

Forstmayr: Tourism Key to Economic Recovery.
By L.K. Hewlett



Josef Forstmayr

Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association President, Josef Forstmayr says Tourism is key to economic recovery and sustainability in the region.

Forstmayr was at the time addressing the 11th Annual St. Kitts Tourism Awards Banquet where individuals and businesses in the industry were recognized for their outstanding contributions. The CHTA President had high praise for St. Kitts' Tourism Product and congratulated Tourism Minister Hon. Richard Skerritt on the island consistently winning top industry awards.

Forstmayr pointed out that of the 10 countries in the world most dependent on tourism, 7 are in the Caribbean and as such the importance of travel and tourism to its economies should not be understated or overlooked.

“The travel and tourism economy in 2011 will account for significant double-digit contributions to the region’s Gross Domestic Product, its employment -2.2 million jobs, its exports and overall investment in the region. WTTC forecasts travel and tourism’s contribution to the Caribbean’s GDP will be \$70 billion by the year 2021... Every citizen needs to understand that, whether or not he or she works directly in the tourism areas, every tourist’s dollar brings economic and social benefits to every level of our society,” he said.

The CHTA President called for a strong consensus of the region’s leaders and the public so that travel and tourism could receive the full support it needs as the Caribbean’s most vital export industry.

“It is the fastest way to create jobs, grow the economy and generate income for all The Tourism Is Key advertising and PR campaign... targets a broad audience from Caribbean Heads of State to its citizens and stakeholders, illustrating both regionally and in each destination the impact of tourism on jobs, the impact of tourism on the wider economy, the impact of tourism on investments for the future and the value of foreign exchange generated by tourism.”

Forstmayr remained critical of regional airlift, saying CHTA estimated that in 2010 the Caribbean governments collectively paid \$45 million to secure air-lift which is “still inadequate and still very expensive” for visitors and intra-regional travelers.

“Due to the lack of a competitive and truly regional airline, regional tourism has been suffocated by outrageous ticket prices and a cumbersome and ill-conceived network,” he said.

On a more positive note, the CHTA Head declared that progress was being made in the area of the Caribbean tourism industry’s marketing and business development unit, the Caribbean Tourism Development Company (CTDC). CTDC is a jointly owned and operated entity created by the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) and the CHTA.

Through this medium, he pointed out, the region would draw awareness and generate bookings for potential vacationers from around the world.

CTO Chairman Minister Skerritt also spoke at the event, acknowledging that while

Tourism is “good business” it was a complex one “often clouded in paradox”. He said successful tourism business is achieved by ‘uniters’, not dividers.

“Successful tourism needs more positive solution providers and fewer cynical complainers. Successful tourism business demands less complacency and more assertiveness. Truly outstanding tourism destinations achieve better results because of more strategic thinking and less reactionary behavior in both the public and private sectors.”

He continued, “Our tourism must therefore be protected from the partisan tribalism that too often divides us. We don’t have to like each other to work together; we don’t have to agree on everything in order to improve our product standards and island experience; we don’t have to vote for the same party in order to recognize the value of tourism expenditure to our economy.”

Senator Skerritt warned stakeholders against allowing the needs of tourism to be compromised by “short-sighted political stupidity” and allowing “overly obsessed cost-cutters or bean counters” to ignore the need for investing in people development or in market competitiveness.

The gains achieved in Tourism should not be taken for granted, he advised, adding that the path ahead “can be laced with gold and honey”, but only if key players strategize, invest, protect and collaborate together.