

**MINISTRY OF TOURISM**

**MEETING OF OVERSEAS MARKETING  
REPRESENTATIVES  
&  
TOURISM STAKEHOLDERS**

**FEATURE ADDRESS**

**DR. THE HONOURABLE RUPERT T. GRIFFITH  
MINISTER OF TOURISM  
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

**Date:** Wednesday September 21, 2011  
**Venue:** Hilton Trinidad and Conference centre  
**Time:** 9.00am

- Mrs. Melba Dedier, Permanent Secretary Ministry of Tourism
  - Mr. George Stanley Beard, Chairman of the Tourism Development Company Limited (TDC) and other TDC Directors
  - Mrs. Sandra Perkins, newly appointed Chief Executive Officer Tourism Development Company Limited and other members of her strategic team
  - Tourism Stakeholders
  - Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen
- 

Good Morning.

Let me first thank so many of you for coming out to this first interactive session between the local tourism community and our six (6) newly appointed Overseas Marketing Representatives.

I indeed appreciate and value your presence here this morning as it is a wonderful testimony of the strength of our joint resolve to build this outstanding tourism industry in this remarkable country.

I am eagerly looking forward to a week of very candid and productive discussions that will boost tourism in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has recognised the tourism sector's importance not only as a contributor to the growth of the economy but as a generator of employment opportunities as well.

We also acknowledge that this twin island Republic of ours is more than just sea, sand and surf. Our culture, heritage, myriad festivals and passionate welcoming people are the biggest strengths of our tourism product.

As a result, therefore we have positioned the tourism industry as a key driver of our national economic diversification effort

And it is in this regard that the role of Overseas Marketing Representatives is quite an important one.

Your mandate is to develop and implement proactive and coordinated marketing and communication strategies for destination Trinidad and Tobago. The message that Trinidad and Tobago is ready and open for tourism must be carried across international borders.

Simply put, we need increased tourist arrivals and investment into Trinidad and Tobago.

I wish to offer my congratulations to all six (6) of our Overseas Marketing Representatives in the United States of America, United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, Scandinavia and the new market of India.

Whilst continuing with our thrust in traditional tourism source markets, I firmly believe that it is also necessary to reach out to new and potential tourism source markets, to widen our visitor profile and augment tourist arrivals from all countries. Hence the reason for the establishment of representation in India.

We are particularly interested in encouraging tourism in the specific niches of wellness and medical tourism where India has a distinct advantage with its rich heritage of traditional and natural medicine.

During my discussions with the TDC team regarding the agenda for this visit by the Marketing Representatives, there are a few things I insisted must not be comprised.

Firstly, the Representatives must be given ample opportunity to experience and understand the Trinidad and Tobago product.

And secondly, tourism stakeholders and the broader tourism community must be afforded sufficient time to interact with the Overseas Marketing Representatives so as to ensure a clear appreciation of the marketing needs and challenges of Trinidad and Tobago.

Additionally the marketing representatives must actively collaborate with our Overseas Missions in promoting Trinidad and Tobago.

This week I am extremely pleased to welcome on board the members of my new strategic team at the TDC, led by the highly experienced and consummate professional Mrs. Sandra Perkins who has now taken up the post of Chief Executive Officer.

*(Minister Griffith calls out by name the members of the new TDC executive)*

Congratulations and I look forward to working closely with all of you over the next coming years.

The organisational re-structuring of the Tourism Development Company (TDC) so as to build a strong, dedicated and passionate team is, for the most part, complete.

We have also crafted a vision for the industry, which is clearly articulated in our National Tourism Policy, and developed a One Year Tourism Action Plan.

We are ready, ladies and gentlemen, to carry tourism to the next level.

But these are demanding times for tourism - here in Trinidad and Tobago and also internationally.

Many of our tourists travel here from international markets that are presently experiencing unrelenting economic strain. The much-hoped for economic recovery in our tourism source markets, especially United Kingdom and the United States of America, has not taken place.

I know that this has impacted upon some of your bottom lines and that some of you are gripped by a sense of anxiety, and perhaps even fear, when you look at industry-wide hotel occupancy rates, dining patterns and level of subscribed tours.

Nevertheless, we must also understand that the global economic recession has changed our market place in fundamental ways.

The mindset of the visitor is also different. The international visitor is increasingly seeking a quality experience but is, more than ever, price conscious.

For that reason, we must now deliver a product and service that meet international quality standards. There must be a significant shift in the way we manage our future.

The business will not come to us. We have to fight harder than ever for every inch of business.

It is vital for us, for all of us, to develop a true public-private partnership. All levels of government and industry must work together in partnership to reposition the industry on a dynamic growth path for the future.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Spare me a moment to thank the Board of the Tourism Development Company for its excellent handling of the recruitment of the Overseas Marketing Representatives. The recruitment process was transparent and open and executed with all due diligence. All efforts were made to obtain the best possible representation and this we have achieved.

In conclusion, I know it is tough out there. We - both the public and the private sector - have all made major investments in the local tourism industry.

Now, we must work together to protect and grow these investments.

I want to encourage forthright debates over the course of the next five (5) days and hope that the outcome of our discussions will be the best way forward for achieving our common objective of marketing and promoting Trinidad and Tobago as a tourism destination in all parts of the world.

Hopefully when we meet again in a similar forum in 2012, Trinidad and Tobago will no longer be the best kept secret in Caribbean.

This is the challenge and one that I intend to overcome.

Thank you and may God bless us all.

September 17, 2011