

MINISTRY OF TOURISM

**OFFICIAL OPEN OF THE LA BREA MUSEUM
& VISITOR CENTRE**

FEATURE ADDRESS

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

Date: Tuesday September 27, 2016
Venue: La Brea Interpretative Centre, La Brea
Time: 11.00am

- The Honourable Nicole Oliverrie, Minister of Energy And Energy Industries and the Member of Parliament for the La Brea area
 - Mrs. Sati Jamraj-Marimuthu, Acting Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism
 - Mr. Richard Duncan, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Tourism Development Company Limited (TDC) and other TDC Board Members
 - Mr. Warren Solomon, Chief Executive Officer (Ag.) of the TDC
 - Mrs. Lisa Bholai, Research and Communications Officer of the National Centre for Persons with Disabilities
 - National Swimming Champion Ms. Shanntol Ince, our special guest of honour today
 - Executive Management of the TDC and Ministry of Tourism
 - The teachers and children of La Brea Roman Catholic Primary School
 - Residents of La Brea and environs
 - Specially Invited Guests
 - Members of the Media
 - Ladies and Gentlemen
-

I wish you a hearty Good Morning!

I am indeed pleased to be here with the tourism stakeholders and the people of La Brea as we officially launch the newly refurbished visitor's centre and museum.

Today - Tuesday September 27 - we unite with nations around the world as we celebrate World Tourism Day.

This special observance is intended to promote awareness of the importance of tourism and its social, cultural, political and economic value. This initiative also seeks to address global challenges outlined in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to highlight the contribution that the tourism sector can make in reaching these goals.

Everyone has the right to access and enjoy tourism products and services on an equal basis.

We all look forward to a long weekend, a holiday, or just some time to take a break; kick back and relax, lime with friends, bond with family, explore new places and participate in exciting activities. The joy, the freedom, the ability to explore, to experience and enjoy all the wonderful things that travel and tourism has to offer, both at home and abroad.

As simple as this seems, millions of people around the world have encountered barriers to participation in tourism.

Differently-abled people, older people, small children and their caretakers, family and friends are among the 1 billion people around the world who face numerous obstacles in accessing the fundamentals of travel and tourism.

This year the theme for World Tourism Day is **TOURISM FOR ALL; PROMOTING UNIVERSAL ACCESSIBILITY.**

This is a call to action, encouraging tourism stakeholders around the world to examine the complexities of accessible tourism, to embrace the concept of integration, and develop and implement policies and strategies to ensure that our tourist destinations, products and services are accessible to all people; regardless of their physical limitations, special abilities, age or circumstance.

Research has shown that accessible tourism has proven to be beneficial to the economic, social and cultural development of a destination. The Australian Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre recently funded an Accessible Tourism Research Agenda that sought to outline a research base on which to develop the supply, demand and coordination/regulation information required to develop the market segment.

This is a huge and promising market indeed. I hope that tourism stakeholders, both private and public, join the Ministry of Tourism, and the Tourism Development Company (TDC) in exploring the opportunities for new investment and new service requirements in this area.

We are here today at the refurbished La Brea Pitch Lake Visitor Facility. A critical feature in the scope of works for this project included ensuring proper access for the differently-abled. This represents one of the many projects to be delivered under this government administration that considered and caters to the needs of the differently-abled.

I admit that we have a long way to go in this regard...but as they say the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.

As Tourism Minister I intend to ensure that all future tourism projects would be designed towards developing a barrier-free destination where all can truly appreciate, experience and enjoy what our twin-island paradise has to offer.

So here we are today at the La Brea Pitch Lake, internationally known as a wonder of the world. Measuring approximately one hundred acres and estimated to be 76 meters deep in the center, this is the largest and most significant pitch lake in the entire world.

This La Brea Pitch Lake attracts over 20,000 visitors annually. People occasionally swim in the waters of the pitch lake. I certainly hope to indulge one day; as I was told that the sulphur content is very therapeutic.

This lake has great social and economic value to residents of La Brea in particular and citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. We can boast that our asphalt has been used on roads and airport runways all over the world.

The Visitor Centre was built by.... In...., it is intended to....

During the 2015-2016 fiscal year, the TDC embarked on a refurbishment exercise of the La Brea Pitch Lake Facility.

These works included the following: -

- Removal and replacement of the perimeter fencing with high security fencing. This included the installation of new gates to the entrance of the Pitch Lake.
- Refurbishment of all public washrooms; including those for the differently-abled.
- Fabrication and installation of the differently-abled access ramp to the museum on the first floor.
- Upgrades to the sewage system including the expansion of waste storage, new waste lines and associated fixtures.
- The entire facility was repainted.
- The design and construction of a cascading water feature.
- Landscaping works were completed.
- Museum repairs were completed on the existing displays along with the installation of additional lighting and painting of the internal walls of the museum.

This represents extensive works and the TDC is to be congratulated.

I am pleased that priority was given to maintenance of this facility, and more so to making this facility accessible to all.

Today, we are reminded that the natural beauty and diversity of our planet should not be exclusive to the able-bodied and that everyone benefits from universal accessibility in tourism.

Here in Trinidad and Tobago we are celebrating the opening of an all access facility and we are also celebrating tourism development in a rural community.

We join the rest of the world by answering the call to action and committing to developing the necessary policies, best practices, regulations and infrastructure to promote a better quality of life for all our citizens and visitors and to truly advance the sector.

Ladies and gentlemen thank you for joining us.

Happy World Tourism Day!

Thank you.

September 28, 2016