

MINISTER SHAMFA CUDJOE

Media Conference-20 Jan16

Introduction of members of the Standing Committee
for the Strategic and Sustainable Development of
Tourism and Launch of the Baseline Survey

S Farrell

2016

Good Afternoon

Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism - Ms Cecilia Greaves-Smith

Permanent Secretary Ministry of Planning and Development- Ms Joanne Deoraj

Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism-Ms Samdai Rampersad

Management and Staff of the Ministry of Tourism and the Tourism Development
Company

Chairman and Members of the newly formed Standing Committee for the
Strategic and Sustainable Development of Tourism

And members of the Media

Thank you for being here and accepting our invitation.

I would like to declare today that the Ministry of Tourism can make the tourist industry a primary source of foreign exchange for Trinidad and Tobago: An important declaration against the background of falling energy prices.

Given the potential of the tourism sector to create employment, alleviate poverty, earn foreign exchange and stimulate the creation of inter-industry linkages with agriculture, construction, manufacturing, sports and other service industries, it is the focus of the Ministry of Tourism and my focus to advance the development of the tourism sector.

The building of a viable tourism sector requires strong partnerships with the private sector and most importantly, the inclusion and support of the national community. In achieving this, the Ministry of Tourism provides strategic direction to the Tourism Development Company which is our executing and implementing agency.

In order to provide direction that is enabling, we are committed to using an approach outlined by our Prime Minister, Dr Keith Rowley: an approach that is

data based and evidence driven. Decisions should be guided by findings and not feelings.

In light of this, there are two landmark announcements today:

- ✓ First, the launch of the Baseline Survey Project which represents our endorsement of this data based and evidence driven approach to support effective decision-making. The intention is for the Ministry to be able to scientifically determine the existing contribution of the tourism sector to the national economy and further develop policies and programmes to improve that overall contribution. At the end of this survey the Ministry will be enabled to develop key tourism indicators to track the industry's contribution to the economy.

There is a copy of the Visitor Expenditure Survey in your packages so that you can see the kinds of information we are seeking to obtain in the first instance.

There are other survey documents that will be used up until August 2016.

When the results are collated at the end of September 2016, the findings will be shared with those who operate in the industry so that they may improve their

product offerings and are consequently better positioned to attract the repeat tourist and interest new ones.

This approach represents obtaining information from the visitor's perspective, an important perspective.

The second announcement is about action we have taken to look at tourism not so much from the visitor side but more about an industry perspective.

We ask ourselves, if we want to increase foreign exchange through Tourism what can we do better?

Are we adhering to international best practice?

Are we providing an enabling environment for Tourism operators?

Is the overarching level of support sufficient for the heightened role that Tourism must play in our economy?

In order to address these and other questions the Standing Committee for the Strategic and Sustainable Development of Tourism and a Stakeholder's Forum have been established with Cabinet approval, to explore, investigate and

enquire into the workings of the elements that make up the Tourism sector and bring into high relief those areas that require attention.

The Stakeholder's Forum provides an avenue for all interested industry stakeholders to discuss and report on operational issues that may be impacting the industry. The Forum will provide for large and small hoteliers, tour operators, tour guides, tourist transport operators, community tourism groups, tourism sites managers/operators, tourism service providers, Regional Corporation representatives, and similar others to voice their issues and challenges. The Forum will meet once per month in the first instance and quarterly thereafter, as work progresses, and will be chaired by the Chairman of the TDC. It is expected that close synergies will be fostered between the Standing Committee and the Stakeholders Forum so as to expedite efforts and successes in building the sector.

Although our economy is facing the challenge of volatile energy prices, Tourism has proven to be a resilient product worldwide, with an average annual increase of six percent to 2020 forecast by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation.

These are exciting times for the tourist industry and the work of both the Standing Committee and the Stakeholder's Forum can *position Trinidad and Tobago to benefit from the continuous expansion in Tourism worldwide.*

Therefore it gives me very great pleasure to introduce to you the Chairman and Members of the Standing Committee for the Strategic and Sustainable Development of Tourism.

The Chairman of the Committee is the Head, Department of Tourism Management Studies, University of the West Indies, Dr Acolla Cameron.

Dr Cameron is an expert in her field and I am very pleased that she has agreed to lead on this Committee.

The other members of the Committee are

Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Cecilia Greaves -Smith

Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Ms Samdai Rampersad

Administrator, Division of Tourism and Transport, Tobago House of Assembly

Chairman, Tourism Development Company

Chief Executive Officer Tourism Development Company

Chief Executive Officer, InvesTT

Tourism Consultant, Mr Cliff Hamilton

Executive Director, TTHTI

General Manager. Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

General Manager, Port Operations- Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

Assistant Commissioner of Police

Representative, Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts

Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs

Manager, Business Development Unit, Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development.

The Standing Committee is expected to meet monthly in the first instance.

Making Tourism a major income earner to buttress our economy is not an achievement that is possible without the support and cooperation of our citizens.

We must all see the value of the revenue that is possible from Tourism and cooperate with the Tourism thrust; whether it is being courteous and polite or just simply welcoming. That is one part, the other is that the tourism industry can be a source of wide spread sustainable employment- it is possible.

Getting all our citizens involved in the Tourism effort is of singular importance not only in diversifying the economy away from energy but in creating a rallying point to motivate and stimulate action on the part of our citizens.

We must all take the responsibility to make our country a welcoming and attractive destination. *We can become involved in the industry. We can refine our Tourism product. Communities can develop heritage sites or create attractions to engage the tourist.*

You can expect that the Ministry of Tourism will continue to do its part in advancing and developing the Tourist industry while we encourage our citizens and our communities to come forward and do their part, so that Tourism can become a stabilising force to our economy.

It is a prospect and a possibility. Our efforts are geared at making it a reality.

I thank you