreover rest assured that Government does recognise the importance of safety and security to tourism growth.

We have in place a major program to ensure a climate of safety and security for all those who live in our country and all those who visit it. I am confident that the close and active co-operation between the tourism sector and the police will assure the success of our security plans.

In conclusion, it is my pleasure to declare this Heritage Authentication Workshop officially open.

I thank you.

March 10, 2011