Cruise Ship Season Curtained Amid Health Concerns

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The World Health Organisation has declared COVID-19 a pandemic and called on governments to take ‘urgent and aggressive action’ to prevent its spread.

Even before this announcement, Trinidad and Tobago initiated an early response plan to prevent the entry of the virus into this country through the establishment of a Cabinet Approved Multi-Sectoral Committee chaired by the Ministry of Health to treat with COVID-19. Steps included travel restrictions on countries with high incidence of COVID-19 and aggressive screening at our ports of entry.

As part of the Multi-Sectoral Committee to treat with COVID-19, the Ministry of Tourism has been closely monitoring the evolving situation and its overall impact on the tourism sector. Since the discovery of the virus in December 2019, the international travel and tourism industry has been adversely affected.

One of the direct responsibilities of the Ministry of Tourism is the management of the cruise season which runs for a six month period from November to April of the following year. As part of the urgent measures to protect citizens, Government has accepted the recommendation of the Cabinet Approved Multi-Sectoral Committee to suspend the arrival of cruise ships for the remainder of the 2019-2020 cruise season which officially ended on April 24, 2020.

Given the rapid infection of COVID-19 globally, the potential economic loss from the epidemic entering Trinidad and Tobago will outweigh the potential loss associated with the decision to suspend the arrival of cruise ships for the rest of the 2019-2020 cruise season.

The Honourable Randall Mitchell, Minister of Tourism, stated that “public health and safety of our citizens are of utmost importance and there is urgent need to place safeguarding measures in place to protect our citizens from the potential devastating effects of a COVID-19 epidemic.”

The Ministry will continue to work with all stakeholders including cruise line executives, tour operators, agents and port officials to ensure that all relevant parties are kept abreast as the situation evolves.

The Destinations have benefitted from a successful cruise season due in the most part to enhanced collaboration with all stakeholders. Continued engagement and dialogue are important in moving forward as we address this urgent threat to our industry and country.

The travel and tourism industry has faced similar challenges and has emerged stronger and more resilient for it.