

MINISTRY OF TOURISM

**LAUNCH OF STAY TO GET AWAY 2017  
ADVENTURE BEGINS AT HOME**

**FEATURE ADDRESS**

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

**Date:** Thursday June 29, 2017

**Venue:** House of Angostura, Corner Eastern Main Road and Trinity Avenue,  
Laventille

**Time:** 7.00pm

- Dr. the Honourable Nyan Gadsby-Dolly, Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts
  - Mrs. Ethel Berkley, former THA Administrator
  - Members of the Diplomatic Corps
  - Mrs. Vidiah Ramkhelawan, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Tourism
  - Mr Cliff Hamilton, Interim Chief Executive Officer of the Tourism Development Company Limited
  - Presidents of the various Tourism Organisations
  - Representatives of the community and tourism action groups
  - Officials and Staff of the Ministry of Tourism
  - Members of the Media
  - Ladies and gentlemen
- 

Good evening

I am happy to be here today! It is indeed an exciting time for us in the Ministry of Tourism as we launch our 2017 Staycation campaign entitled Stay to Get Away.

This Year has been identified as the Year of Sustainable Tourism by the United Nations, and dubbed as the Year of Adventure by the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO). It is therefore timely, relevant and fitting to execute this unique and exciting initiative as we ring in the July/August vacation season once again.

Stay to Get Away 2017 is in essence, a domestic tourism campaign geared at:-

- Encouraging locals and residents to experience the tourism product in new and exciting ways.
- Helping our stakeholders to maintain “heads in beds” and stimulate economic activity during slow periods.
- Providing marketing support for our service providers
- Enhancing tourism awareness and appreciation through public education and first-hand experiences by our locals.

Against the backdrop of a challenging economic environment, more and more residents are electing to take vacations within Trinidad and Tobago rather than abroad. Our records show that the appeal of the staycation, the long weekend getaway, and the domestic experience has increased significantly over recent years.

In addition, there seems to be a greater appreciation, awareness, and demand for what Trinidad and Tobago has to offer. We boast of flora, fauna, foods, festivals, and exciting events ... all compelling enough to rival what is available anywhere in the world. Complemented by the most warm and friendly Caribbean hospitality beyond our guests' imagination

The stay to get away initiative provides the opportunity for us to experience and enjoy all that is beautiful and breath-taking about our twin islands. Our Tourism is Our business, and I expect that as our local residents continue to develop an interest in and passion for our attractions, the tourism

equation would become more and more complete. We will then be encouraged to protect, preserve, enhance and invest in all that God has bestowed upon us, which we often take for granted.

There is a significant contribution that domestic tourism can make to the development of any nation, through economic expansion, job creation, revenue generation and poverty alleviation. Trinidad and Tobago is no different. Therefore, even as we develop and manage our destination to provide an authentic and exhilarating experience for the international tourist, we should do the same to garner the support of our fellow citizens.

Domestic tourism is a multi-million dollar industry, worth nearly one billion dollars annually, contributing substantially to the overall performance of the sector. In fact, many tourism businesses would not survive if it were not for the year round patronage of domestic visitors.

A 2015 survey conducted by the Tourism Development Company revealed that over 278,000 overnight domestic trips were taken by Trinidad and Tobago households over the survey period at an average of 2 trips per household; an increase of 6.3% from 2013.

The leisure market that includes sports, recreation, cultural activities and visiting friends and relatives accounted for 35% of all domestic trips. Business, conferences, conventions and retreats were some of the other reasons for domestic travel.

An average of TTD \$293.90 was spent each day on an overnight trip, approximating a total overnight domestic expenditure of over TTD \$862,268,817 million.

382,761 persons travelled from Trinidad to Tobago. 123,619 persons from Tobago to Trinidad. Trinidadian residents vacationing in Tobago spent over TTD 500 million, which translates to about 69% of Total Domestic Travel Expenditure.

Persons from Tobago visiting Trinidad spent approximately TTD 189 million.

This kind of business activity could only redound to the benefit of our service providers, business operators, tourism stakeholders and the wider economy by extension.

This means business for the small buses, maxis and taxi operators, for the double vendors in Debe, the coconut water man on the savannah, the pannist, the calypso entertainer, the carpenter and builders upgrading the rooms, more working hours for the house keeper, the waitress at the restaurant...and the list goes on and on.

Yes, the international traveller generates foreign currency inflows and that is critical. But when holiday makers stay here, we retain the hard currency that would have been spent abroad. And as simple as it seems, it keeps many businesses afloat during the low and lonely periods.

So your staycation redistributes your currency within the boundaries of your own country. You are therefore, important to our tourism, important to our economy, important to the development of our country.

As we rediscover what is arresting and engaging about our tourism product we can maximise on the opportunity to obtain feedback from our local clientele, and we can refine, rebrand and repackage what we present to the international visitor. Further we could engender a sense of pride in our people and present a more patriotic, passionate and hospitable host to our visitors.

We have to find our Bake and Shark delightful first before we could convince our visitors. We have to get lost in a river lime at Caura River first before we could tell our friends in the Americas. We have to revel in the beauty and splendour of our own festivals first before we could sell the Tobago heritage or Trinidad Carnival, the greatest show on earth to the rest of the world.

We take for granted that everybody would know about the beauty of our Botanic Gardens, or the novelty of the Caroni Bird Sanctuary, or that everybody knows about the tranquillity of Toco, Pristine Pigeon Point or the Wild Fowl Trust or the La Brea Pitch Lake.

Our natural treasures, our rich heritage remain a timeless magnet for visitors from abroad who return again and again to experience terrific Trinidad and tranquil Tobago.

How dare we sit at the cusp of the capital of paradise and not bask in the boldness, brilliance and beauty of all our country has to offer?

Our tourism is our business, and we have to take pride in ourselves before we could attract others.

The 2016 Stay to Get Away initiative was a success and participating accommodation properties, tour operators and other tourism stakeholders are highly enthused about the possibilities for this year. Last year we partnered with: -

- Small Tourism Accommodation Owners Association of Trinidad and Tobago (STAOTT)
- The National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago
- Lopinot Country Style Community Tourism
- Lopinot Tourism Association
- Professional Airline Training Solutions (PROATS)
- Trinidad and Tobago Tourist Transport Service Association
- Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC)

Roughly 5,860 persons went on tours for the month of August (4.8% above the target of 5,590). The most popular tours were offered by National Trust and the PTSC's Know your Country. Nelson Island and La Brea Pitch Lake tours were also a hit.

This year we are getting off to an early start to maximise the entire July/August period. Earlier on this year, the Ministry of Tourism launched the

first ever tourism mobile application, Go TrinBago, as well as created the LIME 365 marketing campaign that positions Trinidad and Tobago as a destination where there is something to do every single day of the year.

The Stay to Get Away 2017 time frame has also been extended and will run from 1 July 2017 to August 31st 2017. This year, there is a diverse offering of properties, tours and experiences on offer that will whet the appetite of even the most seasoned traveller.

This initiative is being well supported by our tourism sector stakeholders. They have really risen to the occasion to offer affordable packages to budget conscious domestic tourists that guarantee value for money.

We have partnered with The Trinidad and Tobago Incoming Tour Operators Association (TITTOA). The Trinidad Hotel Restaurants and Tourism Association (THRTA) have thrown their full support behind this initiative as well as The Small Tourism Accommodation Owners Association (STAOTT).

Hotels in Trinidad participating in Stay to Get Away 2017 include: -

- Asa Wright Nature Centre
- Hyatt Regency Trinidad
- Kapok Hotel
- Coblenz Inn Boutique Hotel
- L'Orchidee Boutique Hotel
- Trade Winds Hotel

- Cara Suites Hotel and Conference Centre
- The Cascadia Hotel and Conference Centre
- Courtyard by Marriott
- Crews Inn Hotel and Yachting Centre
- Forty Winks Inn

A number of Tobago based entities have also come on-board and will be participating in Stay to Get Away 2017. These include

- Coco Reef Resort and Spa;
- Magdalena Grand Beach and Golf Resort;
- Shepherd's Inn Tobago;
- Kariwak Holistic Haven;
- Blue Waters Inn.

Several community based groups and other entities will also participate this year. These include: -

- Lopinot Tourism Association
- Lopinot Pastora Community
- Asa Wright Nature Centre
- Brasso Seco Paria Tourism Action Committee
- Nature Seekers
- National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago
- Trinidad and Tobago Tourist Transport Service Association (TTTTSA)
- Fondes Amandes Community Reforestation Project (FACRP)

- Angostura Ltd.

Tours on offer to the general public include:

TOURS ON OFFER FOR STAYCATION 2017:

#### NATURE TOURS

- Magic Mermaid Pool
- Rio Seco Splash
- Fascinating Turtle Watching Tours

#### BIRDING TOURS

- Nature Heritage of the Northern Range (includes an accommodation package)

#### HERITAGE TOURS

- Five Islands Restoration Tours
- Five Museums of Port of Spain
- Return to Nelson Island
- Butterfly Museum
- Re-discover your Spanish Heritage
- Walking Tours of Port of Spain
- The Merikins Experience

#### COCOA & COFFEE HERITAGE

- Life As It Used to Be – Brasso Seco Experience

## CULTURAL IMMERSION

- Forest Reforestation
- Trinbago Traditions

Caribbean Airlines has also indicated that they will add several additional flights for the July-August period that would augur well for the success of the initiative as well.

I believe that our young people have a critical role to play in changing our attitude, our posture and our perspective on tourism. Therefore, this Ministry has placed tremendous focus on developing programmes that impact our nation's youth.

Last year, we concentrated on school caravans. This year, the Ministry of Tourism worked in collaboration with our country's first Junior Minister of Tourism, Mr La Quan Perry of Manzanilla Secondary School.

Next week we start with the youth symposium followed by a week of tours conducted by the Trinidad and Tobago Tour Guide Association; specifically geared towards educating our young people.

That would end with the Junior Minister of Tourism Competition and then we kick into high gear with a myriad of tours executed by TITOA and other community based service providers.

It is finally a pleasure to have TTITOA on board. THRTA is also on board along with a number of stakeholders from Tobago as we continue to extend invitations and add to the number of stakeholders participating in this year's initiative

We have come a long way and we have an even longer way to go. We intend to extend the range of tour options to include all segments of Trinidad and Tobago's society; including our senior citizens and differently able. We are also attempting to get other specialty tours developed that epitomise Trinidad and Tobago such as a Foodie Tours.

This year we are witnessing increased interest from the public and private sector. This campaign may experience challenges as government expeditiously moves to solve the inter island transportation woes. But those problems are being addressed and we expect some relief soon.

Based on travel patterns and behaviour and on reports from our stakeholders we could all agree that domestic tourism has a critical role to play in the future of the sector. As we develop our domestic tourism strategy, we intend to promote domestic tourism all year round through our new tourism entities. If there was ever a time to stay home and enjoy your vacation, that time is now.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The development of the domestic tourism portfolio is as important as that of the international one for the growth of tourism in Trinidad and Tobago.

To all our stakeholders, I say we have to advance this sector together. The private sector must do its work and the government must diligently play its role as facilitator.

As we embark on a new chapter, towards a more prosperous future...as I always say it won't always be easy, but we will get there together. The government, stakeholders and citizens must walk hand in hand. Advancing the tourism agenda is going to take all of us. And we must do all in our power to leave no one behind.

We thank everyone who have worked on ensuring that this project comes into reality; including the TDC employees who assisted in the early stages, Best wishes to all stakeholders.

I thank you.

June 30, 2017