



CARIBBEAN
HOTEL & TOURISM
ASSOCIATION

Keynote address of Enrique De Marchena Kaluche, President of the Caribbean Hotel & Tourism Association (CHTA), at the Tourism Week Celebrations and Award Ceremony on Nov. 27, 2008 in Tobago.

Ladies and Gentlemen: I want to thank you for inviting me here today to speak before you. This is a very special and important time for us in the Caribbean.

As the current president of the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association, I recognize the importance of tourism to our businesses and the economy of our Caribbean nations.

As this is National Tourism Week throughout the Caribbean, my appearance here today is that much more important. The National Tourism Week Celebration throughout the Caribbean is an annual event which seeks to highlight the positive impact that tourism has on our islands.

And while, we in the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association, as well as many of you sitting in the audience listening to my words, fully understand, and believe in the significance of tourism to our island economies and also its importance to the people of the Caribbean, -- I fear that there are still millions of people throughout our Caribbean nations that do not fully comprehend the importance of tourism to their lives.

This year's celebration in Tobago is themed
"Tourism...Enriching Lives, Developing Communities."

I am heartened by the theme because I know and have seen what tourism can and has done to a variety of destinations, in particular to communities in my destination in the Dominican Republic. But more about that shortly.

First, I must tell you that I was so pleased to see that you included youth involvement in the form of youth expressing themselves on the subject of tourism using the medium of verse, words or song.

The children of the Caribbean are the future of our nations and the value that they bring to every aspect of our life and culture should be cherished and nurtured.

Exposing the youth to tourism is essential for any destination serious about reaping the benefits of tourism. We need our youth to find their way into the tourism infrastructure.

We need home grown general managers of the airports, hotels, attractions and the greater service industries that coincide with tourism to make our nations strong.

We also need and respect those individuals who enter the tourism industry at the basic service levels such as waiters, waitresses, flight attendants, housekeepers, gardeners,

engineers and others who are all the unsung heroes of our industry.

Without these service oriented people, we would have no tourism industry. With the right people, we have what many consider to be an unparalleled successful industry here in the Caribbean.

And let me say just a little about the word “service.” It is often misunderstood to mean servitude. And yet, to be of service really means, to be helpful, giving, generous with our time, our energy and ourselves.

There is nothing greater for one person to do than to give to others.

This is the backbone of the hospitality industry where service and hospitality are synonymous and where employees proudly perform service at the highest levels no matter what their tasks are.

It’s that service that has made the Caribbean famous.

I was also very pleased to hear about the “Tourism Village” open daily to the public, who can visit and view the many aspects of the tourism industry and possibly be encouraged to get involved.

I also heard about the charitable event, “Tourism Men Can Cook” and I can only tell you that I would not have wanted to be demonstrating my cooking ability.

Not that I would have poisoned anyone. I too can cook, but it is definitely not gourmet. I have other qualities and leave the cooking to those that are trained.

And speaking of training. We must always focus our resources on training. The future of our tourism industry is reliant on a constant production of trained personnel to operate all segments of our industry.

The tourism industry is all encompassing. From the moment a guest arrives at our airport and is met by the immigration agents. Followed by the customs agents and then the taxi drivers.

The visitors are appraising our land based on the welcome they receive. This is all before they get to the hotel of their choice.

We know that the hotels and all the employees are important. But just as important are those ancillary services and everyone else that comes in contact with the visitors during their stay.

Recently, we in the Caribbean hotel industry changed the name of our association to reflect the changes taking place throughout our wider tourism industry.

We changed the name of the institution to the Caribbean Hotel & Tourism Association (CHTA) as a sign of the times, which requires integration of the whole tourism sector. This is an answer to our clients which are today more informed and conscious, and certainly, more demanding, and want the entire tourism experience.

This is also be a way to show to our governments, public and private multilateral institutions, and all players in the tourism sector that CHTA has a broader span of representation of industry partners and therefore and plays a more significant role in the Caribbean.

It is important that we all work together to improve tourism because the ultimate result will be an improved life for our own Caribbean Communities, our people – you and me and all of us here in the region.

We here in the Caribbean hotel sector have a very clear goal to raise the awareness level and critical role that the entire hotel and tourism industry contributes to the economy of the Caribbean and also tourism's role as the major provider of jobs and the alleviation of poverty.

The economic importance of travel and tourism to the Caribbean is indisputable, although the industry's potential is a long way from being fully tapped.

There is still insufficient awareness and understanding of the industry's economic contribution and how it permeates the depth and breadth of the general economy and overall fabric of Caribbean society.

My own country, the Dominican Republic, for the first time in years, has been making a major investment in infrastructure to make it easier for visitors to get around. And they have recently made a major investment in promotion with a \$24 million annual budget for the last three (3) years.

Much of the growth in our tourism product in the Dominican Republic is geared to target the high end vacationer. I am proud to say that the Dominican Republic is right now an excellent model to follow and our region should feel free to copy our current success.

We have been successfully able to integrate our 60,000 hotel rooms, all inclusive, most of them, with the names of Marriott, Westin, Four Seasons, Ritz Carlton, and we have done so because these all inclusive chains have changed to become the Ultra exclusive all inclusive as for example the Paradisus Melia, Iberostar, and Gran Bahia Principe has done.

This turnaround in the Dominican Republic did not come overnight. It took us in the private sector many years of sustained vision, hard work, leadership, persuasion and pleading with our own politicians to convince them to spend the money to both improve and promote tourism.

The public sector took the lead in the origins of the development of the tourism industry in the Dominican Republic when it supported the development of Puerto Plata, Punta Cana, La Romana-Bayahibe and now Cap Cana, which are the leading destinations in the country. This was basically done by the private sector even including construction of most of the infrastructure.

It is just since the last four (4) years that the Government has begun to expend major resources in tourism in the country. They realized that this is an investment with immediate return that supports the whole chain of the Dominican economy, the agricultural sector, cattle, telecommunications, construction etc.

In essence, most or maybe some of our Caribbean nations are lacking in the understanding of the importance of tourism where an average of 20% of the individual nation's GDP is generated from tourism and in some cases it is as much as 60% of the GDP.

It was extremely encouraging to hear the CARICOM Heads of Government consisting of some of the most important and influential Caribbean leaders such as the Prime Minister of the Bahamas, the Honorable Hubert Ingraham, and others, acknowledge the crucial importance of tourism to the economies of the Caribbean. They recently declared that they

would place tourism on the agenda of every CARICOM annual summit meeting from this day forward.

But this is only the beginning, a good beginning in any case. We must now take this door that has opened and step inside the room and make our case for a sustainable tourism policy plan for each and every nation and the Caribbean as a region.

Only then we will get the full respect and funds we need to compete effectively with the other nations and regions of the world.

We need to band together in greater solidarity than every before to ensure that this door does not close, but opens as wide as our beaches.

This is our opportunity to raise the level of consciousness of our politicians, our opportunity to push for investments in our infrastructure, our time to push for funds for the promotion of tourism to attract visitors which will help increase the revenues for each of our nations.

We need to focus on the integration of tourism into the economic chain on the islands as we have millions of tourists buying vacations which include hotels, taxis, restaurants, shops and sightseeing attractions which all feed the wider economy of the islands.

This benefit of tourist spending impacting into the wider economy is the relevance that needs to be conveyed to the people of the islands so that everyone understands the importance of these tourists and the dollars they bring to the economy.

The second area we need to focus on is equally important. It is the human resource development that the tourism industry provides for the residents of the Caribbean.

Tourism business means jobs, not only in the hotels, but work for the taxis, the restaurants and the farmers and fishermen that fill the restaurants with food.

It also means work for the seamstress and the crafts people. And the shopkeepers including all their workers including the deliverymen as well as the trash collectors.

Hotels also need managers, engineers, accountants, chefs, and so on. Tourism is also about building a career and achieving individual aspirations.

Tourism means business for all residents on our islands and we need to create a better understanding of this within our own communities.

We need to raise the level of consciousness with our own residents and ensure that they can participate in the ownership and economic benefits of the industry.

We need to make a statement to our politicians and to the general population of our countries that tourism feeds the economic chain and builds strength in the human resource development of our children.

I am pleased to say that you have done a wonderful job here in Tobago this week as your Tourism Week events have been outstanding.

I want to thank you for inviting me to participate in this award ceremony. I consider it a privilege to be present when you are recognizing and honoring those individuals and companies that, indeed, have enriched lives and assisted in the development of communities – matching the theme of Tourism Week here in Tobago.

TOURISM IS THE BUSINESS OF ALL THE PEOPLE IN THE CARIBBEAN!!! Thank you for having me join you in your celebration.