

MINISTRY OF TOURISM

# **EMPOWERMENT OF THE TOURISM ENTREPRENEUR SYMPOSIUM**

## **FEATURE ADDRESS**

**THE HONOURABLE SHAMFA CUDJOE  
MINISTER OF TOURISM  
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

**Date:** Thursday November 12, 2015

**Venue:** Hyatt Regency Trinidad, International Waterfront Centre

**Time:** 8.30am

- Mrs. Samdai Rampersad, Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism
  - Directors of the Board of the Tourism Development Company Limited (TDC)
  - Mr. Keith Chin, Chief Executive Officer of the TDC
  - The Management Teams at the Ministry of Tourism and the TDC
  - Partners and Friends from the Tourism Industry
  - Members of the Media
  - Other Specially Invited Guests
  - Ladies and gentlemen
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Thank you so much for your warm welcome.

We are joined today by over fifty (50) entrepreneurs from across the length and breadth of Trinidad and I always consider it a privilege to have the opportunity to meet and share ideas with our tourism stakeholders. It is one of my more favourite things to do.

On the heels of a new year, Trinidad and Tobago is entering a period in which we anticipate some economic challenges. In the face of this reality, small businesses – *by providing the products, services, knowledge and skills needed by our communities* – will play a key role in growing and sustaining our national economy. Entrepreneurs play a vital role in society by keeping our economy vibrant, and making opportunities available to more people. New businesses and small companies are an important pillar of any country's economic engine.

This is no less true than in the tourism industry. Our taxi drivers, tour operators, small accommodation providers and tour guides, among others, all provide a need in our local tourism industry and take risk every day without any certainty of reward.

We recognise that in many cases small businesses form the basis for the delivery of tourism offerings and that they provide a point of direct contact between our visitors, destination Trinidad and Tobago and our various communities. Furthermore, small entrepreneurs facilitate a rapid infusion of tourism spend into the local tourism economy.

Small enterprises are, therefore, critically important to our local tourism sector, as they are able to provide a set of extremely diverse and customised experiences. Their sustainability is, however, dependent on a number of factors, including market access and the necessary skills and training that would enable the delivery of a quality visitor experience.

I, therefore, congratulate the Tourism Development Company Limited (TDC) on hosting this first of a kind symposium for small tourism operators in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean region. This initiative of the TDC's Small Tourism Enterprises Project (STEP) opens up the barriers to unlocking the creative and entrepreneurial thinking potential of small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs).

It should be noted that a similar symposium will take place on Friday this week in Tobago.

I would also like to congratulate those of you here today who own or operate businesses – and who – through your enthusiasm, determination and hard work have seized on this invaluable opportunity to retool your skills bank so as to develop additional business opportunities.

Those of you who own and operate small and medium enterprises (SME's) also play a further vital role – that of providing the leadership, mentorship and examples of success for those contemplating and following in your paths as entrepreneurs.

As mentioned by the TDC's Chief Executive Officer moments ago, the operations of your business are what is fuelling and empowering the entrepreneurial spirit of this twin island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Make no mistake; innovation and the entrepreneurial spirit are desperately needed presently. We can do no longer depend on our energy resources; diversification is a **MUST**.

In Trinidad and Tobago the tourism sector has been identified as one of the key contributors to the national economic diversification effort. The vision is to build a world-class tourism destination that delivers sustainable economic growth.

Admittedly, resources are tight – and we are going to have to rely on each other – on our ingenuity to make lemonade out of limes, confidence and our vision for the future.

And all of you embody a spirit that we need in order to take on some of the biggest challenges that we face in this world - the spirit of entrepreneurship, the idea that there are no limits to the human imagination; that ingenuity can overcome what is and create what needs to be.

Everywhere I go, across Trinidad and Tobago I am always amazed to hear from people, but especially young people, that they are ready to start their own business and shape their own destinies. And that is entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship creates new jobs and new businesses ... it is the spark of wealth generation in a nation. It is a viable alternative to a culture of crime and violence and economic dependency that can all too often fill the void when young people cannot envisage a future for themselves.

The challenge is - as so many of you know - it is very often difficult to take those first baby steps. It is sometimes hard to access capital. It is hard sometimes to get the training and the skills to run a business as professionally as it needs to be in this highly competitive world. It is hard to tap into the networks and mentors that can mean the difference between a venture taking off and one that falls flat.

Many of you present here this morning have worked hard to build your businesses over the years. Entrepreneurship at its core is about having a can-do attitude, about showing initiative and resourcefulness, and finally, about making things happen.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we make plans to grow our tourism sector, I look forward to building on the knowledge, commitment and strength of the tourism stakeholders represented, in part, by those of you here today.

For its part, the Ministry of Tourism will continue to provide the nurturing and enabling environment for our citizens to start and sustain their businesses. We will seek to promote a co-ordinated and integrated support across governmental organisations for participation by SMMEs in the local economy.

For the tourism sector to realise its vision, all stakeholders should be empowered through the provision of adequate training and capacity building programmes. Furthermore, market access barriers for small businesses should ideally be removed. Product and business development strategies should be aligned to supply and demands considerations. Quality assurance must also be given first priority.

It is against this background that this outstanding STEP initiative and others such as the STAR service quality program and the TTTIC quality certification programs shine as they address the gaps in entrepreneurship development. I urge SMMEs to make full use of all of these business improvement programs on offer by the TDC and other state agencies.

As I close, I must remind you that Trinidad and Tobago is a nation with a proud past and a promising future. Our economic future is bright. But to get past the present business realities we must be reliant on partnerships and cooperation.

We all know that there is an element of risk in starting and sustaining any business, but with the right idea and an ample amount of hard work, the rewards can be great.

Be ever mindful of the fact that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago appreciate your efforts. Consistent partnering of government and the private sector is the only way we can ensure sustainable tourism growth and an improvement in our tourism performance.

I would like to thank the tourism entrepreneurs here today for helping us to build the tourism sector thus far and look forward to your continued commitment to a better future.

Let a spirit of innovation and creativity fuel your discussions today.

I thank you. May the Almighty God bless and keep you.

November 24, 2015