

July 5<sup>th</sup> 2019

## Tourism on the move

### Introduction

There is no place like the spectacular islands of the state called St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The 32 islands and cays present a unique gathering of a culture that says everything about the people of this country called Vincentians. This is a country that the ruling party, the Unity Labour Party, has done tremendous work in ensuring that there is modern day growth and development in the country.

By the same token, the opposition New Democratic Party has done its hardest, to dismantle all the progressive things that the ULP has introduced. The NDP opposed the international airport project at Argyle, and even wrote a letter to ECCAA, asking that body not to approve the operations of the airport. All this at a time when the country's economy, was focusing on Tourism, along with the other sectors of agriculture and services.

Tourism has been improving by leaps and bounds, thanks mainly to the international airport at Argyle. The ULP administration has embarked on a new policy, aimed at transforming the tourism sector, through a number of initiatives. For example the government has embarked on a drive to increase the hotel rooms in the country. So there will be the construction of a hotel in the Mt. Wynne Peters Hope area, along with the Blacksand resort now under construction. Then the government will build a 93 room hotel in the Diamond area.

### Mid 2019 figures

Last week the Tourism Authority announced that there was a seven percent increase in visitor arrivals to the state, for the period January to May 2019. The figures show that this year, some 232,916 visitors came to our shores during this period, as compared to 217,453 visitors for the same period in 2018. Arrivals by air also showed an increase over the same period this year, with a total of 36,757 in 2019 as compared to 34,335 in 2018.

Visitor arrivals by yacht also increased in the period January to May 2019, by seven point six percent. And of course, there is the cruise ship sector, which also saw an increase, with some 158,233 passengers coming here during the period January to May 2019, as compare to 147,878 during the same period last year. All this points to the increasingly hard work being done by the Tourism Authority,

to market this country as a destination of value, in the face of attempts by the opposition NDP to bad mouth our lovely country.

It is truly a remarkable effort by the Tourism Authority to market the country in places like Canada and the United States, and their efforts have been aided by the presence of the international airport at Argyle. Without this project, the number of economic opportunities which have arisen, and of which citizens are enjoying, would not have existed.

So for example, the proposed Rainforest project at Calliaqua was driven in part by the international airport. So too is the Black Sands villa and resort in the Peters Hope area. The naysayers, the prophets of gloom and doom, the bad talkers of our country, and the political opportunists, have been embarrassed, and found to be irrevocably wrong. By any yardstick, the international airport at Argyle is a game changing success.

### **Further Development**

While we relax and enjoy the successes in the tourism sector, the government is focusing actively on the next challenge to the development of the tourism sector. This relates to the provision of more hotel rooms, to meet the demands of the increasing stay over visitors. The private sector is playing an important role in this exercise, with Beachcombers and Hotel Alexandria among hotels expanding on the mainland. In the Grenadines there are plans to construct a luxury Aman hotel on Canouan. Developers in Canouan have spent over US\$500 million dollars over the last twelve years or so, and employing some one thousand Vincentians in the process.

But the ULP administration can and must play a role in accelerating the increase in hotel room stock in the country. In this regard the ULP administration has sought and obtained a loan of US\$50 million dollars, to construct a 250 room resort at Mt. Wynne. Plans have already been drawn up and are well advanced to showcase a unique and standard setting design, as St. Vincent and the Grenadines enters the mass tourism sector in the Caribbean.

The other project in the quest for more hotel rooms, is the construction of a 93 room facility in the Diamond area, close to the international airport at Argyle. This facility will be constructed through assistance from the CARICOM Development Fund, with investment from the National Insurance Services. When completed, the two hotels will employ some 350 Vincentians.

### **Conclusion**

There is a lot of excitement and anticipation in the tourism sector these days. Many Vincentians are keeping an eye on the growth and expansion in this sector, so as to take advantage of the opportunities that will come their way. Some have

already taken advantage of the opportunities, and they can be heard bragging on radio stations about the new taxis they have purchased, and the expansion to their houses to facilitate the rental of rooms.

We still have work to do in the tourism sector, and Vincentians need to be much quicker, to take advantage of the opportunities. There are possibilities for persons who want to sell their products and craft items to cruise ship visitors who come here. The ULP is on the path to creating a unique and diverse tourism product, with a heightened focus on its positive spillovers. Get on board now, to benefit from the broad developmental impact.