

MINISTRY OF TOURISM

**THIRD CHINA-CARIBBEAN
ECONOMIC AND TRADE
COOPERATION FORUM**

SEMINAR ON TOURISM CO-OPERATION

FEATURE ADDRESS

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

Date: Tuesday September 13, 2011

Venue: Hyatt Regency Trinidad

Time: 9.00am

- His Excellency Mr. Shao Qiwei, Chairman of the China National Tourism Administration and other members of the Chinese Tourism Delegation
 - My Fellow Ministers of Tourism from neighbouring Caribbean countries
 - Mrs. Melba Dedier, Permanent Secretary Ministry of Tourism
 - Mr. George Stanley Beard, Chairman of the Tourism Development Company Limited (TDC) and Directors of the TDC
 - Seminar Participants
 - Friends
 - Ladies and Gentlemen
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Good Morning.

I wish to extend a special welcome to His Excellency Mr. Shao Qiwei, Chairman of the People's Republic of China National Tourism Administration, and all the

executives from the China National Tourism Administration to one of the most eagerly-anticipated events on this year's regional business calendar.

I commend the People's Republic of China for the splendid initiative of the Third China Caribbean Economic and Trade Cooperation Forum.

This is an excellent platform for government agencies and business leaders from the two sides – the People's China and the Caribbean – to interact and identify business opportunities and projects for cooperation in a win-win fashion.

Events such as this are valuable in helping nurture important business relationships; and People's Republic of China is an important partner.

This Third China Caribbean Economic and Trade Cooperation Forum is a visible sign of the huge amount of work going on behind the scenes to strengthen business relations between the Caribbean region and the People's Republic of China.

Moreover the tourism session this morning is evidence of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago's commitment to putting tourism at the forefront of our economic engagement with the People's Republic of China.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has attached great importance to the growth and sustainable development of the local tourism industry. Indeed Government has declared tourism as one of the key pillars for transforming the country's economy.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago recently adopted a National Tourism Policy. This Policy provides a framework within which all tourism activities should operate. The Policy also stresses the sustainable development of the tourism sector, which is centered on community collaboration and community participation.

Furthermore, our National Tourism Policy provides a clear direction for strengthening linkages between the Trinidad and Tobago economy and the tourism sectors of other Caribbean countries and deepening greater economic integration of the region.

Therefore forums such as this will certainly lend to increased dialogue and healthy growth of cooperation with other States on the development of the Caribbean tourism industry.

The People's Republic of China and Trinidad and Tobago has traditionally enjoyed friendly relations.

This has resulted in various initiatives, such as Trinidad and Tobago's participation in the enormously successful Shanghai Expo last year as we sought to showcase investment possibilities in our islands and to lure new visitors to our shores.

Indeed, in 2010 Government dispatched a team of Officials to lay the groundwork for the establishment of an Embassy in Beijing and it is hoped that this initiative will soon materialise as a Trinidad and Tobago's presence in the People's Republic of China is deemed as important.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The People's Republic of China is the fourth largest economy in the world, growing at a rate of 10%.

The People's Republic of China is also the fastest growing outbound market in the world. In 2010 57.4 million Chinese travelled abroad; spending US\$48 billion US dollars in other countries.

According to the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) in 2020 the People's Republic of China will become the largest tourist country and the fourth largest for overseas travel.

It is no surprise, then, that Trinidad and Tobago views the People's Republic of China as an important and new tourism source market.

It is in this regard that in 2007 the twin island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the People's Republic of China which grants Trinidad and Tobago approved destination status.

This Memorandum of Understanding allows organised group tours from the People's Republic of China to engage in leisure travel to Trinidad and Tobago.

Chinese have been coming to Trinidad and Tobago as early as 1806 and their influence in almost every sphere of life cannot be overlooked. Indeed, in 2006 the Chinese community celebrated its bicentennial anniversary of their arrival and a public holiday was declared.

Data on visitor arrivals to Trinidad and Tobago from the People's Republic of China illustrate that tourism inflows from China increased from 278 visitors in 2002 to 1,747 visitors in 2009; an increase of some 528.4%.

The growth of the Chinese tourism market is a big opportunity for Trinidad and Tobago and we are enthusiastically embracing it with both hands.

We want to share with our Chinese friends our rich and unique cultural traditions, festivals and heritage, our beautiful beaches and abundant flora and fauna, and, of course, our delectable award winning indigenous cuisine.

Trinidad and Tobago is a twin island country where business meets pleasure, where hard work and

relaxation find a creative compromise and where passion for both are never scarce.

We recognise that interest in the Chinese market in the Caribbean region, and also in the wider international community, is strong.

But, so is our commitment to the market and the needs of our Chinese visitors.

It is for this reason I am eagerly looking forward to the presentation later this morning on the needs and preferences of the Chinese tourists.

We recognise as the People's Republic of China's middle class rapidly expands and more people travel abroad we need to understand more about how consumers plan and book their holidays, and how to better service the needs of the Chinese visitor.

Research has indicated that social media and internet marketing play a significant role in travel bookings from the People's Republic of China.

Indeed, a unit has been set up within the Tourism Development Company Limited (TDC), the marketing and implementation agency of the Ministry of Tourism, specifically dedicated to social media and networking. This will make it easier for us to provide instant responses and instant answers to travellers in promising new markets - not least in the People's Republic of China.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Trinidad and Tobago is truly open and ready for foreign investment in hotels and tourism infrastructure.

The philosophy of our government is to provide the facilitative environment for business to grow. The main engine of this growth is the private sector.

There exist a number of highly attractive and competitive fiscal incentives for approved tourism projects, namely tax holidays; tax exemptions from profits from sale of lots, villas and condominiums; carry-over of losses from tax exemption period; duty concessions on vehicles and duty exemptions on building materials.

We have a number of excellent hotel investment opportunities - at varied price points - both in Trinidad and in Tobago, which we can discuss further perhaps during one to one meetings. These opportunities include integrated eco-tourism resorts and business hotels.

One of the critical objectives of this government is to substantially upgrade and increase the quality room stock on both islands.

We will make sure that doing business in Trinidad and Tobago is easy and simple.

Indeed in the latest Global Competitiveness Index, released just last week by the World Economic Forum, Trinidad and Tobago improved its competitive standings by moving up three (3) notches on the rankings of the index.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Trinidad and Tobago is at an exciting stage in its development and we are already beginning to see

tangible results from the change in the way we conduct our tourism business.

The number of visitors gracing our shores this year for Carnival, our major national cultural celebration, was some 40,000 with almost full occupancy in our hotels and guest houses.

I am quite optimistic about the resilience of the local tourism industry and the signs are positive.

Our relationship with the People's Republic of China is also growing and strengthening. This is not only good for business but it plays an enormous role in cross cultural understanding and education.

The benefits of this Third China Caribbean Economic and Trade Cooperation Forum will go a

long way in bringing people together for many years to come.

The simple message I want to leave you with this morning is that Trinidad and Tobago is serious about tourism. We no longer want to be the best kept secret in the Caribbean.

We are fully aware of the challenges that face us. We believe, though, that we have a unique tourism product.

We, therefore, welcome the opportunity to present tourism opportunities in Trinidad and Tobago this morning.

Finally, I especially want to convey my most profound thanks to my tourism stakeholders for taking the time to be here.

This shows their willingness to seek and seize opportunities as well as a testimony to the strength of our common resolve to build this outstanding industry in this remarkable country of Trinidad and Tobago.

Once again to the first time visitors to the beautiful islands of Trinidad and Tobago, welcome and I trust that you would have some time to visit our many attractions.

I thank you.

September 12, 2011