

## Comments by the Ministry of Tourism

### **First Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on Examination into the Current Expenditure of Ministries and Departments under three (3) Sub-Heads: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Development Programme – Consolidated Fund and Infrastructural Development Fund**

#### **Head 35 – Ministry of Tourism**

##### **I. Domestic Tourism**

The Committee noted the Ministry of Tourism was in collaboration with the private sector, tour operators and owners of accommodation sites to strengthen the promotion of sites and local hotels in both Trinidad and Tobago.

Recommendations: Ministry of Tourism –

- Develops the infrastructure of existing local sites.
- Ensures safety of all local sites in accordance with best practice.
- Ensures routine maintenance and upgrade of local sites.
- Ensures local hotels and guest houses meet international standards.

#### **Develops the infrastructure of existing local sites.**

The National Tourism Policy (2010) mandates the Tourism Development Company Limited (TDC) to inter alia, develop and enhance the tourism product in Trinidad, which “shall be innovative, differentiated and offer the visitor high value and an internationally competitive visitor experience”. The Policy also encourages the use of a participatory approach, with stakeholders such as, local communities, the private sector and Non-Governmental Organizations, (NGOs), to partner towards development and ownership of the tourism industry.

At present, there are five (5) sites vested in the TDC, namely the Maracas Beach Facility, Las Cuevas Beach Facility, Manzanilla Beach Resort Facility, Vessigny Beach Facility and the La Brea Pitch Lake Visitor Facility. In 2015, Cabinet approved the transfer of the Lopinot Historical Complex to the Ministry of Tourism and a review of the extent of the responsibility is being undertaken. The five original facilities are continuously enhanced, refurbished and maintained by the TDC utilising funds allocated under the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP). Major works conducted include the following:

- Rehabilitation of Waste Water Treatment Systems at all sites.
- Continuous water quality monitoring at all beach sites.
- Rebuilding of the sea wall at Manzanilla.
- Renovation of restaurants at Las Cuevas, Manzanilla, and Vessigny beaches.
- Major rehabilitation of all buildings and infrastructure at Manzanilla to mitigate against coastal erosion.
- General refurbishment of all buildings at all beach facilities.
- Rehabilitation and reopening of the Museum at the La Brea Pitch Visitor Centre.

- Construction of an access ramp for the physically challenged to enter the upper floor, which houses the Museum at the La Brea Pitch Lake Facility.
- Construction of general access for the physically challenged at all beach sites.
- Purchase of amphibious wheel chair for Maracas.

The Las Cuevas Beach is the only Blue Flag certified Beach in the Southern English speaking Caribbean and was awarded the international certification for a second year in 2016.

In addition to the above, the Ministry of Tourism has the responsibility for the Maracas Beach Facility Improvement Project (MBFIP). Funding for this project is under the Infrastructure Development Fund (IDF). The MBFIP is aimed at the re-development of the Maracas Beach Facility and Cabinet has agreed to its execution in three work packages as follows:

- Package I- Surcharging, road works and upgrade of drainage and car park facilities to be done by PURE.
- Package II- Building works comprising- and III to be done by NIDCO.
  - A - Design and construction of vending facilities and washroom facilities
  - B - Renovation and expansion of existing Lifeguard Facility to accommodate employees of the Tourism Development Company Limited (TDC) and employees of the Ministry of National Security
  - C - Design and construction of a boardwalk, Police Post, Ticket Booths and Landscaping
- Package III - Construction of a new waste water treatment plant and upgrade of sewer and water lines.

### **Community Tourism**

In addition to the sites and attractions vested in the TDC, the Ministry and the TDC have previously partnered with Regional Corporations and community groups to develop and enhance sites and attractions through strategic partnerships.

### **Ensures safety of all local sites in accordance with best practices.**

Regular site visits are conducted to all vested facilities to identify, make recommendations and mitigate against potential hazards and threats. In fiscal 2017, the TDC will seek to install CCTV cameras for improved security at sites vested under the TDC based on the availability of funds.

### **Ensures routine maintenance and upgrade of local sites.**

As indicated above, there are five (5) sites vested in the TDC. General repairs and maintenance are carried out at all vested sites with projects being prioritised based on the ability of funds, the need to improve the visitor experience and increase the revenue earning capacity of the site.

## II. Certification of Tourism Programme Operators – TTTIC

The Committee noted:

- The Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Industry Certification (TTTIC) programme was a national certification programme designed to ensure that tourism operators and service providers in Trinidad and Tobago’s tourism sector conformed to prescribed standards of service in their operations.
- These standards were developed through the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards (TTBS). The National Standards and Certification Body, as well as through extensive stakeholder input.
- The Ministry of Tourism developed this programme to ensure that all tour operators were certified.
- The certification was not mandatory, and the Ministry was working towards making the programme mandatory.

Recommendations: The Ministry of Tourism –

- Ensures that Certification of Tour Operators and Service Providers become mandatory throughout Trinidad and Tobago by December 2016.
- Conducts frequent and rigorous checks to ensure all tour operators and service providers are certified.
- Ensures certification is renewable at specific intervals to be determined based on best practice.

### **Ensures that Certification of Tour Operators and Service Providers become mandatory throughout Trinidad and Tobago by December 2016.**

The Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Industry Certification (TTTIC) programme is a national tourism certification programme designed to ensure that operators and service providers in the tourism industry conform to national standards of quality in their operations. TTTIC is a **voluntary programme**, and was developed under a tripartite agreement between the Tourism Industrial Development Company (TIDCO), the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards (TTBS) and the Department of Tourism, Tobago House of Assembly (THA) in 2001.

Tourism operators in Trinidad apply for certification through the TDC but must undergo an audit conducted by the TTBS. These audits are based on national standards which are produced by the TTBS with stakeholder input. Currently, there are eleven (11) national standards for tourism services and operations which provides minimum requirements for operators and service proprietors in meeting the level of service acceptable to the international tourist trade.

The listed standard below is applicable to hotel and guesthouses:

- **TTS 22 Part 1: 2012 Requirements for Tourist Accommodation – Part 1: Hotels and Guesthouses**

Additional accommodation standards include the:

- **TTS 22 Part 2: 2014 Requirements for Tourist Accommodation – Part 2: Bed and Breakfast and Self Catering Facilities**
- **TTS 22 Part 3: 2014 Requirements for Tourist Accommodation – Part 3: Villas**

The effectiveness of the TTTIC programme has been hindered by a number of issues which include, the voluntary nature of the programme, the absence of legislation which mandates tourism operators to be compliant with TTTIC, obtaining of statutory approvals by tourism operators for eligibility into the programme and the absence of a working arrangement in respect of implementation of the TTTIC programme in Tobago. Consequently, this undermines attempts at improving the standards and quality of the tourism product which directly impact on the destination's ability to attract new and repeat visitors.

The Ministry of Tourism recognizes the need for the strengthening of legislation for compulsory licensing and the establishment of an Authority to oversee the licensing and regulation process. In this regard, the Ministry has proposed the establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Regulatory and Licensing Authority (TTRLA). The TTRLA will seek to develop a regulated tourism sector through established regulations and best practice standards by:

- establishing compulsory licensing of all tourism plant, operators, service providers;
- enacting laws to strengthen compliance by tourism operators and establishments;
- instituting proper standards within the sector and
- creating a regulated environment for tourism investment.

The Ministry was allocated \$500,000 in fiscal 2017 to execute Phase I of the project which includes:

- the engagement of a consultant to review existing legislation and best practices and to develop a regulatory and licensing authority model for Trinidad and Tobago; and
- hosting of five stakeholder consultations to obtain feedback on recommended regulatory and licensing authority model for Trinidad and Tobago.

### **Conducts frequent and rigorous checks to ensure all tour operators and service providers are certified**

The TDC is responsible for conducting advisory visits while the TTBS conducts final audits to issue certification to tourism properties. Advisory visits are made to operators and service providers based on:

- **Requests by potential applicants:** The officer visits the property, conducts a mock audit and provides recommendations based on the standard to bridge gaps that can hinder certification.

- **Re-visits:** Re-visits are conducted at properties that would have previously participated in the TTTIC programme. The officer reviews the standard with the operator and service provider and encourages re-application in support of the programme.
- **Site visits:** Site visits serve as an awareness outreach for those operators who may not be familiar with the TTTIC programme.

**Ensures certification is renewable at specific intervals to be determined based on the best practice**

TTTIC certification covers a one (1) year period and operators are invited to reapply upon expiration of their certificate.

### **III. Product Development**

The Ministry of Tourism informed the Committee of the need to refresh and revitalise the Caribbean Product in view of the competition beyond the region. The Ministry highlighted the need to collaborate with all the other Ministries, related organisations and Regional Corporations to develop and strengthen the product to become more suitably internationally.

Recommendations: The Ministry of Tourism –

- Develops a clear Vision for Tourism and also develop and operationalises a Strategic Plan for the Sector.
- Establishes a team/group to focus on researching new ways in which the country can revitalise its Tourism Industry.
- Finds new innovations that would create a greater appeal to tourists.
- Partners with other Ministries and agencies including the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Local Government, the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts and the Tourism Development Company (TDC) to re-develop the Tourism Industry which would allow the local industry to achieve international standards.

**Develops a clear Vision for Tourism and also develop and operationalises a Strategic Plan for the Sector**

#### **National Tourism Policy**

The National Tourism Policy of Trinidad and Tobago was approved in October 2010 and provides a framework that allows for the sustainable development and management of the tourism industry. The Policy commits to the use of sustainable tourism as a tool for the economic, socio-cultural and environmental development of Trinidad and Tobago for the benefit of all citizens. The Ministry and the TDC have commenced a strategic planning process. The Strategic Plans are to be finalised and approved by Cabinet by February, 2017.

**Establishes a team/group to focus on researching new ways in which the country can revitalise its Tourism Industry**

## **Standing Committee for the Strategic and Sustainable Development of Tourism in Trinidad**

In January 2016, Cabinet appointed a Standing Committee for the Strategic and Sustainable Development of Tourism in Trinidad. This Committee comprises members from key Ministries and partners in the industry. It is charged with the responsibility to provide high-level technical support and advice for the development of the tourism industry and to ensure that strategies are aligned to the Government Policy Framework.

The Ministry of Tourism mandated the Tourism Standing Committee to propose the strategic direction for tourism over the period 2016-2020. To this end, the Tourism Standing Committee developed a Tourism Road Map which has as its focus the identification and analysis of key niche areas where the destination has demonstrated competence and a competitive advantage, with the potential to generate the most attractive returns.

### **Tourism Stakeholders Forum**

The Stakeholders Forum is also Cabinet appointed and was established to provide an avenue for all interested industry stakeholders to discuss and report on operational issues that may be impacting the industry. The Forum includes representatives from large and small hoteliers, tour operators, tour guides, tourist transport operators, community tourism groups, tourism sites managers/operators, tourism service providers and Regional Corporations. The Forum allows industry operators to voice their issues and challenges, and what they foresee are the needs of the sector. These are then brought to the attention of the Tourism Standing Committee and Ministry for action.

### **Finds new innovations that would create a greater appeal to tourists.**

### **Tourism Road Map**

In an effort to facilitate economic transformation, the Ministry of Tourism, together with the Standing Committee for the Strategic and Sustainable Development of Tourism in Trinidad has developed a comprehensive Road Map for the Tourism Sector which, as indicated has as its focus the identification and analysis of key niche areas where the destination has demonstrated competence and a competitive advantage, with the potential to generate the most attractive returns. These areas include hosting of Meetings and Conferences throughout the year, expansion of cruise tourism and improved tour offerings. The Road Map has to be approved by Cabinet.

### **Partners with other Ministries and agencies including the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Local Government, the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts and the Tourism Development Company (TDC) to re-develop the Tourism Industry which would allow the local industry to achieve international standards**

Linkages with other sectors of the economy is critical to the ability of the tourism industry to achieve its full potential. The Ministry recognises the importance of for linkages and stakeholder relations and has taken a collaborative approach with respect to the following:

- Development of sub-policies for Eco-tourism, Sport and Community-based tourism.
- Representation on the Standing Committee for the Strategic and Sustainable Development of Tourism in Trinidad includes representatives of the Ministries of Community Development, Culture and the Arts; Sport and Youth Affairs; Labour and Small Enterprise Development; Works and Transport; National Security; and InvesTT.
- Fortnightly meetings with the Ministers of Tourism, Local Government and Rural Development, as well as, the Minister of Works and Transport; TDC; National Infrastructure Development Company Ltd (NIDCO) and the Programme for Upgrading Road Efficiency (PURE) Division of the Ministry of Works and Transport in the implementation of the Maracas Beach Facility Improvement Project.
- Collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries in the implementation of developmental works at the Maracas Beach Fishing Village.
- Further partnerships can be developed with the Ministries of Agriculture in respect of the supply of local produce for the tourism sector and the banking sector with respect to the provision of financial services as it relates to businesses in the tourism sector.
- Partnership with the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government to develop and maintain sites and attractions within communities.