

**Address by the Most Hon P.J. Patterson
at the Official Re-opening of
Morgan's Harbour Hotel and Marina
Port Royal
Friday, March 24, 2006 at 5:00 p.m.**

SALUTATIONS

Rev. Leslie Hoo Sang,

Rector, St. Peter's Anglican Church, Port Royal

Mr. Neville Blythe

Chairman - Morgan's Harbour Hotel and Marina

Ms Janice Blackwood

General Manager - Morgan's Harbour Hotel and Marina

Ladies and Gentlemen ...

For over half a century, Morgan's Harbour has stood as a landmark at the entrance of historic Port Royal. After the somewhat lonely journey along the Palisadoes strip, the property's solid walls and old-style gates have long provided a welcome sight, seeming to signify one's arrival into another world, with the promise of an experience that can be duplicated nowhere else on earth.

Morgan's Harbour has quietly endured. It prides itself as representing a meeting of the old and the new. This is true. Morgan's Harbour is steeped in the history of Port Royal. At the same time, from its exceptional vantage point, it has always appeared to be looking out over the waters of the Kingston harbour at the many developments and changes in our wider society.

Today, under the Chairmanship of Mr. Neville Blythe, we welcome the opening of this newly refurbished and expanded facility, and its stated mission of *'returning to the limelight in Port Royal, with the understanding that the hotel's success will also be the success of the Port Royal community'* and, I daresay, beyond.

The timing of the relaunch of Morgan's Harbour could not be better! We are experiencing exciting times. Changes abound. There is no better time for entrepreneurial endeavour as our country focuses on accelerated growth, economic diversification and development.

As is now well known, Jamaica recorded its best year ever in 2005, with nearly 1.48 million stopover visitors, in line with the 4.6% increase in arrivals recorded for the region as a whole last year.

When I assumed my first Ministerial portfolio as Minister of Industry and Tourism in 1972, Stopover arrivals to the island that year were just under 408,000 and cruise passengers were under 72,000.

Last year, Jamaica also recorded the best-ever figures for cruise passengers with arrivals of 1.136 million. And here, let me pause to offer my personal commendation to our team from the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management which, on Wednesday of this week responded well to the crisis on board the *Star Princess*, which experienced a tragic fire while on route to Jamaica.

The response of our emergency services, tourism officials and industry personnel was such as to considerably lessen the trauma to the passengers and project the island's increasing ability to manage crisis in an industry which is extremely sensitive to such occurrences.

Current international investment in Jamaica's tourism industry is unprecedented. Over 1,100 hotel rooms will come on stream this year.

Approved developments slated to come on stream in the short to medium term, number between 5,000 and 6,000 new hotel rooms. Opportunities abound for Jamaicans to benefit from these developments through local investment, business linkages with tourism, and increased job openings.

The concern in this dynamic environment is for carefully structured and sustainable growth for Jamaica's tourism industry based on a first-class, diversified product that differentiates us in the increasingly competitive regional and international marketplace. In achieving this objective, we have long identified the critical role of our built heritage assets in order to create a tourism product which is reflective of the rich history, culture and aspirations of our Jamaican people.

It is a matter of great satisfaction to me that an instrument, the *Tourism Enhancement Fund* has been put in place to assist in ensuring the systematic implementation of the programmes and projects detailed in Jamaica's Master Plan for sustainable Tourism Development.

Of great interest to many of us here is the Master Plan's vision for the redevelopment of the Port Royal/Spanish Town/Kingston heritage triangle as a priority, given the existence in this area of a large number of the country's significant heritage resources. This defined geographical area possesses a wealth of historical sites to constitute a tremendous international attraction. We must embark on the pace of the redevelopment programme for this valuable "heritage district" and remove whatever challenges and constraints exist.

However, there are many reasons for my conviction that the time is now at hand for the fulfillment of the promise for development of this triangle of Jamaica's premier heritage sites.

Earlier this week, the Cabinet gave its approval of a proposal to establish the Spanish Town Redevelopment Company to manage the comprehensive and integrated redevelopment of Spanish Town.

The primary goal is to abate decline and dereliction and improve the physical and economic conditions in the urban fence primarily through the development of heritage tourism in this historic district. Physical, commercial and social components will dovetail through private and public enterprise to enhance the prospects for the residents, and, at last, prepare Spanish Town to be in a position to share its rich heritage with visitors to this country.

Similarly, the programme for the redevelopment of Port Royal can no longer brook delays which have been a consequence of the high costs associated with requirements for this exceptional archaeological site, one of very few of its kind in the world.

We have to obtain optimum combination of protection for this incomparable heritage asset while at the same time achieving authentic redevelopment and commercial viability.

Considerable effort has gone into laying the groundwork of defining the required scope of redevelopment of reference, and optimum planning strategy for Port Royal as a historic district. We believe that development plans for a project of this importance and magnitude, as for those in the industry as a whole, must reflect a holistic approach, encompassing the varied critical components such as land use, transportation and housing.

The injection of new investment into a strategic property like Morgan's Harbour, provides a boost to realizing the vision for Port Royal, even as sources of funding the overall redevelopment programme for the old city are pursued with renewed urgency.

There will be no better opportunity to showcase tourism as a vehicle for conservation and development of the country's heritage assets, as a powerful catalyst for urban renewal and general redevelopment than over the next year as the island and the Caribbean region prepare to host the international community for the ICC World Cup Cricket 2007.

Kingston, as hosts to the semi-finals of this prestigious event, has itself embarked on a determined effort of regain its rightful place as the cultural capital of the Caribbean, and come into its own, once again, as a premier visitor destination.

Some 100,000 additional visitors are expected in the region for this event. It is thought that an additional 30,000 visitors, (plus our usual winter tourist arrivals) may visit Jamaica during the event and there is much discussion as to where and how they are to be accommodated. Kingston currently has less than 2,200 hotel rooms.

However, the highway development, in making travel time across the island far shorter and more comfortable, will greatly facilitate the expected influx of visitors. There is no question that cricket fans will be commuting across the island and they and their families will even now be looking at possible itineraries of places to see and things to do when they are not at cricket.

Overseas investors are showing a great deal of confidence in the future of Jamaica's economy as a whole, and in the prospects for tourism on this island. Our entrepreneurs, large and small must ensure now their place in the expansion of this industry of ours.

I congratulate the Chairman, directors, management and staff of Morgan's Harbour Hotel and Marina on your foresight and actions in embarking on the repositioning of this property to play its role as an important catalyst for development in Port Royal and its environs initially.

The effects of the great earthquake of 1692 were by no means confined to Port Royal, but were felt across the harbour, and, indeed, across the island. Evidence of those reverberations is still visible as far away as Judgment Cliff in St. Thomas where a whole mountainside moved on that fateful day. I have no doubt that activities here at Morgan's Harbour will reverberate widely and positively in our concentrated effort to propel Jamaica along the path to growth that is measurable, inclusive, and sustainable.