

**MINISTRY OF TOURISM**

**TRINIDAD HOTELS, RESTAURANTS & TOURISM ASSOCIATION**

**TOURISM AWARDS GALA  
DINNER AND DANCE**

**FEATURE ADDRESS**

**MINISTER OF TOURISM  
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

**Date: Saturday September 26, 2015**  
**Venue: Hilton Trinidad and Conference Centre, Port of Spain**  
**Time: 6.00pm**

- Dr. The Honourable Nyan Gadsby-Dolly, Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts
- Assemblyman Mrs. Tracey Ann Davidson Celestine, Deputy Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly and Secretary for Tourism and Transportation in the Tobago House of Assembly
- Mr. Allen Chastanet, our esteemed Guest of Honour, and a former Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation in St. Lucia and renowned hotel entrepreneur
- Mr. Guy Joseph, Member of Parliament for Castries South East in St. Lucia
- Mrs. Cecilia Greaves-Smith, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism and other Permanent Secretaries present
- Mr. Umesh Rampersad, Board Chairman Tourism Development Company
- Mrs. Samdai Rampersad, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism
- Mr. Andrew Welch, President of the Trinidad Hotels Restaurants and Tourism Association (simply referred to as THRTA) and other Board Members
- Mr. Christopher James, President of the Tobago Hotel and Tourism Association
- Mr. William Aguiton, Chairman Board of Governors Trinidad and Tobago Hospitality and Tourism Institute (otherwise referred to as TTHTI) and other TTHTI Board Members

- Mr. Shaun Mc Grath, newly elected President of the Tourism Association of the Guyana Hotel and Tourism Association. Coincidentally Mr. Mc Grath is the Chief Executive Officer of Cara Hotels (Guyana and Trinidad)
  - Event Sponsors
  - Presidents and other Representatives of the various Tourism Associations
  - Distinguished Awardees for Tourism Excellence, our very special guests this evening
  - Members of the Media,
  - Ladies and Gentlemen
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Good evening and thank you, Mr. Paul Keens Douglas, for your kind words and such a warm introduction. Your stellar reputation as a Caribbean storyteller is certainly well-deserved.

I am extremely humbled to have been invited to attend the second annual Tourism Awards Ceremony hosted by the Trinidad Hotels Restaurants and Tourism Association (THRTA). This Awards Ceremony celebrates our commitment to excellence and recognises the trail blazers and shining stars of the hospitality and tourism industry.

These are the individuals that are setting the tone and raising the bar in terms of improving our product and enhancing the experience for all who choose to visit Terrific Trinidad and Tranquil Tobago.

It is a signal event in many ways. Tonight, I make my maiden contribution as the Minister of Tourism addressing the broad representational interests within the industry since I took up my new appointment two (2) weeks ago. It is also the first time that these awards have been opened to all registered tourism stakeholders' organisations across the country.

This evening, we are privileged to be able to salute this outstanding group of professionals who have selflessly given of their time and their intellectual and professional efforts to the important mission of building our tourism sector. All of you have made your community and your country proud and you have etched your names in the annals of tourism history.

The Trinidad Hotels, Restaurants and Tourism Association has had a long and distinguished history as an industry grouping which champions the cause of its members. But make no mistake about it; this is not your average group of lobbyists.

The THRTA encourages its members to raise the bar and lead by example. I must applaud the Association for initiating this most worthwhile industry awards scheme which exemplifies the growth and maturity of the tourism and hospitality sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

We all now feel a strong sense of pride, hope and expectancy as we witness the sector increasingly take control of its own destiny against the backdrop of the dynamic economic environment in which we now live.

I am especially heartened by the efforts currently being made to bring the Tobago Hotel Association and the THRTA closer together so as to coordinate programs to the benefit of each island destination and the nation as a whole. I make the commitment that this sort of symbiotic collaborative relationship must also happen at the national level.

I recognise that the relationships between the Ministry of Tourism, the Tourism Development Company and the Tobago House of Assembly have had its challenges in the recent past. I am prepared to work with all parties to iron out these differences and formulate a partnership that will place Trinidad and also Tobago in an indomitable tourism position.

The Trinidad Hotels, Restaurants and Tourism Association also has my assurance that the Ministry of Tourism will continue to support ventures such as this awards ceremony and any project that will redound positively to the benefit of the local tourism industry.

The Trinidad Hotels, Restaurants and Tourism Association must also be commended for inviting St. Lucia's former Minister of Tourism and a "giant" in Caribbean tourism, Allan Chastanet, to share his enviable wealth of experience. We gained so much from his presentation that clearly shows his powerful passion and commitment to the advancement of a truly authentic and engaging Caribbean tourism industry.

Let us please give Mr. Chastanet another hearty round of applause.

Ladies and gentlemen,

My interactions over the last two (2) weeks or so with a wide range of tourism stakeholders have revealed a wealth of expertise, commitment and dedication to the industry. I am also very keenly aware of the frustrations within the industry. Over the last five (5) years there were four (4) different Ministers with responsibility for Tourism, multiple changes of TDC Boards and Permanent Secretaries and a lack of direction and leadership as it relates to tourism action plans and policies.

And quite frankly, that situation did not augur well for the industry.

But, ladies and gentlemen, I am here to tell you that these pages have turned and we are now on a new chapter in our nation's development and in the advancement of the tourism industry.

This present Government is fully aware that tourism can unleash vast opportunities that can play a very important part in driving the economic diversification of Trinidad and Tobago. It is against this background that we have identified tourism as one of the lynchpins of our national economic diversification strategy; driven by a strong and effective public/private sector partnership and robust policy that promote job creation, wealth generation and overall economic expansion.

**We intend to work hard to transform Trinidad and Tobago into an exciting tourism location and a magnet for tourism investment.**

As we examine our neighbours in the global community, we see farsighted countries acknowledging that an economy based on natural resources must at some point use the revenue from those resources to build a comprehensive sustainable economy based upon comparative advantage. One need only look at the major investments made by countries such as Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Qatar. They are taking the resources derived from the sale of oil and reinvesting those resources into flourishing tourism based economies.

The impact of the fluctuating oil and energy prices, the finite nature of our energy resources, the rise of the US Dollar over the Euro and the rapidly changing international economic scenario have all ensured that diversification is a **MUST** for Trinidad and Tobago. Tourism must take its rightful place side by side with the energy sector so as to safeguard our future and promote a more prosperous nation.

**From the trunk to the driver's seat, all eyes are on tourism. Once again, the stone that the builders refused has now become the head cornerstone.**

**We have no other alternative.**

The time for talk and pontificating about the long acknowledged value and benefits about the tourism industry has long gone. How much longer do we intend to talk? What more is there to say? We can all agree that time is not on our side. All we can afford at this juncture is action.

I am committed to ensuring that the Ministry of Tourism develops clear and concise tourism policy objectives in collaboration with all of our tourism partners and that **the tourism voice is heard, clearly and strongly, in the Cabinet.**

I have mandated my Ministry to come up with a Tourism Growth Strategy in short measure; prioritising the major projects that will be undertaken on a yearly basis. This will be a comprehensive action plan that will focus on the incredible economic potential that exists in the tourism goldmine that sits in this country. All tourism stakeholders must play a key role in the design and development of this Strategy and contribute their views on what is required to ensure a viable, cost competitive and sustainable tourism sector.

Moreover, I have reconvened the Trinidad Tourism Standing Committee comprising of senior representatives from various tourism stakeholder groups to inform on the strategic direction of the industry. This Committee will tackle major issues impacting upon tourism development such as airlift, marketing, product development, destination management and creating an enabling investment climate. Under my direct Chairmanship, the Tourism Standing Committee will meet religiously on a monthly basis.

Our marketing campaigns now have to really hit the mark. It is a very competitive world out there when it comes to the tourism dollar. Our marketing has to be utterly and absolutely spot-on so as to increase visitor arrivals and tourists spend to transform our economy. We want to work with all of our stakeholders to ensure that we achieve just that.

**Moreover, these marketing campaigns have to be based on empirical scientific research rather than trial and error.**

In terms of our offerings, there is no doubt that if we are to increase our market competitiveness, we must develop our tourism product in such a manner that it stands out in a very crowded international marketplace. It is for this reason that the Ministry intends to guide the TDC towards developing “brand propositions” - iconic and signature programs that will stand out internationally and give Trinidad and Tobago the edge above its competitors in the region.

We must commit to investing in better infrastructure, improved signage, cleaner streets, communities and beaches, safer towns and villages, quality service and more value for money. Tourism and transport are very closely interlinked. We must provide sophisticated and reliable airlift into both Trinidad and Tobago as well as to drastically improve the inter island connectivity to make both islands more accessible to the international community.

I wholeheartedly support the view of the THRTA’s President, Andrew Welch, that we must invest in training those who wish to join the hospitality sector so that we could have a workforce that is attuned to the expectations of visitors who will be gracing our shores. More importantly, though, we must embark upon a comprehensive nationwide awareness campaign to explain just how the visitor economy works and how we can all play an important role to ensure that together we succeed in reaping the full harvest of this industry.

In this global competitive environment the importance of timely and accurate information is paramount. We need to examine and analyse both our existing customers and our potential customers. The Ministry of Tourism is already working closely with our partners within both the public and private sectors to ensure that such information is available on a timely basis and is putting in place appropriate mechanisms to ensure that such information is readily available and easily accessible.

We intend to get these things **right** so as to realise the full economic potential of the tourism sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

But tourism is about more than economics.

We must be proud of what we have to offer.

Because we are a great people and a great nation; second to none in the world and the crème of the crop in the Caribbean.

*We have it*

*Indian Dances and Chutney Music*

*Tambu Bambu and Calypso*

*Sauce Doubles in Curepe and Debe*

*Dirt Oven Bread in Castara or Les Coteaux*

*Snorkelling in Store Bay and Photo Shoots at the Pitch Lake*

*We have it*

*Business Meetings at the Hyatt*

*Liming and Dining on Ariapita Avenue*

*We Have It*

*Anything you name it*

*We have it*

*This is where the milk meets the honey*

*Terrific Trinidad*

*Tranquil Tobago*

*Talk about value for your money*

We have so much to be proud of, so much to share with each other, and so much to show off to the rest of the world.

So, imagine you are a visitor arriving in this country for the first time or you are a third generation Caribbean Diaspora. You come in from the airport, you book into a hotel, the meals, the room that you occupy, the sites and attractions that you see, the experience that you have in the first 24 hours can leave a lasting impression. The Ministry of Tourism wants to work with the industry players to make sure that this visitor experience, in every sense, will drive people to return – to look at Trinidad and Tobago as a place to rejuvenate, to enjoy enthralling cultural experiences, to host business meetings, to invest, and to come back again for another holiday.

What I have just briefly outlined is just the framework of our tourism agenda. The role of the Government in the tourism sector is to support businesses to do what they do best by creating the right operating environment that promotes strong and sustainable growth.

**My mandate as Minister of Tourism is to ensure that tourism maintains its prominence as an engine for boosting growth in the national economy.** I am committed to making that happen.

I must also emphasise that government cannot do it all – the private sector must step up to the plate and bear its fair share of the responsibility of creating a vibrant and profitable tourism industry.

I am confident that together we can realise the tourism potential that is so clearly epitomised within this year's World Tourism Day's international theme of **"One Billion Tourists, One Billion Opportunities"**. The challenges are immense, but I know that we can obtain the winning edge; once the tourism stakeholders and government work closely together.

Once we keep our commitments and well get through this together ... it won't be a stroll in the park .... But we will walk this journey together.

Now is the time, then, to stand together, be open to new ideas and new opportunities. Now is the time to be open to a new Minister in her 30's.

It is time for all of us to renew partnerships and to forge new ones. Let us work for the good of this industry that we all love so much. Let's not be timid. Let's not be afraid to put everything on the table. After all you have invested how dare you be timid ... this is not for the faint-hearted, weak or skeptical.

**This is for the wayfarers; this is for the trailblazers, this is for the visionary leaders... plain and simple. This is for the people ready to get the job done.**

In closing, permit me once again congratulate the Trinidad Hotels, Restaurants and Tourism Association on the exceptional work that it is doing. I also thank all awardees for their commitment to our sector and hope that you will continue to explore, dream and work to ensure that tourism retains its rightful place at the heart of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago.

Let us all rise to that occasion.

Let's take on the challenge

We can and we will do this

Hand in hand, Step by Step

Working and winning together

Thank you once again for the opportunity to celebrate with you tonight.

Enjoy the rest of your evening. God Bless the entire Tourism Family and our nation.

September 24, 2015