

MINISTRY OF TOURISM

**PRESENTATION TO THE SAN JUAN
BUSINESS ASSOCIATION**

FEATURE ADDRESS

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

Date: Monday March 21, 2011

Venue: Himalaya Club, Barataria

Time: 6.30pm

- Mr. Abraham Ali, President of the San Juan Business Association
 - Mrs. Melba Dedier, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism
 - Mr. George Stanley Beard, Chairman of the Tourism Development Company Limited (TDC) and other Board Directors
 - Mrs. Lara De Sonpere Roberts, Acting TDC President
 - His Excellency Brian Charles Lara, Sports Ambassador, and Mr. Ato Boldon, Trinidad and Tobago sporting legend
 - Distinguished Businessmen and women of San Juan
 - Our Media Partners
 - Ladies and Gentlemen
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I am most delighted to be here with you this evening.

Let me first thank the President of the San Juan Business Association for affording me the opportunity to address such an influential and important gathering of business and community partners.

This evening it is my pleasure to provide an overview of the tourism industry in Trinidad and Tobago, government's strategic focus for the sector and delve a bit into how you can play a part in the development of the local tourism industry.

CONTRIBUTION

Ladies and gentlemen,

Tourism plays a critical role in our economy. In 2009 the direct impact of its contribution to our Gross Domestic Product was 4%. Tourism also creates some 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 tourism economy of Trinidad and Tobago is expected to average 5.25% over the next ten (10) years.

These statistics reflect the potential and vitality of Trinidad and Tobago's tourism industry.

STRATEGY

It is in light of this scenario that our People's Partnership Government has targeted tourism as an important pillar in the national economic diversification effort.

Our recently approved National Tourism Policy, which was developed hand in hand with stakeholders, the corporate sector and communities, provides the framework for the sustainable development and management of a competitive, people-centered tourism industry.

At present, the Ministry of Tourism is developing terms of reference for a consultant to formulate a National Tourism Strategy and Implementation Plan, which we envisaged will be ready for public comment by the beginning of the fourth quarter in 2011.

This leads me to the broader theme that I really want to focus on this evening - and this is - what will be the future of our local tourism sector over the next five (5) years or so.

MARKETS

After the economic downturn, political turbulence and natural disasters that have enveloped the global economy recently, it is evident that there

must be a fundamental change in the way we do business.

It cannot be business as usual.

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.

The good news is that these changes bring new opportunities as well.

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) Tourism 2020 Vision forecasts that international arrivals will reach nearly 1, 6 billion by the year 2020 – 1, 7 times the number recorded in 2008.

Indeed, it is estimated that in 2010 the Caribbean received 20.3m international arrivals, an increase of 4.1% from that of 2009.

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 growing middle income population with a high propensity to experience new “exotic” destinations. 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, Trinidad and Tobago must seize all these various opportunities available.

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

Visiting the major cities of Ahmedabad, Mumbai, New Delhi and Bangalore, the delegation made several important inroads into generating a phenomenal increase in awareness and visibility of destination Trinidad and Tobago.

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.

Also we have had numerous expressions of interest from Indian investors for the construction of hotels and are presently in discussions with the Oberoi Group and the ITC-WelcomGroup as to furtherance of their plans.

Comprehensive information regarding our Mission to India can be gleaned from the information booklet distributed upon your arrival.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We need to position ourselves in emerging markets before the space becomes overcrowded.

Therefore more promotional missions, like that to India, will definitely need to take place.

Diversifying our tourist base is a priority.

TOURISM CONSUMER

The travel preferences of today's tourist have changed. The international tourist is demanding service, value for money, novel experiences and is more environmentally and culturally conscious.

In clear recognition of our unique diverse culture and the need to embrace local communities in the tourism effort, the Ministry of Tourism is exploring many new frontiers in product innovation.

We are working with communities and regional corporations to develop little known tourism destinations such as Blanchisseuse, Paramin, Toco Beach and Lighthouse and its environs; just to mention a few.

Groundwork has also commenced for the construction of a Sugar Heritage Village and Museum at Sevilla House in historic Caroni.

The Museum, containing information and artifacts from one of the most significant and influential periods in Trinidad and Tobago's history, will usher in a new renaissance.

SITES & ATTRACTIONS

Efforts are also being directed towards improving our existing sites and attractions inventory including erection of adequate visitor amenities, interpretative signage and heritage preservation.

It is worth noting that in May 2011 Trinidad and Tobago will be certified as an **Authentic Heritage Tourism Destination** by the Travel Professionals of Colour out of the US.

This designation opens us up to yet another vibrant client pool.

NICHES

Additionally, I have mandated the Trinidad and Tobago Conventions Bureau to pursue a much more aggressive and focused events and conventions strategy.

We must invest in creating a mix of vibrant and diverse events throughout the year ranging from traditional community feasts to international music, art and sports events. Indeed we will be hosting in October this year an International Culinary Competition.

Such a rich calendar of events helps us to continue differentiating ourselves from other Caribbean destinations by providing diverse

opportunities within the annual calendar which will appeal to a wider audience.

The island of Trinidad can easily become the business, meetings and conference centre for the southern Caribbean.

We have highly experienced and qualified event planners, appropriate conference facilities, authentic cultural and nature-based experiences and a solid legacy for hosting impressive mega events.

In addition both Trinidad and Tobago have enormous potential to attract more visitors to participate in sporting events and leisure activities.

In this regard the TDC, the marketing and implementation agency of my Ministry, has been working with several international sporting media bodies, such as ESPN, Soccerex European Forum, our local sport ambassadors and the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs to determine new initiatives that will enhance the sports tourism niche.

We do hope to continue developing other thematic sectors in the near future including agro-tourism, health (medical tourism), religious tourism and ecotourism.

COMMUNICATION

With the prevalence of social media and the all-pervading global village, the Ministry of Tourism and the TDC are using new channels to communicate with audiences. Ample use has been made of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube for the marketing and promotion of Carnival 2011.

I am happy to report that Trinidad enjoyed almost full hotel occupancy for Carnival 2011; with preliminary estimates indicating an almost 12% increase in international arrivals over 2010.

We intend to take full advantage of the spotlight that has shone on our country over the past two (2) months, and the accolades from visiting

international celebrities and media covering Carnival.

WHAT'S NEXT

Ladies and gentlemen,

To conclude, the tourism industry of Trinidad of Tobago has a bright future.

However, to truly succeed we need you to partner with Government and all stakeholders involved.

We place an extremely high value on our relationships with our industry and business partners, and we hope that you will join us every step of the way.

We do appreciate your support, and we have no doubt that with your help we will achieve our goal of becoming the preferred destination of choice in the Caribbean.

I thank you again for inviting me to join you this evening.

March 19, 2011