

Remarks by
The Most Hon. P.J. Patterson, Prime Minister, Jamaica
at
Caribbean Marketplace Opening Ceremony
Sunday, January 9, 2005, 7:00 p.m.
Half Moon, Montego Bay

Salutations.

It is a great pleasure for me to add my own words of welcome to all of you on my own behalf and on behalf of the Government and people of Jamaica.

It is indeed heartening to see this large number of distinguished guests and participants here this evening. We are happy that you were able to join us for this Conference which we have the honour of hosting here in Montego Bay. Your presence is indicative of the high level of importance you, like all of us in the Tourism Industry here, place on this critical sector of the economy of the entire Caribbean Region.

The long-standing cooperation of players in the Caribbean Tourism sector is yet another indicator that the peoples of the Region recognize that when we stand together in unity we are a stronger voice and a greater force in this complex global geo-political and economic environment.

Most of us have enjoyed some measure of success in our tourism industry. Here in Jamaica we put our best minds to work as we sought to develop a medium term strategy to guide us as we seek to realize its full potential. In consultation with all the stakeholders, we created our Master Plan for Tourism which clearly sets out our road map. We are well advanced in its implementation with the development of modern infrastructure, the addition of a large number of rooms and new attractions.

Not only here in Jamaica but in the entire Caribbean there exists potential for far greater growth. As an unrepentant regionalist, I am positive that this growth will be best achieved by deeper and stronger ties between the tourism sectors of all the member countries and organizations that comprise the CHA.

The global growth of travel and tourism was extraordinary in 2004. Now one of the largest industries worldwide, it accounts for seven percent of the world's export of goods and services. Consequently, it is important to understand the magnitude of its impact on the world at large and, therefore, the significance of managing our own regional industry with a global outlook.

When Caribbean Heads met for the Tourism Summit in The Bahamas, immediately following the tragic events of September 11, 2001, we were confronted with a downswing in the world economy and the prospect of economic collapse in the light of a reduction in travel everywhere. We in the Caribbean have benefited from a remarkable resurgence. The World Tourism Organization last November reported that worldwide tourist arrivals broke all records last year, with an unprecedented growth rate of 12 percent for the period of January through August. Projected growth for the entire year was 10 percent.

While forecasts for most regions of the world are lower for 2005, the global industry is expected to continue to grow at a steady pace. We are all trying to cope with the horrors of the catastrophic earthquake in Indonesia, which has changed the landscape of that region forever. We are clearly not yet aware of what impact this incomprehensible disaster will have in human as well as in economic terms overall.

In the Caribbean, we are not strangers to the effects of natural disasters. Our hearts go out to all nations now experiencing the devastation of this latest tragedy of such staggering proportions. For all of us, it underscores the fragility of this precious planet and our ongoing responsibility as guardians to constantly protect and nurture it.

We have always been sensitive to the critical importance of environmental protection even as we develop plans and ventures in our travel and tourism industry. Also key to our planning for 2005 and beyond are community-based development and an understanding of growth markets.

So let us now take a brief look at the Caribbean Region in relation to those key factors.

Throughout the Caribbean countries, there is a common need for travel and hospitality alliances to work together to strengthen the resource base on which **the sustainability of our tourism industry** so delicately rests. The Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism (CAST), which is the environmental subsidiary of the CHA, plays a key role in promoting environmental best practices and goals of sustainable tourism. In a recent communication to Caribbean tourism partners, CAST cited a report by the organization "Reefs at Risk" alerting us to the need for an increased focus on minimizing land-based activities that threaten our reefs. CAST also reminds us that action is required throughout the region in order to achieve the UN's Seventh Millennium Development Goal to ensure environmental sustainability by 2015.

As a pioneer of environmental sustainability in tourism, the Caribbean Region continues to implement and support initiatives to promote the "greening" of hotels and destinations.

Important areas where projects are ongoing include waste minimization; management of fresh water resources; land-use planning and management; transport; energy efficiency, conservation and management; and environmental impact assessments for new construction.

Community involvement in the growth and maturing of the tourism industry in areas like educational and adventure tourism has brought the region to the forefront of global tourism. This success is reflected by statistics in a report from the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), which projected revenues of US\$40.3 billion in economic activity directly generated by the travel and tourism industry for the Caribbean Region in 2004. This figure includes an anticipated 2.4 million jobs created by tourism, representing 15.5 percent of total employment in the region.

In October last year, the WTO reported an increase of eight percent in tourist arrivals to the Caribbean in the period of January through August 2004. Clearly, our cultural and geographic diversity, our accessibility and our unique character as one extraordinary group of islands together make us a powerful force among the leading travel destinations for tourists worldwide.

To continue this growth curve, an **understanding of growth markets** for the Caribbean Region is imperative. Geographically, our appeal has no bounds. We in Jamaica are thrilled to report that China has now granted our country "Approved Destination Status." This development is a major milestone in opening up the entire Caribbean Region to a potentially huge market and valuable new source for tourism revenue. China is now the world's seventh-largest nation of international tourism spenders.

Business travel is, of course, an enormously important growth area, and the U.S. represents a major percentage of our income in this market. According to a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit development organization, Americans have taken 144 million business trips in 2004, representing an increase of four percent over the figures for 2003. And the forecast for 2005 projects an increase to 149 million business trips.

As we look ahead, there are a number of exciting opportunities coming up for marketing the Caribbean Region. Among them, of course, is the **2007 World Cup Cricket** tournament that will bring cricket fans and travelling sports enthusiasts from every continent to our shores. In planning for that, let's also be sure to plan for the future ... by building smartly ... by using this perfect opportunity to improve our infrastructure ... by designing structures that are not only spectacular for this important event, but which will also serve us well for ongoing productivity and endure for proud use by generations to come.

To ensure continued success in that all-important future, let us never for one minute forget that **our greatest asset is our people**. Let us ensure the security and well-being of our citizens through a focus in all our tourism initiatives on involving local individual and group participation to the maximum. Tourism must essentially support our communities, generating profitable activity on the home front in order to strengthen every one of the Caribbean nations for a healthy and productive future.

In that direction, the signing of the initial phase of the **Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME)** in mid-February is a big step forward for the Caribbean region.

- The five Bills passed to date by the Jamaican Parliament cover the free movement of goods, capital and people, as well as the movement of certain categories of professionals and workers within the single market space.

The CSME will create a market of some six million nationals of the Region, with outreach to 15 million consumers spread over 2,000 miles. It represents a giant move towards achieving sustained economic development in the Caribbean territories, based on international competitiveness, coordinated economic and foreign policies and functional cooperation. It represents empowerment for the people of the Caribbean.

It will also be the platform to launch a major advance of the Tourism Industry throughout the Caribbean. Jamaica intends to capitalise on this. We aim to make Montego Bay a main gateway to the Caribbean for the rest of the world.

In closing, let me underscore an important lesson that the fruitful yet turbulent year 2004 must surely teach us all. The Caribbean and neighbouring Florida suffered sad losses through the onslaught of hurricanes. Many nations have drained precious resources to repair the damage to infrastructure.

While we have no way of avoiding these natural disasters, **we must all work together in building the region's preparedness** for coping in the future with such catastrophic events. Let us now move forward to:

- support the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency, which is already working towards establishing an early warning system for tsunamis in the region.
- implement educational programs that will teach residents to minimize potential damage in advance.
- design a plan of action that anticipates danger and informs of best practices for dealing with any impact.
- and, of most importance, let us share the knowledge acquired through national experience for the common good of all Caribbean countries.

On a purely joyful note, please join me now in a **first viewing of the new Jamaica Tourist Board logo**, specially designed in celebration of the organization's 50th anniversary. I am delighted to have the opportunity of this auspicious occasion, and the pleasure of your company, for our unveiling. So here we are

(LOGO IS UNVEILED.)

Thank you all for your participation in this year's Caribbean Marketplace, and for joining us here in Montego Bay. It is my hope that this exchange of buyers and sellers will be profitable for both sides as you seize the opportunities which are now open in view of the rebound in the travel industry we are enjoying, particularly in our Region.

I wish you all an enjoyable and productive stay, and look forward to welcoming you back again and again to Jamaica.