

OFFICIAL MINISTER'S ADDRESS FOR WORLD TOURISM DAY 2021

September 27, 2021

Theme: TOURISM FOR INCLUSIVE GROWTH

Good morning fellow Saint Lucians.

Today, Saint Lucia joins the rest of the world in celebrating World Tourism Day under the theme: "Tourism for Inclusive Growth". This theme captures the very essence of the mandate of the Ministry of Tourism; and the philosophy of my Government, as it emphasizes the urgent need to "putting people first". Pre-pandemic, there was no doubt that tourism was on a growth path, with 2019 being the record-breaking year for Saint Lucia, with over 1M visitors. Although noting the growth patterns over the past years, indigenous businesses continue their plea for equity in accessing tax relief and other forms of assistance to create a more attractive climate for local investment.

Tourism, comprising of both local and foreign direct investment, is our most productive sector, which employs over 15,000 persons. It has proven to be one of the most resilient industries due to its ability to bounce back quickly after natural disasters. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a debilitating effect on the industry worldwide, instantly paralyzing economies due to the high level of dependency on the industry by many countries.

When there are interruptions to travel and trade, there is an immediate domino effect on economies across the world, especially in small island developing states like Saint Lucia and the rest of the Caribbean. As Saint Lucia continues the management of COVID-19 and sustaining the responsible opening of the industry, we must continue to build resiliency and sustainability.

With the reopening of the industry and further development in the COVID-19 era, we must address the distribution of wealth to all the actors within the tourism value chain, to increase employment opportunities and reduce poverty. **It is the ethos of my Government to ensure that as part of employment opportunities, Saint Lucians become owners and operators of more tourism businesses, with a focus on developing strong linkages with agriculture, the youth economy and the digital age.**

Already, many of us depend on tourism - from our travel agents, to airport staff, taxi drivers, tour companies, hotel workers, vendors and artists, villa rental owners, boat operators and watersports operators, beach and market vendors, entertainers, crafts-persons and duty free shops just to name a few.

“The World Travel and Tourism Council predicts that if the global vaccine rollout continues at pace, and travel restrictions are relaxed just before the busy summer season, the 62 million jobs lost in 2020 could steadily return by 2022.”

Saint Lucia has made great progress in the re-opening of the industry and to date approximately 8,500 workers have been re-employed. A total of 290 vacation rental properties have been certified and experiencing higher bookings. Thirty-five (35) hotels have reopened their doors and reporting satisfactory occupancy rates. Over 20 car rental companies and over 1,500 taxi drivers have returned to work. The cruise sector has re-opened, albeit at low volumes. Since the relaxation of travel protocols for vaccinated persons, the destination has now recorded a total of 110,116 stay over arrivals to date. Achieving almost 54% of pre COVID-19 figures for the Second Quarter as well as exceeding projections by 11% for the overall targets as part of the recovery.

Sustaining a responsible reopening requires a national effort. It requires that all Saint Lucians adhere to the protocols, build vaccine confidence with strong uptake and focus on taking advantage of opportunities for growth.

Over the past weeks, I have had the opportunity to consult with various subsectors to gain a better appreciation of the challenges faced and general sentiments of operators on how the Ministry can improve its services and provide opportunities for inclusiveness. These consultations will surely contribute to the development of policies and programs moving forward. The intension of the Ministry, is therefore to set policy and glean ways to ensure equal opportunity, increase employment, maximize linkages, reduce poverty and disparities between communities across the island.

As we continue to combat COVID-19, now more than ever, an inclusive approach is required to ensure that we all return to work to secure our livelihoods and provide for our families. We must all participate in the rebuilding of this sector in such a way that there is greater benefit to citizens and communities, and greater resilience in the ability of the sector to cushion against the impact of this crisis and any in the future.

As we celebrate the theme of World Tourism Day under inclusiveness, I would like to take this time to thank all stakeholders within the tourism industry; all ancillary and emergency service providers and personnel; and all other frontline workers, who, on a daily basis confront the threat of COVID-19. We continue to fight to save lives and protect livelihoods.

Together and “putting you first”, we will define the future of Saint Lucia’s tourism industry to cater to delivering the best for Saint Lucia. Happy World Tourism Day 2021!