

**NOTES FROM A PRESENTATION AT
THE CARIBBEAN SYMPOSIUM OF THE INTERNATIONAL
DOWNTOWN ASSOCIATION
HILTON BRITISH COLONIAL RESORT
NASSAU, THE BAHAMAS**

1. Thank you for inviting the Caribbean Tourism Organization to be here. We are delighted that what started so well in Curacao is continuing and that we have, besides representation from The Bahamas and Curacao, representatives from Anguilla, Barbados and Jamaica. I would wish to thank Lillian De Geus and Don Werdekker for delivering a program and hospitality in Curacao that was so good that we launched this alliance. I would also wish to pay special tribute to the large delegation from Anguilla. They are people who walk the talk as faithfully as any other destination in our region.
2. I stole a story from Jackson Burnside some years ago which told of a group of thirsty sailors becalmed off the coast of South America who, after signaling desperately to a passing ship their need for fresh water several times, finally followed the instruction of the signalers of the passing vessel which was: "Drop your bucket where you are". On pulling their buckets up, they found that they were filled with fresh water because unbeknownst to them, their ship had become becalmed at the mouth of a large fresh water river.
3. That is precisely what IDA is encouraging the people of the Caribbean to do. Drop our buckets where we are. There is a perfect convergence of the goals of IDA, the desire of all peoples throughout the Caribbean and the stated goals of the Ministry of Tourism all of which wish to see more of the place incorporated in the products and services developed and enjoyed by visitors and residents alike. All of this is enshrined in the agreement that was signed between CTO and IDA that has become known as the Willemstad Accord.
4. A recent study of levels of national happiness placed The Bahamas in the top five of all the nations of the world in its happiness index. The BBC, in reporting on this story, cited another study that showed that 81% of people surveyed would wish their governments to focus more on increasing their levels of happiness instead of focusing on growing GDP. Given the result of this survey, it is most surprising that only one nation on earth speaks about happiness in their founding documents

and that is the United States with its reference to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”.

5. Now we would guess that the level of national happiness is a function of the culture of the people and one reason to go to such a place would be to tap into the happiness of that people. Surely, if one could immerse himself/herself in the culture of The Bahamas, one could tap into the deep source of that happiness.
6. That is the basic premise of a broad based group of Bahamians that have been working on a downtown development project here in Nassau for the past two years. They recognize that many references to the word “culture” leads to activities that are boring to the uninitiated. They recognize that going to most museums is the penance that we pay to show people that we are sophisticated. This group recognizes that culture must be presented in such a way that citizens validate and authenticate it and visitors get and are moved by it. That is the only way for visitors to tap into Bahamian happiness in a concentrated way.
7. Atlantis is the best example that I have seen in our part of the world of the establishment of a highly concentrated, highly interconnected experience operating around a central theme. This group of Bahamians proposes to do the same based on experiences derived from and celebrated by Bahamian culture. I spent some time yesterday immersing myself in their proposal so that I could convey a few, a very few, of the elements to you today as an example of what can be done to make the redevelopment of a downtown culture-based yet exciting and focused.
8. In their space, which covers some 70-100 acres, they propose to recreate “Over the Hill”. There was a time when visitors to Nassau spent their time at a series of clubs deep in the heart of the “Over the Hill” area where the people of Nassau lived. The names of those clubs evoke such wonderful memories: “The Lemon Tree”, “The Zanzibar”, “The Cat & Fiddle”, “The King & Knights”, “Peanuts Taylor’s Drumbeat Club”. We recall that taking visitors to these clubs was an enormous source of Bahamian pride.
9. Vernice Walkine and David Johnson of the Ministry of Tourism know that a mandatory inclusion in every piece of advertising is Junkanoo. Yet, very few visitors ever get an opportunity to involve themselves in the real thing. That is why Junkanoo will be held in this special place

every night at midnight a time that is true to the magic and mystery of the real event.

10. Adults and children will be able to experience a hurricane and see why Bahamian children become excited when a hurricane is coming even while adults become properly grave and concerned. There will be a hammock bar to celebrate the discovery of the hammock in The Bahamas where there will be no stools. All patrons will be required to lay and receive their libation via a “drip” and anyone standing will be required to leave. Those leaving can take a Bahamian workboat to their next stop while feeling the low volume pulsating sounds of Junkanoo that synchronizes the heartbeat of everyone to maximize happiness. As is said in the BahaMen song “Dance to the Junkanoo”, “even when your auntie lookin’ very happy, That’s the way Junkanoo go”.
11. Authentic Bahamian products and “The Real Straw Market” will occupy a prominent place in the town square. The experience of piracy in The Bahamas will be delivered in a new and exciting way. The amphitheatre will feature the National Youth Choir and visitors and Bahamians will get to experience a ride on a jitney in song and understand the appeal of the suitor for “Mr Walker’s Daughter” as well as understand why lending a friend money in The Bahamas is our form of “adventure capital”.
12. Rake and scrape music which many say is the official music of The Bahamas will be heard in its full glory even as we celebrate and trace the provenance of some of today’s most prominent guitarists to the genius of Joseph Spence of Andros in The Bahamas.
13. We will all come to know why Bahamian women run so fast as to win gold medals in the Olympics and why Bahamian men jump so high as to have a longstanding, well documented and well deserved global reputation in this area.
14. . . .and prominently displayed in the middle of the town square will be our version of “Big Ben” . . .a large clock showing “Bahamian time” . . . one will notice that the clock has no second hand and no minute hand. It has only an hour hand and the readings around the side would go from “One’ish” to “Twelve’ish”. Absence of stress certainly contributes to national happiness.

15. As much as anything else this place will serve to reconnect the young people of The Bahamas to their past in a way that competes with the many modern distractions that occupy so much of their time. The litmus test of the success of this place will be the desire by the young and older people of The Bahamas to let this be the first place that they take their visiting friends and relatives.
16. This proposed development from this broad based group of Bahamians will cost in the neighbourhood of eighty million dollars to develop in full and there is already a high level of interest among investors because of the expressed interest of cruise ship companies in the need to have more items of interest for their passengers in Nassau. This development also proposes to avoid the bane of most downtown developments which is the need to convince a large number of individual owners to buy into the proposal. They have identified a space that can be developed under their central control in the same way that Atlantis has achieved its success so rapidly.
17. I have become convinced that the fastest way to accelerate the development of downtowns throughout the Caribbean is through the “demonstration effect”. I tell people that the only book that I now want to author is “The Sociology of Small Communities”. In our communities, the first task of any proposal is to “show me where in the world this has been done already” and the second requirement is “show me a place similar to mine where it has also been successful”. These are our tasks because every country throughout the Caribbean has the capacity to not only develop their downtown, they have the opportunity to use that redevelopment to reconnect with their cultures in a most exciting and engaging way. The power and beauty of the Caribbean comes from its diversity so we are delighted that most member countries are not inclined to copy others; they are wedded to creating products that are in their own image and likeness.
18. Finally, I recall that the mission of the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism used to be and might still be “to create, sell and deliver satisfying experiences, satisfying in every way to the people who live in The Bahamas, satisfying to those who invest in the tourism industry and satisfying to visitors”. The mission statement is deliberately in that order because it anchors all of its developments to the place. That should be the ultimate aim of downtown developments throughout our region.