

**ADDRESS TO BE DELIVERED BY
THE HON. RICHARD L. SEALY, M.P.
MINISTER
OF TOURISM & INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT, BARBADOS
&
CHAIRMAN,
CARIBBEAN TOURISM ORGANISATION**

**AT THE OPENING CEREMONY
FOR THE CARIBBEAN TOURISM ORGANISATION'S
STATE OF THE INDUSTRY CONFERENCE 2016**

**ON WEDNESDAY 14TH SEPTEMBER, 2016 AT 7:00 P.M.
AT THE HILTON BARBADOS RESORT**

“Honouring Our Legacy: Defining our Future”

Salutations:

- The Hon. Allan Chastenet, Prime Minister of St Lucia
- Deputy Premier of Cayman Islands, Hon. Moses Kirk Connell
- Fellow Ministers and Commissioners of Tourism
- Tha Hon. Cardigan Connor, Parliamentary Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office of Anguilla

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- Mr. David Scowsill, President and CEO, World Travel & Tourism Council
- Mr. Hugh Riley, Secretary General, Caribbean Tourism Organisation
- Chief Executive Officers and Directors of National Tourism Organisations
- Delegates
- Specially Invited Guests
- Members of the Media
- Ladies and Gentlemen

A very good evening to you all,

It is for me a privilege and pleasure to host you all here in Barbados. Colleagues from the region, and numerous tourism players from beyond, this Conference is taking place at a very timely juncture for tourism destinations like ours.

There is at present buzz on about the Caribbean as the ideal holiday and business destination. We therefore have a unique opportunity to

reflect more intently on the paths which we follow to create unique experiences while ensuring the sustainability of our industry.

A simple audit of where we are now and where we plan to go is in order. Early successes in tourism contributed to a stable economy – suddenly Caribbean destinations were sought after for holidays and honeymoons. We had something of our own to offer to the world.

Movement from the dependency on agriculture as the mainstay of the economy; fast forward to present times; we have seen significant changes in the expectations and desires of our visitors. The sun-seekers of the sixties and seventies have become the Experience tourists...persons whose focus is on living the local experience, on doing activities on their own, rather than having things done for them.

The new focus on “the experience” is being seen across the spectrum of visitors, from the budget traveller to the luxury traveller. We will hear more on one aspect of this tomorrow when we will have an opportunity to hear about “Delivering the Luxury Experience”.

There is also changing consumer behaviour including intense research before booking. This research more often than not includes reading blogs, and other social media sites. The Caribbean is now exposed to an “unseen world” through social media.

Along with changing consumer behaviour we are also dealing with local populations with their own expectations of the industry. We have a sense of who we are, what we have to offer and what we wish to

achieve. The point at which there is an intersection between the desires of our own populations and the expectations of our visitors is the point at which we have a truly sustainable tourism product. That sustainability will also depend on considerations for the environment as part of our tourism planning.

Over the years, Caribbean tourism faced its fair share of challenges, with the sector experiencing several crises from the '70s to the '90s, from which it has emerged stronger and more resilient, despite the death knell sounded by naysayers. These downturns gave rise to new products, services and methodologies, whilst new markets were explored.

The dawn of the millennium did not mark an end to the challenges that the tourism industry had faced. In fact, it could be said that the challenges have occurred with increasing regularity over the last sixteen years, with some being concurrent. From terrorism in source markets to outbreaks of new communicable diseases; weather-related threats and financial and economic downturns.

Other regions such as Pacific, Asia, the Middle East and Africa have emerged offering competition to the product being provided in the Caribbean.

In the face of all of this, the region recorded 28.7 million visitor arrivals in 2015, an increase of 7 percent. With this performance, the Caribbean has outpaced international tourism arrivals which grew by 4.4 percent in 2015. We must commend ourselves on achieving

healthy growth in this challenging, competitive industry. This year we are on target to reach 30 million arrivals which is a very healthy state of affairs!

As you are all aware, increased arrivals must be coupled by the concomitant provision of increased room stock. For our part in Barbados, which most of you would have heard about earlier today, we have plans on stream to increase our room stock by some 2306 by 2019, with a planned investment of USD 1.0 billion.

I think the CTO and all of us can take pride in and feel a sense of achievement knowing that we are responding to the calls of the regional sector.

So what then is the mandate for future Caribbean Tourism? The lexicon now includes terms such as Airbnb, Uber, Brexit and Cuba. These are all realities which we must grasp and come to grips with. There is need for us to carefully define our future, drawing on our multiple strengths, whilst continuing to recognize and honour the legacy which has led the Caribbean to its successes over the years.

Building on this legacy of resilience, collaboration and consistent re-engineering of our tourism products, it is the vision of the CTO that we will be able to successfully deal with the new and emerging issues and resulting in the Caribbean becoming one of the most desirable warm weather destinations by 2017.

The CTO has set itself a number of goals in order to realize this vision: to be **Stronger, to be Better and to be Better Known**; which is in itself a continuum. What I can say is that the institution has commenced the process and is determined to execute its mandate.

In its process of re-engineering, the CTO has established a business development unit; it has launched the Tourism Information Management System (TIMS) and is currently testing the Tourism Satellite Account Facilitation Tool in several pilot countries. As part of its quest to provide better service to its members, the CTO has been involved in producing tourism statistics, conscious as we are of, the saying: “what gets measured gets done”.

It has also been able to increase sponsorship funding from non-government membership for consumer and trade events and has increased donations to the CTO Foundation from \$26,000 in 2015 to \$33, 815 to date in 2016.

The CTO has also made progress in the hemispheric initiative on sustainable tourism development, in collaboration with the Inter-American Institute of Cooperation in Agriculture (IICA) and other food tourism stakeholders; it has increased public networking and is playing an increasing role in the area of advocacy, selling confidence in regional destinations and bringing strong attention to the Caribbean brand.

Efforts made include the work of the UK Chapter of the CTO to penetrate the European market with success being reaped in the addition of three new UK Chapter Members bringing the total to 88 and

through the hosting of roadshows in Scandinavia, Ireland and a bespoke travel roadshow in UK.

The revised business model seeks to see issues being tracked to resolution, improved service delivery, the convening of membership discussions with countries the engagement of strategic partners and the finalization of a strategic sponsorship proposal.

I might add that the CTO is also working towards expanding its membership to include countries of the Caribbean Basin, bearing in mind the parameters of its current Constitution.

What I can say though is that the CTO's efforts to define the future of the regional sector must be paralleled by complementary action at national levels. In particular, the evolution of the sector has to be reflected in ongoing partnerships between public and private sector agencies in particular through collaboration with other agencies which have technical expertise in specific areas. For example, CTO collaborates with the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), the UWI following the discovery of Zika cases in Caribbean countries and contributed to the prevention and mitigation effort through its public service announcements to communicate prevention and control measures to residents and visitors. One activity under this project has been the formation of a Steering Committee which will focus on promoting a healthy tourism workforce and the reduction of employer health-related costs across the region.

It is also working with the UWI and the Caribbean Regional Organisation for Standards and Quality (CROSQ) to establish Operational, Health, Safety and Environmental standards and a certification and recognition systems for the industry among others.

Ladies and gentlemen, the programme planned for this Conference therefore deliberately aims to bring to light the diverse issues faced by Caribbean Tourism for all of us as we aim to place the region at the forefront of global tourism.

I look forward to free and frank discussions as we contemplate these important topics over the next two days. I take this opportunity to thank you one and all for the opportunity to serve you as Chairman and for your assistance and cooperation in carrying out this important work.

Tourism will into the foreseeable future, continue to be a common thread in the sustainability of this region. I therefore urge all of you to ensure that it is not left only to the dictates of players in this sector alone; it is to be embraced with a sense of responsibility by each and every one of us, to ensure its continued success.

I would like to take this opportunity also to invite you to explore Barbados and to savour its natural and culinary delights as we stand on the cusp of marking our 50th year of nationhood on 30th November, 2016.

Again let me say that we are delighted to have you here with us. Do enjoy your stay!

I thank you.