

BHTA 1st Quarterly Meeting – Tuesday March 25th, 2014

President's Remarks

Good morning ladies and gentlemen

The last quarter like the previous ones has been dominated by the need to address the ravages of the recession we are facing and has resulted in your Association taking a very focused direction in its operation and has brought with it a renewed determination to recalibrate the environment in which we do business. The BHTA study that was completed in 2010, spoke to the need for the creation of an enabling environment in which to do business and we have been working tirelessly and with the same appropriate narrow focus on these basic building blocks to support the future growth of the tourism sector.

The Association has chosen to concentrate on four pillars of activity namely advocacy, public relations, marketing and research. In doing so the Association has been more actively involved in the marketing of the destination, in the change of legislation to reduce the VAT levied on the wider tourism sector, in progressing the reduction of the level and in some cases the removal of taxation on the industry, using a reworked TDA as the instrument of implementation and in actively educating the general public at large, trying to explain the truths about the industry and to dispel the many myths that surround it.

ADVOCACY

You will remember that when we last met in December we had begun the strong lobby for a level playing field for the industry and at that time had formally made representation to government for the accommodation sector to be able to access the same concessions as had been granted to Sandals Resorts International. At that time we had met with the ministers of Tourism and Finance and presented our case and had been given the assurance that the matter would receive urgent consideration and that a response would be forthcoming by the end of January.

The end of January is behind us and while we have been given continued assurance by the Ministers of Finance and Tourism that the matter is receiving favourable consideration, we have not been provided with a final position on the matter.

Over the past three months we have worked assiduously and cooperatively with the government allowing them time and space to consider our request, have provided supporting documentation and statistical information when requested, have had numerous meetings with the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs, the Minister of Tourism and International Transport and more recently the Minister of Commerce to work through the process.

A paper re the amendment of the TDA which includes the additional concessions for the industry has been prepared and is before the

Cabinet for their deliberation as we speak. We were hoping to have been able to announce that these concessions had been legislated but so far we are not yet in a position to do so. I continue to be optimistic that we will have a positive outcome in the very near future.

The industry is truly at a cross roads. On the one hand we are told by government that the private sector must lead growth and investment yet with the other hand the very tools which would allow and promote this growth are stymied and withheld and the “enabling environment” highlighted in the 2010 BHTA Study, as so necessary for investment and growth continues to evade us.

It would be remiss of me not to state that my firm belief is that at the Ministerial level at which we have been advocating, that the matter of the granting of the concessions to the sector has their commitment and there is a genuine and expressed understanding by them of the need for tourism to be truly treated as an export. We acknowledge that based on the way in which the industry was previously viewed that this is a bold but necessary step in the development and growth of the sector and it is not necessarily an easy one to take.

It concerns me greatly therefore, that on all sides, both public and private sector entities appear to withhold their support and look to protect their own specific interests without considering the larger and much more important need for a strong, vibrant and sustainable accommodation sector and wider tourism industry which drives the most significant percentage of this island’s economy. It is

disheartening to say the least that over the past 6 months that we have been trying to move forward on this matter that there has been little and in some cases no strong support from the various agencies, businesses and other private sector associations that benefit from the sector.

As part of the discussion related to the provision of the concessions to the sector, the BHTA has been asked to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Barbados Manufacturing Association and the Barbados Agricultural Society requiring its members to first seek to purchase needed items locally prior to any decision to import. The MOU has been drafted and the BHTA has provided its written agreement in principle to the requirements, has met when requested and as recently as yesterday morning has been in discussion with the BMA, BAS and Minister of Commerce. We are hopeful that this matter can be quickly and sensibly resolved to the benefit of all and not cause any further undue delay to the process.

This Association has given its assurance previously and I do so again before you publicly, that wherever there is the opportunity to purchase any items locally and obtain similar quality, the required quantity in timeframe required, consistency of supply and a competitive price that consideration will ALWAYS be given first to purchasing locally – if the preceding criteria are met it only makes good financial sense to do so.

If the government does not see fit to offer the same concessions to the established properties that were given to Sandals the unlevel playing

field that will prevail will cause a disconnect in the industry that could be devastating.

It is obvious that the government is endeavoring to encourage investment into Barbados within the tourism sector and is trying to revitalize the room stock, as currently over 1000 rooms lay waste around the island and that is without any new developments that could be introduced. It is also obvious that any new developer coming to the island will be requesting the same concessions as given to Sandals which will result in a number of operators with the concessions, leaving the owners and pioneers of the industry for the past 60 years out in the cold. This cannot happen and as the main economic driver for the economy is a negative scenario.

If the industry is to grow then it cannot be the tax cow. Incentives must be put into place to encourage the above-mentioned investment, to provide for a sustainable and profitable environment that will encourage growth of both an improved product and increased visitors that will automatically deliver additional VAT revenues and taxes for the Government. If you liken the industry to a bicycle wheel, everyone knows if one spoke is broken the wheel will not go round and this applies to the industry all spokes in the wheel must be complete and even to operate. We call on the government to do what is fair and right and in the best interest of the sector on which so very much depends.

We applaud the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs for implementing the VAT bill for the broader sector of the industry and many of the companies are in the process of registering. There have however been numerous challenges with the registration process and it would be extremely useful, in order to move the process forward, for all concerned to conduct a meeting to discuss the issues that have been raised.

APD

By now, everyone would have heard the good news of the reduction of the APD from April next year. The British Chancellor has announced that from April of 2015, the APD will be simplified into a two band system: Band A for short haul flights of less than 2000 miles from London and Band B for all long haul flights more than 2000 miles from London. The new Band B will be charged at the planned rate in 2015-16.

We look forward to a positive impact on our arrivals out of the UK. The Minister in his 10-point plan last year had indicated that he would look to pay the APD for UK passengers. This is no longer necessary and we hope that those funds would be diverted to other productive marketing efforts.

I wish to go on public record thanking all who were involved in making this happen. Our Minister of Tourism worked tirelessly for the lowering

of the APD to become a reality. He never let up, and even on this occasion when people were of the view that it would not be reduced, he kept the faith. I would also like to thank Mr. Hugh Riley and the Chair of CTO and their team, our former High Commissioner to the UK, our Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Barbados diaspora in the UK, UNWTO, WTTC and all others who made this journey in the last four year. Our job is now to ensure that the more fair APD structure reduces the deterrent to travel and allows us to become more aggressive in re-capturing that market.

In light of this consideration of the reduction of the APD in the UK it would seem an excellent opportunity for Caribbean governments to take a serious re-look at the taxes on regional air travel with a view to reducing the overall cost of travel thereby increasing visitor numbers. There is ample proof – most recently supplied when lower air fares were available through RedJet – that reasonable airfares result in exponential increases in persons travelling which in turn increases spend, reduces unemployment and strengthens local economies.

Marketing

Last year our arrival statistics reflected a 5.2% decline over 2012 – a year that was down on 2011. We received 509,722 visitors or 27,975 fewer visitors than in 2012. This year has started with an overall flat position. January recorded a 3.2% increase, the first increase in more

than a year, while February registered a decrease of 2.1%. Overall we were a mere 0.8% up, or 755 additional visitors over 2013. We have not yet seen arrival figures for March, but I am certain that the first two weeks of March would see positive growth based on the influx of visitors for sporting events – the Sandy Lane Gold Cup, polo and T20 cricket – and not forgetting the hostile weather in North America,

Based on projected occupancies across all categories of accommodation, we are detecting softness in some periods in April and during summer and fall. The Marketing Committee has been meeting more frequently to create exciting offers and develop initiatives which can bring business to Barbados.

We were encouraged by the number of hotels (32) who attended the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association's Marketplace 2014 hosted in Jamaica. Several useful meetings were held with the Tour Operators and the BTA's VP's from the market and the then acting President and CEO of the BTA, Ms. Averil Byer.

UK/Europe

In the UK and Europe, generally the outlook is positive for 2014 – bookings for the winter were looking stronger than those of last year and the forward booking pace is encouraging. We currently have four flights a week out of Manchester – two by Virgin and the two Thomas Cook charters. We need to ensure that these flights are successful

since they provide a gateway for travelers from the north of England and also Ireland and Scotland along with other European feeder gateways. We are currently in discussion with the BTA concerning promotional activities in this area which would be directed primarily at the consumer who may be booking travel on the internet and on Bookbarbadosnow.com. We will keep you informed of these discussions and would encourage you to support any such initiative.

The UK, and also Europe, is seeing a longer length of stay of 12-14 days which is a very good boost for Barbados' tourism receipts. We therefore need to go into those markets and ensure that Barbados is kept top of mind with the tour operators and consumers. It is an expensive investment but the UK and Continental Europe, for the time being, will remain our bread basket. The UK office is looking to introduce two innovative ideas in the market.

A final decision is yet been taken on whether Barbados will host a series of 'Barbados Days' in the UK and/or participate in WTM. The suggestion by the BTA VP UK is that WTM should be foregone this year and replaced with a series of Barbados Days to be hosted the third week of October just prior to WTM.

WTM is an expensive proposition and it is felt that these funds should be channeled into direct marketing opportunities. Time is of the essence for this decision and once we have all of the information on the options we will share this with the membership.

The concept of the 'Barbados days' is that around October 20-25, a delegation of members from the BHTA would spend a day each at the offices of our key supplier partners with a final day dedicated to a forum to allow for business to business meetings with the smaller operators.

The days at the offices of the main tour operators would effectively be a Barbados Takeover bringing Brand "Barbados" to the partners and would entail training activities with the respective sales teams and meetings with all the commercial departments of the operator eg. sales, contracting, brochure development. There would also be an informal aspect to the Barbados Days where the sales teams would have the opportunity to enjoy Bajan music, food and drink, win prizes for the most sales on that particular day and network with the members.

The other exciting initiative centers on the possibility of hosting operators and consumers in various key counties across the UK under a marquee outfitted to a Barbados branded bus. The bus would travel across communities during late June through to July culminating at the start of the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow.

If this initiative is successfully undertaken this year, we would need support of membership to accompany the bus on its various stops. We would not expect you to be able to attend all of the events, but we

would want to lend support to the UK office and ensure that a good number of members are present in each location. We are awaiting the itinerary and other pertinent details as to whether we will be able to mount this phenomenal opportunity this year.

You would have heard that we will be getting a third flight from Condor which will be shared with Grenada from this winter. It certainly is good news for Barbados and we are encouraged by the confidence shown in Barbados by the airline.

Unfortunately we have received word that TUI Nordic will be discontinuing its charters from winter 2014/15 due to poor sales. The price point was a challenge for TUI's clients even though both the BTA and BHTA had offered generous support. We hope that we will be able to fill this gap shortly.

Canada

Air Canada is rolling out its Rouge programme and this will include Barbados from April of this year. This is a form of charter service with 2 classes of service. Air Canada will be celebrating 65 years of service to Barbados in December and will be bringing a top level team here at that time. We are anticipating more competitive fares with the introduction of the Rouge service.

The Canadian \$ is almost on par with the US\$ and some tour operators were looking to place a surcharge on packages because of the fluctuation of the exchange rate. Thankfully this has not materialized but we need to be cognizant that economic data suggest that Canadians have a high level of credit card debt so exceptional growth in this market is not to be anticipated at this time.

The Minister of Tourism recently visited Canada on the occasion of WestJet's eighteenth anniversary and the airline re-affirmed its commitment to Barbados.

CHUM FM will once again return to the shores of Barbados which will bring the winners of the competition hosted on the radio station throughout the winter months. This programme provides very positive exposure for Barbados on a continual basis in this market.

USA

The US market is reporting a positive outlook despite challenges with its loss of seats. The net loss of seats – taking into account the withdrawal of the JFK service on January 14 and the additional seats put on by JetBlue – amount to approximately 20,000 less seats. The suspension of flights by JetBlue due to weather conditions during January had a negative impact on their image. It is noted too that their fares are beginning to creep higher and this is may cause a further challenge to the gateway.

US Airways added a Sunday service from March 9 – 30, and will again from July 6 – August 17.

JetBlue out of JFK mounted 10 flights over the week which incorporated Presidents' Day week-end in February and will again increase service at Easter in April and will roll out twice daily flights between June 19 – September 2, 2014.

Latin America and the Caribbean

The BTA's team has been actively seeking to improve air access from the Latin American market and discussions have been held with Avianca out of Argentina; it is hoped that some positive outcome will be forthcoming shortly.

We continue to have challenges with LIAT in providing reliable service and competitive pricing out of our major Caribbean neighbours – Trinidad, St. Lucia, Antigua and Jamaica. The Caribbean arrivals have declined due to unpredictable travel schedules, which have been compounded by the change-over to the newer aircraft which created a shortage of pilots to fly the old aircraft. We hope the full outfitting of the new fleet will soon be completed and that the 100-day plan will see a greater thrust in generating traffic to Barbados especially for key events. We are already in discussion with LIAT on how BBN can work with their excess capacity from key islands and how we can implement flash sales for weak periods.

CRUISE

Reports from the cruise sector indicate that numbers for the 2014/2015 season are trending upwards on 12/13. There continues however to be reduced spending by cruise visitors across the industry worldwide and Barbados has not escaped this – a similar trend was seen in Europe last summer and has continued in Barbados this cruise season.

6 new ships have been welcomed to Barbados in 2013/14 season with one of them being the new Norwegian Breakaway ship which carries 3,800 passengers out of New York.

Homeporting business in 2013/14 is up by 15% on 12/13 and the new 46,000 sq ft Foster & Ince Cruise Services Homeport Terminal within Barbados Port Inc has produced excellent results on guest experience.

In September and October 2014 Barbados will welcome 4 Disney Ship's Calls homeporting out of Puerto Rico.

Cruise and stay and homeporting ships have again this season benefited a range of 3 – 5 star hotel properties across the island and also provide these guests with a wonderful sample of a land based vacation in Barbados.

The Barbados Homeport team at Foster & Ince Cruise Services have started to prepare and plan to Homeport the new P&O Ship Britannia which accommodates 4,200 passengers along with - ON THE SAME DAY – the new TUI Cruises ship – Mein Schiff 3 which accommodates 2,800 Passengers – every other Friday in 2015/16 season. This is a significant undertaking and will require significant and detailed planning and precision execution.

Gimme 5 and Fly

Gimme 5 and Fly will take place from 12 - 19th June and will replace Mega Fam this year. The dates coincide with British Airways 60th anniversary of flying to Barbados and BA will provide the seats for 60 agents for Gimme 5. We are pleased to see the re-introduction of this programme and are confident that we will be rewarding the right agents who produce for Barbados.

Gimme 5 and Fly is a BTA program which is support by the BHTA member hotels who provide the rooms for accommodation for the agents on a complimentary basis and by our DTS members who provide complimentary or highly discounted rates for attractions and activities so that the agents can truly experience the island. This year the BHTA will also be working very closely with the BTA to ensure that the itinerary is an innovative and truly impactful one.

BII2014

The Barbados Island Inclusive programme was re-launched in February 2014. Visitors will receive their 'free spending money' in the form of cash vouchers on arrival at their hotels/villas. The number of suppliers has been widened so that more businesses, especially small businesses will benefit. The deadline for the booking window has been extended to May 15.

Connect Barbados

Connect Barbados will be held from September 3rd -7th and will again see our major tour operator partners from key source markets on island for two days of business to business meetings with the members of the BHTA and the BTA. This event is a wonderful opportunity that allows even our smallest hotel and attraction members access to the trade partners without having to incur the cost of travel to international trade shows. Both the BTA and the BHTA are working assiduously to ensure that the key operators attend Connect and are represented by the actual persons/decision makers responsible for the destination.

BBN

2013 was not an outstanding year for the booking engine due to a lack of marketing funds in the first half of the year and the lack of aggression by members to post their best rates on site. We were pleased to receive an injection of funds from the BTA in December to

assist us in marketing the website and at Caribbean Marketplace, Regatta Solutions met with all hotels asking for more aggressive rates and we have already begun to see the result. January was a record month since the establishment of the booking engine, and we will be re-doubling efforts to ensure the sustainability of the site. February has also tracked well.

Regatta has just tested with some of the attractions a brand-new mobile friendly platform. The new system is fully interactive with multiple currencies, a shopping cart, interactive location map and activities filtered by category. We will continue to upgrade the system even while it is in operation. The next plans are to build a packaging system (Hotel + Attraction), and to build an entirely new separate system for villas. Recently we launched the site in Portuguese, and the mobile version of the hotel booking engine is to be rolled out.

The BHTA can earn significant commission revenue to assist in its administrative expenses provided hotels continue to work with Regatta by putting their best rates on the site. We are investing heavily in marketing the site with injection of funds from the BTA and our Tourism Fund. We need you also to sign up for the Tourism Fund so we can have more marketing dollars to fund, not only the site but other marketing initiatives.

Regatta will be on island next week and the BHTA has sent out information to our general membership to this effect. We encourage

you to join the sessions on Tuesday April 1 at Accra Beach Hotel and Resort at 9:00am for the hotels and at 11:00 am for the Attractions.

These sessions will provide an update on upcoming developments and provide the opportunity for one on one meetings.

We believe that the BTA can also help us to penetrate Government Departments in getting their conference attendees to use BBN and simplify the process of accommodation arrangements. It worked fabulously with the FOROMIC conference in October 2012 where we had over 450 bookings made through the site.

PRODUCT CLUBS

We have been working on two initiatives born out of the BTA Canadian office that align offers along the Barbados Island Inclusive concept for the Romance and MICE Product Clubs. We have been able to finalise offers for each niche and these will be launched imminently in all key markets. The offers will be launched through our channels of email blasts, the PR agencies in the markets, on BBN and hopefully on the 'I Do Barbados' site of visitbarbados.org.

The main elements of the Romance package which carries the tagline – Forever Begins in Barbados – are:

Booking dates of: March 31 - May 31, 2015

For travel from May 1, 2014 - December 15, 2015

The offer will be available to the first 100 brides booked across all markets and key aspects of the offer will see the Bride flying and staying free based on a minimum number of rooms and nights booked; the offer of a free wedding, upgrades on various services and a range of other value added elements.

The Barbados Island Inclusive MICE Incentive which is being proposed, is a cash incentive aimed at attracting MICE groups during the May to November 2014 and May and June 2015. The value of the incentive would be US\$100 per person.

Key elements of the offer would require that groups represent new business, comprise a minimum of 40 adults or 20 rooms with a minimum 5 night stay, be booked between April 1st – May 15th 2014 and include one off property dining experience and 1 activity. The group organizer will be required to register the group with the Barbados Tourism Authority prior to departure to Barbados, in order to take advantage of this special offer.

VIRGIN ATLANTIC SWINGERS LEAGUE GOLF

There are currently over 5,000 member of Virgin Atlantic Swingers League Golf globally, the majority of which are based in the UK and the US. The Swingers season starts in late Feb and players submit their score cards on line and accumulate points. At the end of the season the winners are invited to the finals which is hosted at a top

golf destination to which Virgin flies and this year takes place in November.

Last year the finals were held at Glen Eagles in Scotland and this year Barbados was competing against Dubai and we have been awarded the finals – so very good work to all who worked so hard to secure this.

This opportunity gives us a great opportunity to promote Barbados as a top golfing destination. It is not just about the golf but also having the opportunity for the finalists experience the broader destination.

We encourage you to find out more about this exciting event and take advantage of all the potential exposure for your companies and for Barbados.

Anniversaries and Events

There are a number of important and noteworthy anniversaries this year. Last week ITC/Complete Caribbean celebrated 40 years of business to Barbados – they have been amazing partners and supporters of the island and treated many of their hotel and island partners to a wonderful celebration on board the Sea Dream in Barbados last week to say thank you.

This year also marks the 60th anniversary of British Airways service to Barbados, the 40th year of Crop Over, the 5th anniversary of JetBlue's service to Barbados and the Barbados Food & Wine and Rum Festival and the 360th anniversary of public worship of the Jews in Barbados

all of which provide amazing marketing and PR opportunities for Barbados. Throughout the remainder of the year there are also a number of other excellent marketing/PR opportunities that our members can benefit from. A full calendar of events will be published in the BHTA newsletter but some of the events for the coming months are -:

The 10th anniversary of Reggae on the Hill in April; The Top Gear Festival, Gospelfest and Sol Rally in May, the 40th Anniversary of Crop over in July and August and the Food and Wine and Rum Festival in November.

When I consider the range of activity that has just been highlighted I cannot help but think that we often do not take the best advantage of the myriad of opportunities that are available to us. How many times have we heard of shops and attractions closed on busy ship days, public holidays or on Sunday's in busy tourism belts such as St. Lawrence Gap or of hotels that have not done even the smallest least expensive things to refresh their product or service delivery.

Business today is all about convenience, value, innovation, nimbleness and definitive service and I encourage you all to re-evaluate your business model, challenge your management and staff to find new and creative ways of engaging the customer, insist on and expect only the highest standards of service and be willing to deliver the unexpected – I promise you that it pays dividends.

TRAINING

Both as a revenue earner and to enhance the education of membership, the BHTA will be broadening its training programmes for 2014. Two areas have already been identified – social media and its application to growing business and Marketing 101.

Resource persons have been identified for the Social Media workshop and this exciting event will take place on 3rd April 2014 at Island Inn Hotel. We invite you to register for what will be a very enlightening session.

Public Relations

In an effort to provide more information to the general public on the tourism sector The BHTA has launched "Tourism Talks" which is a full page of tourism news that is featured in the Advocate on the first Monday of each month, in the Nation on the second Wednesday of each month and on Barbados Today on the third Monday of each month.

The page has editorial that highlights a topical issue regarding tourism, Faces of Tourism that features an outstanding young worker in the industry, important statistical information and the latest information on tourism events.

"Tourism Talks" is also featured on Slam FM every Tuesday morning from 9.00 to 9.30 a.m. to discuss the facts and dispel the myths about tourism and is hosted by the popular morning show presenter Alex Jordan.

Research

As you are all aware the BHTA on a consistent basis seeks your support in providing a range of information on occupancy, cost of utilities, other operational costs and various other data that is used to inform our position when we are negotiating on your behalf with government and other agencies. As on all previous occasions I wish to remind you of the critical importance of providing this information in a timely fashion when asked to do so, so that we can properly and accurately represent you.

One of the areas where the sector has continually faced unfair criticism is that of local purchasing of agricultural items. All of the research that we have to date refutes the position that the sector does not purchase locally – on the contrary – once local product is available at a good quality and in consistent quantities it would be foolhardy run the risk of purchasing perishable commodities overseas and shipping them in if we could do otherwise. I believe that what is fair to say that our ability to purchase locally in a more efficient manner could be

helped if both parties – the sector and the agricultural community – had better information about what each other needed.

To this end the Multilateral Investment Fund (MIF) is working with BHTA, as the Executing Agency, to structure a project for SME re linkages with hotels.

The structure of the project will include Training, Consultancy and Technical Assistance that will be mobilized to address specific issues e.g. meeting standards, consistency in supply, crop forecasting and planning.

A Trade Fair or Event targeting hoteliers and restaurants showcasing local supplies and services and demonstrating value added of local inputs will be developed.

Data collection and research including baseline data, demand forecasting and research into best practice will be a large part of the project. The final part of the study is knowledge sharing which will take the form of a Case Study which will be shared at a regional event.

PRODUCT

We have been pleased to see in the past 3 months the re-opening of two properties on the island – Infinity on the Beach – 66 rooms in St. Lawrence Gap and Almond Beach 135 rooms in Speightstown. We

congratulate the operators of these properties and wish them every success.

We also recognise and congratulate Divi Southwinds and their GM Mr. Alvin Jemmott on the opening of their beautiful new beach front restaurant Pure Ocean – it is truly a lovely location and a wonderful addition to St. Lawrence Gap.

It is important to note that one of the main vehicles for the promotion of our destination, providing useful and compelling information on the destination and highlighting all of the options for accommodation, activities, dining and the myriad of other things to do on this island is the national website www.visitbarbados.org. As part of our call to all players to improve the quality of product for which they are responsible we wish to urge the BTA to make the review and redevelopment of this website a priority as in its current state it does little to aggressively promote or market the destination. The BHTA has financed and launched a dynamic and efficient booking engine and we firmly believe that this coupled with a state of the art website which is effectively managed, marketed and optimized could greatly enhance our visibility and bookability.

We also wish to acknowledge the new General Manager to the Hilton Barbados – Mr. George Stanfield – who replaces Matthew Mullen. George, welcome to Barbados and to the BHTA family and we look forward to your active participation in the sector and the Association.

PRESIDENT'S AWARDS

The BHTA President's Awards is a bi-annual event that recognises the outstanding work of businesses and individuals in our industry and rewards them at a what is usually a wonderful evening of celebration. It is also an event that typically signals the end of the President's term and therefore gives cause for reflection on what – hopefully for the outgoing President – has been a productive and fulfilling term.

This year the President's Awards will take place on Saturday May 31st and I would ask you all to Save the Date. Information has already been distributed by the Secretariat highlighting opportunities for sponsorship and noting the 15 awards that will be given on the night. These awards are an opportunity for us to celebrate excellence, innovation and the best of our industry and I would like to encourage you all to actively participate in the process of nominating individuals and companies, providing supporting documentation and support so that the winners are a true reflection of the best that our industry has to offer.

CLOSING REMARKS

Whenever I deliver the quarterly address and outline all that has occurred in the preceding three months and all that we hope to achieve in the months ahead I am reminded squarely of the tremendous amount that goes on in our sector, our connection to all

other sectors and our huge responsibility to the wellbeing of the island as a whole. Tourism truly is **KEY** and impacts the livelihood of each and every one of us that reside in and enjoy all that this beautiful destination has to offer.

I can assure you that my report is merely a highlight of some of the more topical or current issues and projects on which the Association is working and represents only some of things which Sue and her team at the Secretariat coordinate on our behalf. I can assure you, having now seen it up close over the past 20 months that keeping all of the balls in the air is no mean feat and I truly wish to thank and commend Sue and her team for their dedication, commitment and service.

I wish to close by bringing our attention and focus back to the issue of the request for the legislating by Cabinet of concessions for our sector that will level the playing field and bring the existing players in line with what has been given to Sandals Resorts International. As has been previously stated, we are of the firm believe that if these same concessions were offered to the industry in Barbados as a whole, that our product would go from strength to strength and thus secure the future of the industry as it becomes stronger and more competitive.

The beauty of the tourism industry is that there is nowhere and no other business where money is better distributed throughout all the sectors, both large and small. The trickle-down effect of the tourism dollar is seen throughout the economy and the improved product and marketing power that can be achieved by the introduction of the

concessions for all the industry, will lead to increased visitor arrivals, increased foreign exchange and the recovery of some of the taxes given on the one hand for concessions by the increased collection of VAT revenues on the other hand.

We strongly urge and call on the government through our respective Minister to take the bold but right step to ensure the success and sustainability of the sector – the time for talk is over – the time for action is overdue – Tourism **IS** the business of Barbados and the BHTA and its membership stand ready to play our part!!

Thank you and good morning.