

MINISTRY OF TOURISM

**BUSINESS SEMINAR ON INDIA-TRINIDAD & TOBAGO:
INDIA AND TRINIDAD & TOBAGO:
AN OUTLOOK FOR TOURISM**

FEATURE PRESENTATION

**DR. THE HONOURABLE RUPERT T. GRIFFITH
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TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

Date: Wednesday March 23, 2011
Venue: La Boucan Room, Trinidad Hilton Hotel and Conference Centre
Time: 4.00pm

- His Excellency Malay Mishra, the High Commissioner of India to Trinidad and Tobago
 - Mrs. Melba Dedier, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism and other senior tourism executives
 - Chief Executive Officers of the various Chambers of Commerce
 - Presidents of the various Tourism Associations
 - Senior Representatives from the Public Sector
 - Business people in our midst
 - Members of the Media
 - Distinguished Invited Guests
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Good Afternoon.

I wish to express my appreciation to His Excellency Malay Mishra, the High Commissioner of India to Trinidad and Tobago, for inviting me to share this Government's vision and plans for the sustainable and responsible development of the local tourism industry at this very timely business forum.

By all accounts, the last ten (10) months has been a challenging, and some might say turbulent time, for the local tourism sector.

Despite a hugely successful 2011 Carnival season in Trinidad, the tourism industry of Trinidad and Tobago is still struggling with the aftermath of the worldwide financial and economic crisis (*the most severe global economic downturn since the Great Depression of 1929*).

Higher taxes imposed by UK and German governments on travel and relatively high employment in our major tourism source markets have further impacted upon our economy; especially that of Tobago.

However, I must also say that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

There is good reason to be optimistic and brimful of confidence in the viability of our local tourism industry.

In 2009 the direct impact of tourism contribution to our Gross Domestic Product was 4%. Tourism also is generating more than 88,000 direct and indirect jobs across the country.

International visitor spend accounts for some 6.1% of total exports or equivalent to TT\$3.4b. Indeed, real GDP growth for the travel and tourism economy of Trinidad and Tobago is expected to average 5.25% over the next ten (10) years.

Ladies and gentlemen, stay-over arrivals globally have increased five fold – moving from 166 million in 1970 to 935 million in 2010. In the Caribbean the number of international arrivals for 2010 was 23 million arrivals in 2010; with the Spanish speaking Caribbean countries leading the recovery improving by 5.1% in 2010.

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) 2020 Vision has forecasted that international tourist arrivals would be in the vicinity of 1, 6 billion by 2020.

It is obvious therefore that tourism is one of the most promising of the services sector, a potentially high income earner for this country and key to our economic diversification effort.

The potentials that exist in the industry are enormous and therefore the sector cannot be brushed aside if we want the tourism industry to contribute meaningfully to our national economy.

It is for this reason that Government has been putting in place all the structures, institutions and systems to guide and transform the tourism sector.

Within the short period of time that we have been in office, we have able to put in place a new National Tourism Policy that is in line with Government philosophy.

We are also in the final stages of re-structuring the national tourism marketing and implementation agency, the Tourism Development Company Limited (TDC). The TDC is being re-shaped and streamlined so as to execute its mandate effectively and efficiently.

Both the Ministry of Tourism and the TDC have also been closely collaborating on various initiatives with all stakeholders in the tourism industry; since without the active involvement of all segments of the sector, it would be difficult to achieve the desired results.

Moreover, we clearly recognise that we cannot continue marketing and promoting destination Trinidad and Tobago in the same manner as has been done in the past.

Business and travel dynamics are changing much too rapidly in this global village.

With the continued rise of online technology **there must be a fundamental shift in the way we communicate, conduct business and market our products.**

By the end of the June 2011, we would have completed our review and appointment of Overseas Marketing Representatives. These Marketing Representatives must now play a more active and partnering role in creating an awareness of Trinidad and Tobago as a preferred investment and tourism Caribbean destination.

Our traditional tourism source markets - UK, Europe and to some extent the USA - are experiencing longer than expected economic recession that will impact upon our growth possibilities.

Moreover, we are witnessing the political, financial and economic ascendancy of the BRIC countries, that is, Brazil, Russia, India and China. The BRIC countries have rebound faster from the financial crisis when compared to the advanced economies and this has had major implications for travel and tourism patterns.

The BRIC countries also have a new and expanded middle class with increased buying power and a passion for life and exploring new cultures.

All indications are that, by 2050, India's economy will be the third-largest behind China and USA.

And to stay ahead of the game into the next decade, it is absolutely imperative that we reach out to new and potential source markets, to broad base visitor profiles and augment tourist arrivals from all countries to Trinidad and Tobago.

Therefore it is against this background that Trinidad and Tobago undertook, in January this year, a Tourism Promotional Mission to India.

Visiting the major cities of Ahmedabad, Mumbai, New Delhi and Bangalore, the delegation made important inroads into generating a phenomenal

increase in awareness and visibility of destination Trinidad and Tobago.

We intend to build on the more than 8,000 Indian tourists who have visited Trinidad and Tobago between 2005 and 2008.

Whilst these visitors may have been predominantly small business entrepreneurs, international research has indicated that the business travel segment, inclusive of meeting incentives and conventions, is expected to be the biggest growth area for the future given India's growing trade and investment relations with the world.

An important niche market for Trinidad and Tobago-India is that of medical tourism.

During our promotional mission several Indian investors expressed keen interest in the potential of spa and wellness centers in Trinidad and Tobago.

It is widely acknowledged that wellness and medical tourism is another area where India has a distinct advantage, with its rich heritage of traditional and natural medicine.

Moreover, India has also made tremendous advancements in the field of modern medicine and health care techniques, with state of the art infrastructure and technology available in the country.

In this regard plans are already underway to host a representative from Fortis Hospitals in April 2011 to discuss medical tourism for Trinidad and Tobago with a view to the setting up of hospital facilities as well as a training center.

Following our meeting with Apollo Hospitals in January in India, the group has since visited Trinidad and made in-depth site inspections and held meetings with the Ministry of Health, the TDC and other health institutions.

During the mission specific interest was generated for fourteen (14) potential hotels ranging in size from small to medium to large;

which promises to offer a variety of hotel options.

The TDC is presently in discussions with the hotel groups of Oberoi Group and the ITC-WelcomGroup.

Further details about our India Mission can be obtained from our promotional brochure that is available at the registration desk.

Ladies and gentlemen, we must be proactive and nimble in order to win new markets.

Notwithstanding the significant growth in these emerging markets, Trinidad and Tobago will be continuing with its thrust into our traditional markets.

There is obviously still a large un-tapped potential in the US market given that US arrivals drove growth in Caribbean tourism – arrivals increasing by 5.7% in 2010 and surpassing the 2008 level of 11.5 million.

More focus will be placed on engaging the Caribbean and Indian Diaspora in the major economies of USA, UK and Canada as they represent a sizeable market share and can be great ambassadors for us.

Having visited in India various tourism sites and attractions including the world famous Taj Mahal and Bangalore Botanic Gardens, I was deeply impressed by the solid investment in research and innovation that India has made in

developing, maintaining, operating and packaging its tourism product.

There are product development lessons to be learnt here.

Acknowledging that today's tourist is seeking novel travel experiences that are more culturally and spiritually fulfilling, the Ministry of Tourism is actively pursuing certification as a heritage destination.

Indeed in May 2011 the Travel Professionals of Colour out of USA will announce, at its meeting in Kentucky, that Trinidad and Tobago will be certified as an **Authentic Heritage Tourism Destination**.

It is anticipated that this designation will ensure additional visitors from around the world seeking

greater understanding and appreciation of the Diaspora experience in Trinidad and Tobago.

It will also be incumbent upon us to undertake more comprehensive works on our heritage sites such as Banwarie Trace, Kwame Ture House, Santa Rosa Carib Village, Knolly's Tunnel and Nelson Island.

By the end of this second quarter also, the Ministry of Tourism will be hosting a sod turning ceremony in Caroni at Sevilla House for the establishment of the Sugar Heritage Village and Museum.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my hope that sessions such as this one will re-ignite interest in the tourism industry, foster a

better understanding of the industry and enhance linkages between government and industry for the integrated development of the sector.

I am firmly convinced that dialogue with the private sector, state agencies, communities and non-governmental organisations is crucial for harnessing our rich tourism resources for job creation, growth and prosperity.

As I close, I must praise the work of the India High Commission. The Commission has been extremely supportive of all of our tourism initiatives; not only do they open doors but they also build bridges.

Both Trinidad and Tobago and India have enjoyed many years of solid friendship, cultural

exchanges, business relations and sporting links.

Working together we can do much more to pave a sustainable economic growth path for the people of both our countries.

I thank you, ladies and gentlemen, and may Almighty God continue to richly bless the twin island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

March 22, 2011