

The Future of Tourism in St.Lucia

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Tourism is no more than the expansion of a country or locality's market size through the presence of visitors who do not normally reside in that location. That presence therefore offers prospects for any local business or individual who produces a competitive good or service to benefit from such market expansion. Full appreciation and acknowledgement of that simple concept would help determine the future of tourism in St.Lucia.

The tourism sector is made up of a number of industries, sub-sectors and activities including the accommodation sub-sector; air, maritime and ground transportation sub-sectors, restaurants and dining establishments, arts & crafts industry, retail and wholesale distribution, duty-free shopping, car rental, destination management companies, tour guides, tour operators, travel agents, water sports operators etc. Those activities and industries that make up the tourism sector are necessarily connected through forward and backward linkages to the other major sectors within the economy. The extent of those linkages depends on the country's market size and its level of economic development.

However, it is in the interest of all tourism enterprises to ensure a healthy economic and social environment by seeking, as much as is feasible, to strengthen those linkages by facilitating the development and sustainability of domestic enterprises through, inter alia, the deliberate cultivation of mutually beneficial commercial relationships. Indeed, the evidence is clear that some of the most successful tourism businesses in St.Lucia and the Caribbean are generally those that have the highest local content in their product. Such success derives from their understanding of the significance of cultural authenticity and uniqueness to the well-informed, high net worth visitor. Just as well, those enterprises act in their own enlightened self-interest in seeking to bolster the economic and social stability of the communities in which they operate. They recognize that an economically robust community provides the most conducive environment for their commercial success.

While, like all other sectors, the tourism sector is susceptible to the vagaries of economic conditions in source markets, tourism is even more vulnerable to economic, political or social instability, whether real or perceived. Thus, the sustainability of the sector rests on three main pillars, namely: (1) the preservation of the physical environment through, among other things, maintaining the right ecological balance and ensuring the efficient use of natural resources; (2) economic sustainability, which includes realizing an adequate return on investment for both local and foreign investors and attaining the requisite international competitiveness; and (3) social stability, as defined by positive local attitudes and perceptions of tourism, which itself relates to the extent of participation and involvement of locals and residents in the tourism sector's processes and benefits.

Tourism is all about providing the visitor with a unique and memorable experience and the development of all sectors of the economy would almost always benefit the tourism sector, the wider economy and the visitor's overall experience. Indeed, improved political and corporate governance, enhanced education, development of the cultural industries, more efficient service delivery mechanisms in the public and private sectors, superior business facilitation systems, progressive social transformation practices, more rigorous infrastructural upgrades and improved strategies for agricultural and manufacturing sector advancement would all, in some way, redound to the benefit and comfort of the visitor, the citizenry and the tourism sector. This, in essence, is what is required to ensure a bright and stable future for tourism, and indeed for the entire economy, in St.Lucia.