

JAMAICA: A GLOBAL TOURISM THOUGHT LEADER

SECTORAL DEBATE PRESENTATION 2023/2024 • SPECIAL EDITION

# Tourism

J A M A I C A

APRIL 18, 2023



MINISTRY OF TOURISM

ENHANCING  
TOURISM  
RESILIENCE,  
DRIVING  
SUSTAINABLE  
GROWTH

*Hon. Edmund*  
**BARTLETT, CD, MP**  
MINISTER OF TOURISM

PLUS

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY  
& SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

DESTINATION ASSURANCE  
FRAMEWORK AND  
STRATEGY (DAFS)

TOURISM WORKER  
HOUSING

TOURISM ECONOMIC  
IMPACT STUDY

TOURISM WORKERS  
PENSION SCHEME

MAJOR  
INTERNATIONAL  
AWARDS





## MINISTRY OF TOURISM

**AS PREPARED. PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**SECTORAL DEBATE PRESENTATION 2023/2024**

**Hon. Edmund Bartlett, CD, MP**

**Minister of Tourism**

**Gordon House, Kingston**

**April 18, 2023**

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***THEME:***

***ENHANCING TOURISM RESILIENCE, DRIVING SUSTAINABLE GROWTH***

## OPENING

Madam Speaker, it is an immense honour to address this distinguished house for the 34th time as an elected representative of the people of our beautiful country, Jamaica. I am proud to be the longest-serving active Cabinet Minister and although it has been 43 years since I was first elected to office, I still feel the same great sense of pride and duty as I did when I first stepped into these hallowed halls. Madam Speaker, I take this responsibility very seriously and consider it a privilege to have the opportunity to serve my constituents in this capacity.

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to God for bestowing me with the health and strength required to discharge my duties with the utmost dedication and diligence. I am grateful for this blessing, which has enabled me to carry out my responsibilities effectively.

Additionally, I am honoured to serve as the Minister of Tourism and the Leader of Government Business. These positions are a testament to the trust and confidence that Prime Minister the Most Honourable Andrew Holness has placed in me to serve my country in these critical roles. For this, Madam Speaker, I am deeply grateful and I pledge to continue working tirelessly to uphold the confidence my leader and fellow Jamaicans have placed in me.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to you, Madam Speaker, for your unwavering commitment to steering the parliamentary affairs of our nation with such exceptional skill and dedication. I also want to express my gratitude to the Clerk and the diligent staff of this Honourable House, who have played an invaluable role in ensuring the smooth functioning of our legislative processes.



Madam Speaker, I cannot overstate my immense gratitude to my dear wife of 50 years, Carmen, and my son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren, who have been my constant sources of strength and support throughout the years. I am truly blessed to have such a loving and caring family, who have always been the wind beneath my wings.

I would also like to extend special thanks to my staff at the Ministry of Tourism, including my personal team members, as well as my driver and security detail, whose unwavering commitment and hard work have been instrumental in enabling me to carry out my duties with utmost efficiency.

Madam Speaker, I also want to express my appreciation to my esteemed colleagues in Government, especially those who work tirelessly to impact the tourism sector directly. I am truly grateful for their hard work and dedication, which have significantly contributed to the growth and success of this vital industry.

Permit me also to say thanks to my colleague Members of Parliament. We all work together in the best interest of Jamaica, even if we view things from different perspectives. I must also use this opportunity to pay special respect to the opposition spokesperson for tourism, Senator Janice Allen, and thank her for her conscientious engagement with the task assigned to her.

The sector has been experiencing great success due in no small part to the diligent work of our tourism industry partners and the industrious efforts of the team I have the pleasure of leading. Madam Speaker, I express my sincere gratitude to my Permanent Secretary, Ms. Jennifer Griffith; the chairpersons of the respective public bodies within the ministry; their board members; their executive directors and all our amazing employees.

Madam Speaker, I want to especially thank the Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association (JHTA) President, Mr. Robin Russell, and his executive team for the cooperation and support they have provided over the past year. I also wish to acknowledge his predecessor, Mr. Clifton Reader, for his tremendous contribution during the last fiscal year and for his effective leadership in keeping the sector afloat in one of the most trying times in this industry's history.

I want to also highlight the many persons who contributed to us guiding the industry through those very challenging times and aiding the not only massive recovery but the post recovery boom we are experiencing today. Commendations are in order for members of the COVID-19 Tourism Recovery Taskforce established in early 2020 in the throes of the pandemic. A big thank you to:

- Jennifer Griffith
- Omar Robinson
- John Lynch
- Ian Dear
- Godfrey Dyer
- Delano Seiveright
- Professor Andrew Spencer
- Professor Gordon Shirley
- John Byles
- Dr. Carey Wallace
- Donovan White
- Josef Forstmayr
- Joy Roberts
- Kevin Hendrickson
- Nicola Madden-Greig
- Shane Munroe
- Philipp Hofer
- Anup Chandiram
- Adam Stewart
- Wayne Cummings
- Eaton Hubbard
- John Bailey
- Michael McMorris
- Marilyn Burrowes
- Michael Campbell
- Fred Smith
- Councillor Michael Belnavis
- Jennifer Baugh

- Daniel Carzin
- Velma Walker Ricketts
- Professor Lloyd Waller
- Fernando Vistrain
- David Dobson
- Devon Mitchell
- Astley Shakes
- Prem Matani
- Jordan Samuda
- Wilfred Bagaloo
- Jessica Shannon

Finally, and indeed of equal importance; a special thank you to my constituents in East Central St. James, the Councillors, and my management team. I am most grateful for their loyal support over the years.

Madam Speaker, having served the people of East Central St. James for more than two decades, I am incredibly proud of our progress together. Last year alone, we invested \$13 million in education scholarships for exceptional students in the constituency, through my scholarship programme. It was established in 1999 and awards scholarships based on performance in the Primary Exit Profile (PEP) and previously the Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT), in addition to the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) and other academic pursuits. I am thrilled that we have beneficiaries furthering their studies and doing well in their professions not just in Jamaica but also in China, Japan, Spain and of course the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. It has been a joy, Madam Speaker, to meet up over the years with these achievers!

Madam Speaker, I am also thrilled to share that a new Early Childhood Development Centre for Innovation is scheduled to be built in St. James East Central this year. This state-of-the-art facility will be completed in a year and is funded solely by the

contributions of generous companies, foundations and individuals from here and overseas.

Madam Speaker, I am committed to working tirelessly to ensure that East Central St. James is a model constituency. I owe a debt of gratitude to my devoted staff at every level in the constituency, whose commitment and passion have been invaluable. Therefore, I express my heartfelt appreciation again to my team, Ed's Tulips in particular, for their ongoing support in improving lives in the constituency.

### **PRESENTATION FLOW**

Madam Speaker, my presentation today will be done in two parts. Firstly, I will focus on the state of the industry, including tourism's contribution to Jamaica, the challenges and many successes. Then I will outline the policies, plans and activities that are being undertaken to enable our tourism sector to remain the driving force of Jamaica's economy in the post-COVID-19 era.

### **SETTING THE STAGE**

Madam Speaker, if there was ever an industry that has the potential to transform our nation, our communities and the lives and livelihoods of the Jamaican people for the better, it is tourism.

Tourism's resilient rally from a lengthy COVID-19-induced standstill to go on to become the main driver of Jamaica's post-pandemic economic recovery for the last seven consecutive quarters, according to the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ),

underscores what we already knew – that this multidimensional industry is a powerful agent of economic transformation.

Allow me, Madam Speaker, to detail the huge contribution of tourism to Jamaica.

Madam Speaker, 2022 was a very good year. Not only did tourism rebound at a record rate but the tourism industry has been the driving force behind the post-pandemic economic recovery of the entire nation.

Figures from the PIOJ make this abundantly clear, Madam Speaker. I crave your indulgence as I highlight a few critical facts:

- The January – December 2022 period indicated that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased by 5.1% compared to 2021. This reflects an increase in real value added for the Goods Producing Industry by 2.1% and the Services Industry by 6.0% for the 2022 period.
- For 2022 the estimated growth in real value-added for the Hotels and Restaurants industry was 48.9% compared to 2021. This feat is even more remarkable when we consider that in 2021 the industry had just begun its recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The tourism sector significantly contributed to the growth in the overall economy and other industries, such as the Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing industry, which was estimated to have grown by 9.0%. This improvement reflected the impact of increased demand, particularly from the tourism sector, which grew consequently on the relaxation of previously implemented COVID-19 measures.
- In 2022, Jamaica welcomed some 3.3 million visitors, a 117% increase over 2021, with estimated foreign exchange earnings of roughly US\$3.7 billion.



- 2022 earnings represented a 71.4% increase when compared to 2021, when our earnings totalled US\$2 billion.
- Monthly stopover arrivals began to surpass 2019 figures as of June 2022 and thus it is expected that 2023 will show a full recovery in our annual figures, ahead of previous estimates that full recovery would occur in 2024, with projections of 3.8 million visitors and foreign exchange earnings of US\$4.1 billion.
- Even better news, Madam Speaker, it is projected that Real GDP for the economy will grow within the range of 3.0% to 5.0% during January – March 2023 when compared to January – March 2022.
- Growth is expected to be led by strong performance in part by the Hotels & Restaurants.
- For the January to March 2023 period, it is estimated that Jamaica welcomed 1.185 million visitors, which represents growth of 94.4%, when compared to the same period in 2022.
- GDP performance in fiscal year 2023/24 is anticipated to be driven by continued robust performance in stopover arrivals, facilitated by increased room capacity and intensified marketing efforts.
- For the period January to September 2022, Jamaica earned J\$8.6 billion in Guest Accommodation Room Tax (GART) and General Consumption Tax (GCT) when compared to 2021 when the collections were J\$3.7 billion, representing a 139.2% increase. The 2022 GCT and GART collections exceeded the 2019 collections by 16.2% when approximately J\$7.4 billion that was collected from GCT and GART.
- Investments continue to boom and drive tourism recovery. Over the last 4 years, tourism investments have contributed to 20% of the island's total

Foreign Direct Investments. For the next 5 to 10 years, there are multiple upcoming investment projects, which will see an additional 15,000 to 20,000 new rooms with investments valuing US\$4 billion to US\$5 billion.

- For calendar year 2022, Government Revenue, from the tourism sector, through TEF charges, Airport Charges and Taxes, was approximately J\$40.6 Billion.

Madam Speaker, the last fiscal year has seen my Ministry, our public bodies and tourism partners continuing to build on the framework we put in place post-pandemic for a revitalized tourism product that is viable, equitable and which generates opportunities for all.

As the aforementioned figures show, Madam Speaker, tourism will be the biggest driver of economic growth and prosperity in Jamaica for years to come and it is absolutely important that you are made aware of the work that we have been doing over the last year in repositioning the sector to achieve higher growth rates, a better spread of the benefits of tourism to each and every Jamaican and stronger linkages throughout the economic fabric of this beautiful island.

Madam Speaker, tourism's vast economic reach is not always easily understood. It is so much more than visitor arrivals, earnings, airlift and multi-million-dollar investments. As you have heard me say, time and time again, we are a series of moving parts that must come together seamlessly to create the experience that we sell to the world and there are many individuals who help to create this visitor experience – the hotel workers, farmers, craft vendors, tour operators, red cap porters, contract carriage operators and attractions workers, just to name a few.

However, even when we explain it in this way, the concept of an integrated tourism ecosystem, which benefits hundreds of thousands of Jamaicans, is not fully grasped.

Jamaica's tourism industry is enjoying considerable growth and success. However, progress must include everyone. So, today, Madam Speaker, I will outline how the Ministry of Tourism and its public bodies are making this happen. We have not only put in place the architecture for an enhanced and diverse tourism product but also policies, programmes and initiatives to ensure that Jamaicans at all levels of society can enjoy a larger slice of the tourism pie.

Madam Speaker, we are:

- Connecting small farmers directly with buyers within the tourism industry to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars;
- Up-skilling and certifying thousands of tourism workers and high school students through free programmes offered by the Jamaica Centre of Tourism Innovation (JCTI) and its local and international partners;
- Providing a secure retirement income for our tourism workers through the game-changing Tourism Workers Pension Scheme (TWPS);
- Assisting tourism workers with adequate and affordable housing; including efforts through partnerships being forged with hotel investors, to build more than 2,500 homes for hotel workers;
- Nurturing new and start-up enterprises within the tourism sector through the Tourism Innovation Incubator;
- Facilitating valuable marketing opportunities for Small and Medium Tourism Enterprises (SMTEs) through our annual Tourism Linkages Network (TLN)

events, such as Christmas in July and Speed Networking, which provide a platform for hundreds of local producers and entrepreneurs to engage with the hospitality sector and corporate Jamaica.

- Continuing to upgrade beaches islandwide through the National Beach Development Programme, which ensures access of both locals and visitors to quality recreational spaces. In that vein, I am pleased to state on record that three world class public beaches will be completed for next year, 2024, for the benefit of the people of Jamaica and visitors alike.
- Through the Spruce Up Jamaica programme, we are funding small but focused community development projects across each and every constituency, with \$3 million being allocated per year, per constituency. Madam Speaker, I am pleased to say that given the massive success of this programme, we have moved to increase funding to \$4 million per constituency!
- Through Spruce Up too, we will see a drive to enhance the aesthetics of Negril; a community that delivers outsized revenues and jobs to Jamaica overall.
- Madam Speaker, it is the revenues and benefits of tourism that help greatly in ensuring that the Government can continue to improve our schools, clinics, hospitals, roads, our police force, fire brigade and all the attendant services that we have grown to take for granted.
- Madam Speaker, it is tourism that continues to, directly and indirectly, contribute to well over 350,000 Jamaicans being employed in our hotels, villas, attractions, restaurants, banks and other financial institutions, ground transportation, construction, airports, cruise ports, customs, immigration, landscaping, street cleaning, quarries, trucking, retail, manufacturing,

agriculture, agro-processing, fisheries, entertainment, the marine industry, insurance, information technology and the list goes on.

As I have always said, Madam Speaker, when tourism wins, we all win. It means more jobs for Jamaicans; more opportunities for local entrepreneurs; an increase in the consumption of local goods and services; and a greater retention of the tourism dollar.

### ***Recovery Challenges***

Madam Speaker, there is absolutely no doubt that the global COVID-19 pandemic and the fast recovery that is now exceeding our last best year in 2019 have brought to the fore a number of issues that threaten the sustainable growth and development of the tourism industry and Jamaica in general.

Madam Speaker, these issues include:

- That of maintaining a sustainable supply of skilled labour for the sector. Recognized as a global challenge, Jamaica has been particularly impacted by this problem as our local and foreign investment partners seek to employ local workers in their organizations in a bid to realize returns. The issue is therefore one of skilled labour supply being appropriately aligned to a fully developed compensation strategy that is designed to attract and retain the best of our labour force. Achieving this type of harmony is the pathway to resolving a very crippling issue for the industry, which will only become worse as the expansion of the sector continues apace. We continue to make solid advancements in filling some of the gaps through private and public sector efforts; however, some of these issues persist and innovative solutions will have to be fast-tracked.

- Supply Chain Logistics issues appear to have eased, Madam Speaker, in recent weeks and months. However, there continues to be occasional shortages of certain foods, goods, parts and equipment in the sector, thereby compromising product quality.
- Global inflation, the global supply chain challenges and labour shortages in specific sectors go hand in hand and continue to impact the sector in a myriad of ways, including fuelling higher prices for many goods and services. High airline ticket prices, higher food and goods prices, higher labour costs and higher energy costs all redound to higher prices for consumers.
- Capacity constraints and public order issues are more significant than they were in the years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Madam Speaker, the pandemic and current boom in tourism numbers has drawn more and more of our citizens into the tourism space offering a myriad of goods and services. This is in many ways a very good thing; however, in some spaces disorder, criminality and poor practices have crept in creating a huge challenge to destination assurance for locals and visitors. It takes one bad incident to damage a destination for months, if not years. We have a duty to ensure that persons entering the space follow the rules and are respectful of the importance of law and order. The Tourism Product Development Company Limited (TPDCo) is leading efforts, in conjunction with the security forces, to bring order to spaces that have gotten completely out of control and are significantly damaging our destination. Those efforts include, importantly, regularising the many good-natured and hardworking illegal operators who need a helping hand to bring them in conformity with our nation's laws and regulations. The more orderly and law-abiding our attractions are the more business they will get and ultimately more benefits for everyone. For those



keen on continuously breaking the law and engaging in all sorts of criminal and inappropriate activities, the relevant authorities will deal with them as the law stipulates.

- Madam Speaker, roadway and easement expansion in the conduits of the resort areas has become more important as visitors are spending more time in traffic than ever before. The Prime Minister has outlined a number of plans to begin the expansion of these roadways, including highways. We are delighted that several road infrastructure projects are already in or near the beginning stages and will alleviate traffic congestion issues. This includes the US\$274.5 million Montego Bay Perimeter Road Project, a bypass project, which involves the construction of 25 kilometres of roadway and the finalization of a US\$800 million agreement with the International Finance Corporation to develop a new four-lane highway from Rose Hall in Montego Bay, St. James, to Mammee Bay, St. Ann. The new four-lane highway will, upon completion, bypass congestion-prone spots at Priory, Runaway Bay and Discovery Bay in St. Ann. We are also pleased with advanced plans to construct bypass roads around Hopewell and Lucea in the parish of Hanover. This is particularly urgent given the already tremendous congestion in these towns with much of the traffic heading into Negril. With 4,000 new hotel rooms under construction as is the case with Princess Hotels and Resorts and over 2,000 to start in the coming 12 to 18 months, these bypass projects are essential. Madam Speaker, the National Works Agency and Municipal Corporations continue to work to mitigate some of the road woes and challenges to improve the overall experience of the visitors to the destination and also residents who are also users of the space.

- Madam Speaker, we have also been working across Ministries, Departments and Agencies to address congestion issues at the Sangster International Airport in Montego Bay that have irked visitors and locals, who have complained of waiting for many hours in long lines upon arrival. With the record number of flights, which are full to relatively full, coupled with such a rapid recovery, this expectedly has posed serious challenges. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Security, Hon. Dr. Horace Chang and Transport Minister, Hon. Audley Shaw have been working to address the issues in the short term while pressing to ensure that expansion and development plans by MJB Limited, operators of the airport, are executed as quickly as possible.
- Madam Speaker, as highlighted earlier, the town and environs of Negril contribute significantly to Jamaica's coffers and employ thousands, and will contribute even more due to its robust tourism product and sustainable growth opportunities. We welcome Prime Minister Andrew Holness' huge vision for this locale, which will benefit all of Jamaica. This game-changing development plan will include an international airport, a public beach park, a craft village and, with the help of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), a restored Royal Palm Reserve. Additional sewage and water system improvements are also coming and will add to the new Town Centre being proposed. This is forward thinking, forward planning and true vision in action.
- On the agricultural front, Madam Speaker, we continue to work aggressively with the Ministry of Agriculture and private stakeholders to better meet the need for more locally produced items that can meet the enormous and growing demand of the sector. We are also open to offers from overseas investors to collaborate and/or establish agricultural business initiatives on island, given

the huge growth in hotel rooms and subsequent demand in coming years. Many hoteliers have already pledged full support, urging international players to invest in Jamaica's agriculture and agri-business sector.

- Madam Speaker, it must be underscored that crime and violence continue to negatively influence the brand as the safety perception is impacted. The reduction in major crimes by over 20% since the start of the year is very encouraging and sends a clear signal that the efforts in recent years are having a positive impact on our crime rates. It must be noted, however, that despite the challenges of crime and violence that also exist in many other destinations, crime against tourists remains extremely low at less than 0.1%.

Madam Speaker, these and other challenges we take seriously and continue to work across government, private sector, stakeholder groups and communities to resolve them through a solutions-oriented mindset.

### **THE ROAD TO RECOVERY & SUSTAINABLE GROWTH**

Madam Speaker, Jamaica's tourism industry has made a remarkable recovery from the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are now on a continuous path of growth.

However, Madam Speaker, to continue on this growth trajectory our focus must remain on providing world-class experiences that showcase the best of Jamaica's culture, heritage, and natural beauty.

In addition, Madam Speaker, we must continue to invest in our people, upgrade supporting infrastructure, develop new attractions, and promote sustainable tourism practices that benefit our communities and protect our environment.

One of the ways that we are supporting our tourism workers is through the development of a social equity ecosystem that will give industry workers a greater sense of accomplishment, achievement and security.

Madam Speaker, our Tourism Workers Pension Scheme and Social Housing for Tourism Workers, our training and certification programmes and the tourism innovation support programmes are key.

### ***Tourism Workers Pension Scheme***

As we all know, the tourism industry is a vital contributor to Jamaica's economy and our workers in this sector have dedicated their lives to serving our visitors and ensuring that our tourism product remains world-class.

However, Madam Speaker, despite their hard work and contribution to our country's economic success, many tourism workers face uncertainty and insecurity when it comes to their retirement years. That is why we launched the Tourism Workers Pension Scheme in 2022. By providing a reliable and sustainable pension plan for workers in the tourism industry, we are ensuring that they can have peace of mind and security in their golden years.

The scheme is designed to cover all workers in the tourism sector, regardless of their employment status or age, and it includes hotel workers, craft vendors, tour operators, red-cap porters, contract carriage operators and workers at attractions. This means that all workers in the tourism industry can benefit from the scheme, regardless of their specific roles or responsibilities.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to report that more than 8,000 hospitality workers are already paying into the scheme, with over \$550 million in contributions to date. The Government has committed over \$1 billion to the scheme and the final tranche of \$50 million will be paid in the new fiscal year. As a result, the scheme will have a total of just over \$1.5 billion in funds available to provide benefits to workers.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, the pool of the tourism industry is so wide that we anticipate up to 350,000 contributors to the scheme in the future. This includes workers in the cruise ship sector, who are also Jamaicans, and can continue to contribute to the pension plan when they return home to work in any area of the tourism industry.

Recognizing the social safety net value of the pension scheme, Fund Administrator Guardian Life will also continue its public education programme and all-island recruitment drive. Madam Speaker, the pension pool of funds will represent, in the future, the largest pool of domestic savings that will be available for us for investment, and that is a catalyst for growth. So, beyond the fact that it offers social security for the worker, it also provides a pool of capital for development in infrastructure, housing, and all sorts of other things in the country.

### ***Tourism Worker Housing***

Madam Speaker, the issue of adequate and affordable housing for tourism workers is a pressing problem that needs urgent attention. The Government is committed to assisting in finding housing solutions so our tourism workers can enjoy a more comfortable way of life.

The Ministry of Tourism has already entered into partnerships with the Ministry of Housing, the National Housing Trust and private housing developers for units in Rhyne Park Estate and Grange Pen, St. James, to be acquired by tourism workers.

Madam Speaker, we welcome the pledge by four major international hotel investors, including RCD Hotels, Bahia Principe and Princess Resorts, who have committed to constructing over 2,000 residential units for industry employees combined. This includes apartments and houses for the workers and their immediate relatives.

With thousands of new hotel rooms under construction, the shortage of appropriate housing for tourism workers will only worsen, so this is excellent news. We expect hundreds of tourism workers to benefit from this housing initiative and look forward to local hoteliers coming on board. Madam Speaker, we cannot invest only in properties; we must invest in our people too.

### ***Jamaica Centre of Tourism Innovation (JCTI)***

Madam Speaker, it is truly inspiring to witness the positive impact that the Jamaica Centre of Tourism Innovation (JCTI) has had on the country's tourism sector. The commitment to developing Jamaica's human capital and fostering innovation has yielded impressive results, which have benefited countless Jamaicans.

Over the past year, the JCTI's training programmes have certified over 3,000 candidates with a 94% success rate, demonstrating the organization's meticulous attention to helping candidates with the application process and providing tutors to support them. Additionally, JCTI's highly sought-after Summer Internship Programme (SIP) successfully placed 818 interns, offering them the American Hotel & Lodging Educational Institute (AHLEI) Certified Guest Service Professional Certification as well as dual certification through the HEART/NSTA Trust as Hospitality Guest Service Practitioner Certification.



Madam Speaker, the JCTI's Hospitality and Tourism Management Programme (HTMP) is another unique initiative, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education & Youth, which has provided high school students with the training and certification necessary to access opportunities in tourism. Currently, the third cohort of the programme is underway in fourteen schools across the country, with 318 students enrolled and a retention rate of 93%.

JCTI is also playing a critical role in certifying chefs through the American Culinary Federation (ACF), with certification taking place in three institutions in Jamaica – HEART College of Hospitality Services, the Montego Bay Community College and the University of Technology. This initiative has already produced two Certified Culinary Educators, Certified Working Pastry Chefs, Certified Culinarians, and Certified Pastry Culinarians among this year's certified chefs.

Through this initiative, the JCTI is working to expand chef certification in colleges. By facilitating discussions among the three local schools offering undergraduate credentials in culinary arts and the ACF through the ACF Education Foundation (ACFEF), JCTI aims to change the way they do business. Within a year, all students in the three colleges may no longer need to be submitted as candidates for entry-level culinary certification like Certified Culinarian (CC) and Certified Pastry Culinarian (CPC). This will reduce the pressure of testing on the students and reduce the cost to JCTI for certification at the entry-level.

The JCTI is also focused on certifying sous chefs. It is currently in the final stages of rolling out a new one-year programme to expedite the certification of sous chefs. JCTI is working closely with HEART NSTA Trust and the American Culinary Federation (ACF) to support this plan. This programme will help candidates to develop their skills by twinning them with local chefs in hotels and restaurants.

One of JCTI's key initiatives was the Job Readiness Programme, which provided free certification and interview techniques for potential new entrants to the tourism sector, and it proved to be successful with over 600 persons signing up for the programme. All 450 individuals who completed the courses found employment, indicating that the programme had equipped them with the necessary skills to succeed in the industry.

Madam Speaker, the JCTI has also established a database of certified persons that enables certified individuals to upload their resumes and credentials. This platform allows employers to post available jobs within their companies, making it easier for employers to find skilled workers and for job seekers to find employment opportunities.

Furthermore, the JCTI is expanding its footprint into the region by developing a Learning Management System (LMS). This system will allow the JCTI to offer more than 85% of the certification currently available to candidates in the Caribbean. Candidates will utilize the platform through the University of the West Indies Open Campus and will pay for these programmes at discounted rates. This programme is set to start in the summer of 2023, and it is expected to benefit many people in the region.

Madam Speaker, overall, the JCTI's commitment to developing Jamaica's human capital and fostering innovation within the tourism sector is a shining example of the positive impact that tourism can have on a country's economy and its people. The JCTI's achievements have undoubtedly benefited Jamaicans by providing them with access to valuable training and certification opportunities, which will equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to meet the ever-changing demands of the industry and bolster Jamaica's position as a leading tourist destination.

### ***Tourism Innovation Incubator***

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to share with this Honourable House that Jamaica's tourism sector is poised for growth and innovation with the launch of the Tourism Innovation Incubator by the Tourism Enhancement Fund (TEF) last September. The Incubator promises to be a game-changer for our tourism industry, offering participants an array of valuable services to nurture and develop fresh, innovative ideas for products and services.

Through a series of workshops, research support, pitch delivery training, mentorship and networking opportunities, informational sessions and sourcing of potential partners or investors, the incubator is committed to providing the necessary support for budding entrepreneurs in the tourism sector. We are pleased to have selected 13 talented Jamaican entrepreneurs from across the island with exceptional ideas that will undoubtedly transform how we think of tourism in Jamaica.

Madam Speaker, I am happy to share that we will be implementing the Tourism Innovation Conversion Grant, which has been set aside for access by Tourism Innovation Incubator participants. This grant comes as a result of the success of the TEF-seeded loan facilities geared towards Small and Medium-Sized Tourism Enterprises (SMTEs) at the EXIM Bank. The \$100 million grant funding will be directed towards the development of innovative tourism businesses, which are in a vulnerable stage in the business development process, requiring funding and often considered to be of higher risk.

The Tourism Innovation Incubator also includes a mentorship programme, which will incorporate access to local and global talent and strategic partnerships. This programme will provide guidance to upcoming entrepreneurs by more established businesspeople in the sector. The diversification of the tourism product is projected

to increase tourist arrivals and spend, and this mentorship programme will be conducted in the spirit of “co-petition.”

Madam Speaker, we are currently designing the second Tourism Innovation Challenge, which will be launched in the summer of 2023. The TEF will take the lessons learnt from the first Challenge to improve each iteration of this new initiative.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to share that the Tourism Innovation Incubator will be collaborating with the Jamaica Centre of Tourism Innovation to develop and implement a programme specifically for high schools in the 2023-2024 financial year. This programme will focus on entrepreneurship tailored to tourism in Jamaica, as well as the development of innovation competencies and skills.

### ***Update on Airlift***

Madam Speaker, I am thrilled to share our destination's positive progress and growth in improving airlift and connectivity. The last financial year has witnessed an unprecedented increase in flight numbers with 20,519 flights compared to 14,628 in the previous year; an impressive addition of 5,891 flights or 1,137,668 additional seats. This tremendous growth is a testament to the hard work and dedication of all stakeholders in the industry.

These figures demonstrate the high demand and popularity of our destination, which has resulted in the addition of new routes by prestigious carriers such as American Airlines, Frontier Airlines, Spirit Airlines, Arajjet, and Edelweiss Airlines. Madam Speaker, already Jamaica has secured 1.3 million air seats for the first quarter of 2023.

The surge in visitor arrivals has been met with ambitious and proactive capital expenditure programmes at both the Sangster International Airport in Montego Bay and Norman Manley International Airport in Kingston. These programmes, Madam Speaker, seek to enhance and expand the internal facilities of the airports as well as support runway and apron expansion and rehabilitation works.

I am particularly excited about the new terminal expansion at Sangster International Airport, which was recently launched. This ambitious project is a significant milestone in our efforts to accommodate the increasing number of visitors to our shores, with projected passenger numbers of 6.9 million by 2035, based on pre-COVID forecast levels.

Madam Speaker, these developments are a source of confidence for our destination. Our efforts will continue to yield positive results for the aviation sector and the wider tourism industry.

### ***Update on Cruise Tourism***

Madam Speaker, cruise tourism is rapidly growing and becoming a vital component of the global tourism industry. After experiencing a standstill due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the industry is making a strong recovery, with cruise ships returning to our harbours and signalling confidence in Brand Jamaica and the ongoing revival of the industry. I must commend the work being done by Jamaica Vacations Ltd. (JamVac) as well as the Jamaica Tourist Board to drive the country's cruise tourism recovery efforts.

Currently, there is a significant increase in interest in homeporting, with TUI considering a second vessel to homeport in Port Royal, Kingston, and German cruise

line Aida Cruises continuing to homeport in Montego Bay. As a result, Jamaica's homeporting opportunities have expanded, and we have seen a rise from 25% to 40% in pre/post cruise extension visits.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to report that the global cruise industry has made a remarkable recovery in 2022, largely due to pent-up demand; a trend that we expect to continue throughout 2023. Jamaica has also experienced an uptick in cruise passengers, with approximately 855,000 visitors in 2022 and a projected 1.4 million for the current calendar year.

I am proud to announce that Royal Caribbean International (RCI) has committed to increasing the number of passengers to Jamaica in 2023, while strengthening its training partnership with the Caribbean Maritime University (CMU). This agreement was reached at the 28th Annual Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association (FCCA) Cruise Conference held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, last October.

Moreover, cruise lines have demonstrated their confidence in our country by recruiting some 10,000 Jamaicans to work on cruise ships overseas in 2022. This is a testament to the high calibre of human capital within our country, which allows more Jamaicans to earn a living and make significant contributions to their families and the local economy through remittances, providing much-needed foreign exchange.

Madam Speaker, the growth of cruise tourism in Jamaica presents a significant opportunity to drive the resurgence of the tourism industry, create employment opportunities, and contribute to the economic growth of our country. We remain committed to providing world-class experiences to all our visitors and ensuring that Jamaica remains a top tourist destination.



### ***Update on Rooms and Investments***

Madam Speaker, I would like to highlight the remarkable success of destination Jamaica in retaining its appeal despite the unprecedented global shutdown of the tourism industry caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The strategic implementation of our safety protocols and resilience corridors enabled a staged recovery of visitor arrivals, demonstrating our unwavering commitment to the safety and well-being of our residents and visitors.

I am delighted to report that not only did we retain 100% of our room stock but we also added 440 rooms at the H10 Ocean Eden Bay resort, which adjoins the H10 Ocean Coral Spring resort with over 500 rooms. These H10 rooms were constructed during the pandemic, making it the only property to have expanded during this challenging period. This is a clear signal of the confidence investors have in the future of our destination and our unwavering commitment to its growth and development.

Madam Speaker, to meet the ongoing demand and interest in our beautiful island, we are working on the most ambitious tourism development and expansion plan in Jamaica's history. Our tourism industry is about to reach a crucial milestone with the construction of over 15,000 new rooms. These approximately 15,000 rooms, some of which have already been completed and others to be constructed between this year and the coming years, include:

For the parish of St. Ann:

- Palm Beach Villas, over 100 rooms
- Secrets Resorts, 700 rooms
- Bahia Principe, 2,500 rooms

- Sandals Royal Dunn's River, 300 rooms
- Sandals Dunn's River, 250 rooms
- Beaches Runaway Bay, over 400 rooms

For the parish of Trelawny:

- Harmony Cove, 1,000 rooms
- Planet Hollywood (Royalton), 650 rooms
- RIU Aquarelle, 753
- Excellence Oyster Bay, over 50 rooms

For the parish of St. James:

- Unico, Hard Rock Hotel and Casino and associated resort developments, 2,000 rooms
- Vista Ambassadors, 433
- Dreams Resort, 280+

For the parish of Hanover:

- Princess Resort, over 2,000 rooms
- Grand Palladium, Negril, 950 rooms
- Viva Wyndham, Negril, 1,000
- Sandals Negril

For the parish of Westmoreland:

- Paradise Park, a game changing ultra-luxurious development like no other is in the planning stages, more details will be provided soon.

For the Kingston Metropolitan Area:

- Hilton New Kingston, 300 rooms

- ROK Hotel, 168 rooms (already fully opened)

For the parish of Portland:

- Dragon Bay, 200 rooms

Madam Speaker, these developments will create tens of thousands of new jobs and have massive direct and indirect impact on our economy, our people on a whole and dozens of towns and communities across the island. Moreover, several new hotels, villas, condominiums and hotel expansion projects are set to be launched in the coming months and years, stretching across the island, which will result in the creation of several thousand more new rooms and billions of dollars in investments beyond the current hotel construction and renovation boom.

### ***Tourism Economic Impact Study***

Madam Speaker, having had the experience of managing the tourism industry through the pandemic, the Government will be more strategic about gathering evidence to make decisions about how to optimize the economic, social, environmental and infrastructural benefits of tourism investment.

During the coming year, my Ministry will conduct a Tourism Economic Impact Study, which seeks to identify the economic, fiscal, social and environmental impact of the development of an additional 15,000 to 20,000 rooms to augment Jamaica's existing room stock.

Madam Speaker, the specific objectives are to:

- Identify and evaluate the potential impact of the proposed developments on Gross Domestic Product, Foreign Exchange earnings, Investment, and Government Revenue and expenditure.

- Identify and evaluate the potential impact of the proposed developments on income and employment (both direct and indirect)
- Identify and evaluate the potential impact of the proposed developments on key related sectors such as agriculture, construction, manufacturing and entertainment
- Identify and evaluate the potential impact of the proposed developments on infrastructure needs, the environment and people (particularly housing, transport and recreation)
- Provide recommendations to mitigate potential negative impacts while capitalizing on positive impacts
- Provide a credible, rigorous evidence-base to enhance public awareness of the value of the tourism industry to Jamaica

Madam Speaker, this is the most substantial increase in room stock, over the shortest period of time in Jamaica's history. It represents a uniquely transformative moment. We must seize the moment to obtain the maximum social and economic benefit.

### ***The Shared Economy***

Madam Speaker, approximately 29% of the 2.6 million stopover tourists visiting our beautiful island in 2022 would have had the opportunity to immerse themselves in the unique experiences provided by our sharing economy, most notably through the Airbnb accommodation subsector.

This is a trend that we should all welcome and embrace because it means that more Jamaicans with homes, apartments and villas are contributing to the value chain of local tourism. This not only broadens the range of industry participants but also provides a larger slice of the pie for a greater number of Jamaicans. The increased

participation of locals in the sharing economy can only help Jamaica's tourism industry to develop. As the tourism pie continues to grow and reach new heights, new and existing stakeholders need not be concerned about the benefits that this sector can provide.

As a result, I strongly advocate for local investment in this shared economy, which provides a new dimension to our tourism industry. Jamaica is now establishing new and exciting villa experiences for visitors from all over the world. We should all be proud of how far we have come.

I also encourage all Jamaicans to seize this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to highlight our country's cultural and natural assets. We can all help to enhance Jamaica's reputation as a top tourist destination, while also reaping economic benefits by participating in the sharing economy.

### ***St. Thomas***

Madam Speaker, it brings me great pleasure to share with you that St. Thomas has been garnering significant interest from several local and international investors eager to contribute to the development of our nation. Some local investors are already on the ground. And just this past February, we had fruitful discussions with investors from the Dominican Republic who have expressed keen interest in investing in St. Thomas. They are particularly intrigued by the potential to create a facility that mirrors their successful venture in their homeland. I am thrilled by this prospect and optimistic about its potential positive impact on the local economy.

Furthermore, I am proud to announce that St. Thomas is already a hub for significant investments, including the Southern Coastal Highway Improvement Project, which

will significantly improve the main roadway throughout the parish. Additionally, the construction of the Morant Bay Urban Centre is set to transform the area into a vibrant and thriving community, further solidifying St. Thomas' position as a hub for investment and development.

Madam Speaker, these investments are a testament to the resilience and determination of our tourism stakeholders, who have worked tirelessly to ensure the sustainability and growth of our industry. I am confident that these developments will positively impact our tourism sector and the broader economy, and I look forward to the continued success and progress of destination Jamaica.

## ***POLICY DEVELOPMENT & IMPLEMENTATION***

### ***Destination Assurance Framework and Strategy (DAFS)***

Madam Speaker, the Destination Assurance Framework and Strategy (DAFS) is a national strategic response to the increased international demand for quality tourism experiences. It serves as the blueprint that will guide the Ministry and our partners to ensure continuous improvement in the delivery and management of a high level of quality and authenticity across its tourism products and services.

The DAFS, which comprises tourism strategies that will enable us to deliver on the brand promise to our visitors of a safe, secure and seamless visit, has been approved by Cabinet as a Green Paper for further consultations and finalization as a White Paper. A consultant has been engaged to undertake stakeholder consultations and finalize the Framework and Strategy as a White Paper for tabling in Parliament in the 2023/2024 Financial Year. The stakeholder engagements have begun in earnest with two already being held in Negril and Montego Bay at the end of March. They will continue later this week with consultations in Ocho Rios.



### ***Revision of the National Community Tourism Policy***

Madam Speaker, the National Community Tourism Policy and Strategy was first developed in 2015 in response to increased global interest in experiential tourism coupled with the desire of the Government of Jamaica to enhance the capabilities of communities to participate in the tourism sector, thereby increasing spend within these communities.

In the five years since its implementation, the Ministry has sought to strengthen its institutional capacity to continue the enhancement and development of community tourism. As such, the Policy is currently being revised to meet the needs of an ever-evolving sector. In the 2022/2023 Financial Year, the Ministry in partnership with the Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF), under the Rural Economic Development Initiative (REDI II) Programme, engaged a consultant to revise the Community Tourism Policy.

### ***A Roadmap for the Measurement Framework for Sustainable Tourism***

Madam Speaker, we are currently pursuing the development of a framework for the measurement of Sustainable Tourism in Jamaica. The measurement framework will allow my Ministry and its public bodies to develop and monitor better policies for the sustainability of the tourism product.

The framework is a critical next step in developing sustainable tourism policies and practices based on integrated, coherent and robust statistical data through the development and measurement of key indicators towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To this end, we have engaged the services of a consultant to develop a roadmap for the development of the framework for the measurement of sustainable tourism development in Jamaica.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry's key policy priorities for this year are:

- Development of the ***National Policy on Water-Based Activities in Marine and Riverine Recreational Areas (Water Sports Policy)*** as part of the Ministry's mandate to promote the concepts of sustainability in a safe and secure natural environment.
- Revision of the ***Tourism Linkages Networks Policy***, which will focus on developing and harnessing the local tourism value chain to build productive capacity, address supply chain disruptions and improve the overall competitiveness of the sector. Cross-sectoral linkages with non-traditional industries will be a central policy theme and strategy for the diversification of Jamaica's touristic offerings and the development of niche markets. Pursuant to the new strategic direction envisioned for the Policy, it will be retitled the ***Tourism Linkages Network Policy and Action Plan***.
- The Development of a ***Sustainable Tourism Framework and Strategy***, which will act as the overall guiding strategic document for sustainable tourism planning and policy development. The document will synergize the existing tourism policies, plans, projects, and programmes with a clear and concise implementation plan and monitoring and evaluation framework.

### ***Labour Market Study***

The pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges to Jamaica's tourism industry. As we all know, the sector was forced to shut down in March 2020, and since then, the country has experienced a massive exodus of workers who had to find new roles

outside the industry. This departure has left a significant gap in our tourism workforce, which we must address to ensure the industry's continued success.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, I am pleased to inform this house that the Ministry of Tourism will conduct a Labour Market Study to address current and future labour issues in the tourism industry. The study will assess the hiring arrangements, salaries, benefits, skill sets, and training requirements for various positions in the sector. The study will also provide recommendations for intervention by the Ministry of Tourism and its public bodies.

We will prepare a report based on proprietary data gathered from primary research exercises to ensure the study's accuracy and effectiveness. This study is essential for the tourism sector's recovery and the country's overall economic growth. It will enable us to identify current and future labour market trends and address gaps and challenges to ensure a robust tourism workforce.

### ***Tourism Diplomacy and Resilience***

Madam Speaker, Jamaica is now a global tourism thought leader and, as such, is regularly positioned or requested to play a prominent role in discourse and initiatives on the international stage.

In that vein, Madam Speaker, I am happy to share some exciting developments in the field of tourism cooperation between Jamaica and several key bilateral partners. We have signed three Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with Rwanda, Saudi Arabia and Namibia. We are also exploring the possibility of signing MOUs with ten additional countries, namely, Paraguay, Dominica, Costa Rica, Belize, Nigeria, Botswana, South Africa, Ghana, Sierra Leone and Canada.

These MOUs will strengthen our partnerships with these countries and facilitate greater collaboration in the fields of marketing, training, air connectivity and gastronomy. We are pleased to note that we have already partially activated the MOU with Rwanda and we look forward to welcoming Rwandans on a study tour in the new fiscal year.

Furthermore, we will conduct a strategic analysis of the MOUs that have been signed and those under review for implementation in the new fiscal year. This will help us to maximize the benefits of these partnerships.

Jamaica will also participate in a series of annual meetings, including the 68th United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Commission of the Americas (CAM), UNWTO General Assembly, Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) Business Meetings, the Organization of American States Inter-American Committee on Tourism (OAS CITUR) 5th Special Meeting, and the second staging of the Global Tourism Resilience Conference. These conferences and meetings provide excellent opportunities to showcase Jamaica's tourism product and network with industry stakeholders.

Beyond that, Madam Speaker, little Jamaica has been at the forefront of building resilience in the global tourism industry to face unplanned threats like the COVID-19 pandemic. In February of last year, we proudly launched the inaugural Global Tourism Resilience Day at Expo 2020 Dubai. Today, I am even more proud to share that our efforts have been ratified by the United Nations, which has officially designated February 17 as Global Tourism Resilience Day annually.

This day will serve as an important opportunity to promote sustainable and resilient travel, with a focus on the economic, social, and environmental benefits of the industry. The adoption of resolution 70.1 by the United Nations (UN), drafted by the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, the Ministry of Tourism and the Global Tourism Resilience and Crisis Management Centre (GTRCMC), after a call by Prime Minister Andrew Holness in his address to the UN General Assembly last year, was supported by an overwhelming number of countries, including the Bahamas, Belize, Botswana, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Dominican Republic, Georgia, Greece, Guyana, Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Malta, Namibia, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Spain, and Zambia.

We commemorated Global Tourism Resilience Day by hosting the first-ever Global Tourism Resilience Conference (GTRC), a three-day event in Kingston. Distinguished Ministers of Tourism from various countries and other international industry leaders attended the historic event, engaging in high-level discussions on a range of issues, including lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. Attendees delved into data, exchanged ideas and developed data-driven strategies to help mitigate and handle future threats to the industry.

Madam Speaker, the success of this conference prompted me to issue a call for the creation of a Global Tourism Resilience Fund to support nations that depend on tourism during periods of disruption. While we talk about building resilience for tourism, we need to focus on the broader picture, encompassing social, economic, political, health and security disruptions. The most important aspect of this is building human capacity to predict, mitigate, manage disruptions, recover quickly, and thrive thereafter.

Madam Speaker, we must also build financial resilience while highlighting tourism's responsibility in enabling the highly tourism-dependent countries to gain insight into their capacity to grow, expand, and enjoy prosperity.

Therefore, the establishment of a special tourism resilience fund is crucial. As an industry, we have the capacity to enable this fund to develop seamlessly because we are the most consumption-driven activity on planet Earth. One way to finance the fund could be through a voluntary Resilience Tip given by the 1.4 billion consuming travellers. Contributions would stay in the recipient countries and build that fund to enable capacity for resilience.

Madam Speaker, it also brings me great pleasure to share that the GTRCMC, headquartered right here in Jamaica, has continued its expansion with the establishment of GTRCMC satellite centres. These centres are an important step towards addressing disruptions and crises in tourism, and we are pleased to note that three satellite centres are now operational at Middle East University in Amman, Jordan; George Brown College in Toronto, Canada; and Kenyatta University in Kenya. New centres are being considered for South Africa, Sierra Leone, Botswana, Bulgaria, Rwanda, Malaga, Spain and the George Washington University in the United States and Carlton University in Canada.

These centres will serve as important hubs for knowledge sharing and collaboration, bringing together experts in the field of tourism resilience and crisis management to develop strategies that can be implemented to mitigate and manage future disruptions. Through these centres, we hope to continue building stronger relationships between the tourism industry and academic institutions, fostering a culture of innovation and continuous learning.

We are proud of the leadership that Jamaica has shown in this field, and we look forward to continuing to work with our partners around the world to ensure that the tourism industry remains a vital source of economic growth, social development and environmental sustainability for generations to come.

Madam Speaker, it is imperative that we remain vigilant and proactive in addressing the challenges facing the tourism industry. By collaborating with our partners across the globe and sharing knowledge and expertise, we can develop innovative solutions that will enable the industry to thrive even in the face of crises and disruptions.

### ***Major International Awards***

With the solid work put in, Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to share the outstanding achievements of destination Jamaica in the tourism industry. Our island has once again received global recognition for its exceptional offerings, as evidenced by the multiple awards received at the World Travel Awards Caribbean & The America's Gala last September.

Jamaica has been named the Caribbean's Leading Destination for the 16th consecutive year, which is a remarkable feat that speaks to the unmatched natural beauty, vibrant culture, and warm hospitality of our country. We also received recognition as the Caribbean's Leading Cruise Destination 2022, Caribbean's Leading Tourist Board 2022 and Caribbean's Leading Nature Destination 2022. These accolades are a testament to the hard work of our tourism partners and their commitment to excellence in the industry.

Moreover, Madam Speaker, we are proud to have won seven awards at the 2022 Travvy Awards, held in South Florida, recognizing our high standards of excellence in the travel industry. These include gold for Best Culinary Destination – Caribbean; Best Destination – Caribbean; Best Wedding Destination – Overall; Best Tourism Board - Caribbean and Best Travel Agent Academy Programme. In addition, we copped silver for Best Wedding Destination – Caribbean and Best Cruise Destination – Caribbean.

In March, I was awarded the “Lifetime Achievement Award For Promotion of Sustainable Travel & Tourism” by the Pacific Area Travel Writers Association (PATWA) International Travel Awards. The coveted award was presented at the World Tourism & Aviation Leaders’ Summit at ITB Berlin, the world's leading travel trade show, in Germany.

The PATWA International Travel Awards recognize individuals and organizations that have excelled and are involved in the promotion of tourism from different sectors of the travel trade such as aviation, hotels, travel agencies, tour operators, destinations, government bodies, tourism ministries and other service providers related directly or indirectly to the industry.

Madam Speaker, I am honoured and humbled to have received this Lifetime Achievement Award. I am passionate about tourism and I am equally passionate about the sustainable development of tourism. It is the only way that the industry can be leveraged as a catalyst for economic growth and the transformation of communities and nations. For long-term success, tourism must be economically viable, socially inclusive and environmentally friendly. This award is proof that my advocacy is getting traction and has not fallen on deaf ears.

Madam Speaker, Jamaica's vibrant cultural capital, Kingston, beat out 152 entrants from 28 nations to be selected Best Creative Destination for 2023 by the jury of the 9th Creative Tourism Awards.

The award was recently presented to me by the Creative Tourism Network®, on behalf of the International Committee, on the margins of ITB Berlin. This is a major accolade for Kingston, which has steadily been gaining traction as a cultural and music destination. There is a good reason why Kingston was designated a UNESCO Creative City.



Madam Speaker, these awards showcase the significant potential of our tourism industry and the exceptional value that Jamaica offers to travellers. I am confident that with our beautiful natural resources, vibrant culture, and welcoming people, we will continue to attract visitors from all over the world. Let us work together with our tourism partners to strengthen the industry and ensure that Jamaica remains a top destination for many years to come.

### ***Public Body Updates***

Madam Speaker, it is impossible to overstate the importance of the swift adaptation and pivot of our public bodies, which have undoubtedly aided in our local tourism industry's efforts to bounce back stronger; thus, allowing us to build our resilience for future success. Without their tireless efforts, this would have been an insurmountable task. While the Ministry of Tourism provides the governance, policy direction and strategic leadership to the tourism industry, it is our public bodies that bring this framework to fruition.

### ***Jamaica Tourist Board***

Madam Speaker, the Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB) has been instrumental in the country's recovery efforts from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. With their pivotal role in driving the growth of tourism in Jamaica, we experienced the successful increase in tourist arrivals that we have seen. Their efforts in promoting the destination, developing new tourism products, providing visitor services, and managing tourism responsibly and sustainably have all contributed to this achievement.

In 2022, the JTB launched the "Come Back" campaign, which is not just about all the beautiful places you can visit in Jamaica but all the lessons visitors can expect to

take away. How to be more adventurous and curious; be lively, laid-back, and romantic. It positions Jamaica as a destination that can help visitors realize their most valuable human potential. It is an open invitation for the world to come back to being their best selves again. Using this approach, we have created three research-inspired personas — the Adventure Seekers, Family Planners, and Seasoned Travellers — each packed with an array of adventurous, luxurious, romantic, mouth-watering moments that whet the appetite for more genuine vacation experiences.

### ***Jamaica Vacations Limited***

Madam Speaker, I am delighted to report that the cruise and airlift portfolios have demonstrated remarkable improvements, playing a significant role in the recovery of the tourism sector. The results have surpassed pre-COVID-19 numbers, which is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the entire JamVac team.

Madam Speaker, in the medium term, JamVac plans to target three million cruise passengers, and aims to align efforts for airlift support with the JTB. To achieve these goals, we have set ambitious objectives for the 2023/24 fiscal year.

In terms of Cruise, our objective is to attract 1.4 million passengers. To achieve this, we plan to increase the reach of travel agents across the United States and Europe. We will also implement a Cruise Conversion Strategy to persuade more visitors to disembark and explore Jamaica's attractions fully. Additionally, we will coordinate the procurement of local goods and services by the cruise lines to enhance the visitor experience and promote economic development.

We have achieved remarkable success with the addition of two vessels – Aida and Marella – homeporting in Jamaica. Additionally, we witnessed a significant increase in the visitor disembarkation rate at all ports, which now stands at 90%, up from

50%. We are also proud to announce that our visitors' satisfaction rate at all ports has reached an impressive 97%.

Moving on to the airlift portfolio, Madam Speaker, JamVac successfully brought back Italian flights from our European market, delivered some three hundred and thirty thousand (330,000) seats to Jamaica, and welcomed the return of Canada for the winter season. These achievements are significant milestones for our island, and we are committed to sustaining this momentum.

JamVac's goal is to secure 89,000 seats this fiscal year. To achieve this, we plan to increase the capacity of European flights to Jamaica. Furthermore, we intend to target new markets such as Latin America, Eastern Europe, Asia Pacific, India, Japan, the MENA (Middle East & North Africa) Region and West Africa. These markets have shown significant potential for growth and we believe that with targeted efforts, we can attract more visitors to Jamaica.

### ***Tourism Product Development Company (TPDCo)***

Madam Speaker, TPDCo is an indispensable player in Jamaica's tourism industry. TPDCo has been instrumental in transforming Jamaica into a world-class tourist destination by implementing innovative programmes and projects that highlight the natural and cultural beauty of the island.

One of TPDCo's most notable initiatives is the Jam-Iconic Experience, which seeks to create iconic destination-branded moments and increase the visibility of Jamaica's natural and cultural sites and experiences. This programme has resulted in the establishment of one iconic photo experience in Negril, and we are working on connecting these iconic locations with manicured land spaces and a pristine environment.

Additionally, we will be creating five new Jam-Iconic spaces, as part of our Resort Town and Heritage Upgrade Programme. These experiences will be located in Falmouth, Ocho Rios, Hope Gardens, Cockpit Country and Holland Bamboo, and will provide visitors with interactive elements that allow them to take iconic photos with the beautiful Caribbean landscape in the background.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, the Spruce Up Jamaica 'Pon Di Corner' Programme promotes local inclusivity within the tourism sector by fostering civic pride and increasing value creation for local tourism practitioners within communities. During this financial year, we completed several projects, including the beautification of various areas across eleven parishes.

The programme's remarkable achievements include the erection of a sculpture of Sir Alexander Bustamante in Hanover; murals in Trelawny and St. Andrew; the construction of a staircase leading to a homework centre in Bryce, Manchester; and the repair of several roads in St. Elizabeth, including the New River Cemetery Roadway and Mountain Valley Road.

Madam Speaker, we have also been expanding the Storyboard Programme, which uses technology to create memorable experiences for visitors. Twenty-nine storyboards have been installed in various parishes, including Portland, St. Mary, St. Ann, Trelawny, St. James, Hanover, and Westmoreland, contributing significantly to the preservation and promotion of Jamaica's heritage sites and experiences.

As we enter the new financial year, I am pleased to announce several exciting initiatives that will further enhance Jamaica's tourism industry. First and foremost, we will be implementing an Anti-Harassment Strategy to ensure the safety and security of our visitors.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, we will be completing Phase 1 of the overall redevelopment of the Fort Charlotte historic site in Lucea, Hanover, and constructing a Morant Bay Rebellion Memorial in St. Thomas in recognition of the infamous 1865 rebellion that changed the course of Jamaica's history forever.

Additionally, our Signage Maintenance Programme will see the rehabilitation of fifty signs with TPDCo's logo across the island, including parish markers, attractions and directional signs. The existing signs will either be repaired, replaced or removed.

Madam Speaker, we are committed to ensuring that all tourism operators meet the requirements of the JTB. During the last financial year, we processed 3,417 licenses for new and existing operators and assessed, monitored, and facilitated licensing for 1,165 entities.

Licensing is not just about maintaining quality standards in the industry. It is also a seal of approval which is proof to patrons, locals and visitors alike, that the licensee adheres to international standards of quality, safety and reliability. In addition, it provides access to worldwide marketing by the JTB.

Finally, we are mindful of the challenges faced by our tourism businesses in obtaining JTB licenses. Therefore, we will be completing a review of the licensing criteria during this financial year to make it easier for businesses to obtain licenses and thrive in our industry.

### ***Tourism Enhancement Fund (TEF)***

Madam Speaker, the TEF launched an ecosystem study to interrogate demand by key stakeholders and customers, supply by the creative and cultural industries and the enabling environment by way of policymakers and educational institutions. This

study will guide the TEF in the development of the conceptual designs and the Masterplan for the Tourism Entertainment Academy, which takes into consideration the proposed location for the Academy on the grounds of the Montego Bay Convention Centre as well as the surrounding creative and cultural assets.

The TEF, in collaboration with TPDCo, began training key personnel from various tourism enterprises in the development of a business continuity plan. This initiative is to further increase tourism resilience within the sector, in particular among SMTEs. To date, the TPDCo has executed training in both the Montego Bay and South Coast Destination Areas with a 98% and 94% satisfaction rate, respectively.

In the spirit of enhanced risk management, the Ministry of Tourism in collaboration with the TEF will execute a series of Destination Risk Registers and Action Plans across the various destination resort areas, starting with Montego Bay. This project allows us to determine what risks exist that may prevent us from achieving the Ministry's strategic goals and put plans in place to mitigate against risks.

The areas that will be examined are the environment, climate change and disasters, human capital, supply chain, destination assurance, product offerings, competitiveness, local attitudes and perceptions, and geopolitical conflicts. The Action Plan component will help us prioritize our initiatives based on the level of risks or opportunities that may exist.

### ***Strengthening Linkages***

Madam Speaker, through our Tourism Linkages Network, a division of the Tourism Enhancement Fund, we have been able to expand our reach to more Jamaicans across a myriad of industries which supply and contribute positively to the growth of our sector. Madam Speaker, Jamaica's tourism industry is one of the major pillars of our

economy, contributing significantly to our GDP and providing employment for thousands of our citizens. What is less well known is the vital role that agriculture plays in supporting this industry. The link between agriculture and tourism is a strong one, and it is our responsibility as a government to foster and develop this link for the benefit of all.

To this end, the Agri-Linkages Exchange (ALEX), which is a platform that connects small farmers directly with buyers in the tourism industry, has been a game-changer for the local agricultural community. During the first two months of the year, 490 farmers earned approximately \$108 million in revenue via the ALEX platform. We have also sold produce worth over \$330 million through the ALEX portal in 2022, benefiting 1,733 farmers and 671 buyers registered on the platform. This is a testament to the power of technology and the importance of collaboration in driving growth and development.

It was truly heartening, Madam Speaker, when Fitzroy Mais, a farmer of Content Gap in St. Andrew, proudly shared samples of strawberries grown on his farm with me and representatives of the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA) at the recent Jamaica Blue Mountain Coffee Festival Farmers Trade Day held at the University of Technology. It was a proud moment for us to enjoy the fruits, so to speak, of this joint initiative by the Ministries of Tourism and Agriculture.

However, we have not stopped there, Madam Speaker. We have also developed the Agricultural Food Safety Manual along with key partners and conducted sensitization sessions with over 400 farmers across the island. The objective of this project was to provide tourism agricultural suppliers with information on food safety standards while enhancing their capacity to provide safe service delivery to tourism entities.

The strategy also seeks to address the critical step of building consumer confidence and trust in the range of agricultural products that are consumed in Jamaican hotels, attractions, and restaurants. This will not only benefit our farmers but also enhance the overall quality of the tourism experience for our visitors.

However, we are aware that there are challenges that must be overcome to fully realize the potential of this sector. The Tourism Linkages Network through the Agriculture Technical Working Group, after assessing a number of farming sites in St. James, St. Elizabeth, St. Ann, and Trelawny, identified that water shortages, associated with the high cost of trucking water, as well as extended drought periods across farming communities that supply the tourism and hospitality sector, are the main impediments preventing community farmers from fully capitalizing on the linkages between the agricultural sector and the tourism and hospitality sector.

Madam Speaker, these impediments further limit farmers' ability to diversify their crop production, specifically as it pertains to the growing of exotic fruits and vegetables needed across the sector. To address this, we donated water tanks to farmers in these areas. In the first phase, 50 tanks were donated to farmers in St. Elizabeth and 20 to farmers in St. James. In the second phase, 200 tanks were donated to farmers in St. Ann and Trelawny. This is aimed at assisting with irrigation challenges in the drought season and will also boost their ability to adequately supply the sector. I am happy to announce that we will be continuing this initiative in 2023 so that more small farmers can get their fair share of the tourism pie.

Madam Speaker, the importance of agriculture to tourism cannot be overstated. The Ministry of Tourism is committed to working with our farmers to ensure that they have the support they need to thrive and to contribute fully to the success of our tourism industry. Through our various initiatives and partnerships, we will continue



to develop and expand the linkages between these two critical sectors of our economy.

### *New Culinary Trails*

Madam Speaker, as we continue to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, we are also focused on diversifying our tourism product to offer visitors a unique and authentic experience that showcases our island's rich culture and heritage.

We have decided to develop gastronomy trails in three targeted areas to achieve this goal. The first is the South Coast, specifically Middle Quarters. While this region may have only some of the necessary resources for a full-scale gastronomy centre, it offers unique experiences and potential experiences that cater to the discerning international foodie.

The second area is Montego Bay, spanning the St. James and Trelawny regions. This area could become the second-largest gastronomy centre on the island, with the most significant visitor arrivals. However, the proliferation of all-inclusive resorts has curtailed activity in the local community, limiting the support of the restaurant industry, food festivals, and food zones.

The third and final area is yet to be determined, but we are currently exploring options and identifying regions that can contribute to this initiative. We aim to create a culinary experience that is unique to Jamaica and one that visitors will cherish and remember for years to come.

Madam Speaker, the development of these gastronomy trails will diversify our tourism product and provide an opportunity for more small business owners and local communities to benefit from tourism. We hope this will also spur the creation of more food festivals, culinary events, and gastronomy centres across the island.

We will work closely with local chefs, culinary experts, and entrepreneurs to ensure that these trails showcase the best Jamaican cuisine and highlight our rich cultural heritage. The trails will also allow visitors to experience the beauty of Jamaica's natural environment as they journey through our diverse regions, tasting unique and delicious foods along the way.

Madam Speaker, developing these gastronomy trails is a significant step towards our tourism industry's continued growth and success. We are excited about the opportunities and look forward to working with our stakeholders to realise this vision.

### *Artisan Village*

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to inform the House that the development of Jamaica's first artisan village at the Old Hampden Wharf in Falmouth, Trelawny, is nearing completion. The artisan village is being themed to create an immersive and authentic Jamaican experience, and we are targeting to have it open to the public in October 2023.

This exciting project will provide a platform for local artisans and entrepreneurs to showcase and sell their authentic Jamaican products. The village will offer visitors the opportunity to interact with artisans and leave a design for a custom-made product. They can then return later to collect their personalized piece. Additionally, the village will feature entertainment and dining options that showcase Jamaica's vibrant culture, offering visitors a truly immersive cultural experience.

The artisan village is a significant investment in Jamaica's creative economy and is expected to generate new job opportunities for locals, while providing a unique and authentic experience for visitors. We are confident that this project will help to drive

economic growth in the region and further enhance Jamaica's reputation as a leading cultural tourism destination.

### ***Devon House***

Madam Speaker, I am delighted to share with you the recent developments at Devon House, which are truly exciting for all Jamaicans. On May 27, 2022, we celebrated the opening of The Most Hon. Edward Seaga Suite on the East Lawns of Devon House, which is a beautifully renovated structure that was originally a gazebo. This repurposed building, which was renovated at a cost of \$15.2 million by TPDCo, will host meetings and special events, and I believe it will be a great asset to the community.

In addition to The Most Hon. Edward Seaga Suite, we also officially opened the Devon House Courtyard, which has undergone a major transformation at a cost of \$70 million. The renovated space is now an even more inviting oasis in the heart of the city, with more plants and seating areas for visitors to enjoy. I am particularly pleased to announce that we have taken steps to ensure that the public can continue to enjoy the courtyard safely by addressing issues such as uneven surfaces and poor drainage. We have also added ramps to improve accessibility for differently-abled visitors and those with baby strollers.

During the renovation process, we were careful to preserve the area's natural beauty and only removed one tree after careful consideration by the Forestry Department for public safety. In its place, we planted a young *Lignum Vitae* tree, and we have also added six additional trees and assorted plants and shrubs to the area to enhance its natural beauty.

Madam Speaker, the renovation of Devon House is a timely reminder of the importance of preserving our historical and cultural spaces. I am proud of the work that has been done to address the challenges faced by the Courtyard, and I am optimistic about the future of this beloved landmark. I am confident that the improvements we have made will make it an even more attractive destination for locals and visitors alike, and I look forward to seeing the area continue to flourish in the years to come.

Madam Speaker, I am also very happy to announce that we are creating a business plan for the establishment of a cooking demonstration facility at Jamaica's first designated Gastronomy Centre - Devon House. This facility will play a major role in the restoration and preservation of time-honoured traditions and lost recipes while featuring Jamaica's best culinarians, cooks, and artisans.

It will be designed to accommodate a diverse clientele ranging from cooking basics to corporate team building. It will feature an arena-style theatre to accommodate audiences for product launches, seminars, and cooking competitions, which will be aired via live-streaming and video content creation.

Moreover, the cooking demonstration facility will serve as a Gastronomy Resource Library/Lab that will fuel the creativity, learning, and skills-building of our country's culinary professionals. The facility will offer interactive cooking classes, cooking demonstrations, and educational seminars, providing a platform to showcase our rich cultural heritage through food.

Once completed, this special kitchen will undoubtedly bring more attention to Devon House and help to promote the development of the culinary industry in Jamaica. It will encourage the use of locally sourced ingredients, promote healthy eating habits, and showcase the diversity of our cuisine to the world.

### ***Milk River Hotel & Spa and Bath Fountain Hotel***

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to share that we have taken a significant step towards preserving the historic Milk River Hotel and Spa. In March, we announced that we will allocate \$30 million towards the renovation of the property, pending its divestment through a public-private sector arrangement. This follows a previous spend of \$11 million and will be used to correct structural defects. Recent chemical analyses of its radioactive waters have confirmed that it still retains the properties that gave it an international reputation for the cure of gout, rheumatism, neuralgia, sciatica, lumbago, nerve illnesses, kidney and liver disease, and other disorders.

In addition, Madam Speaker, the Ministry continues to undertake the preparatory work to transform both the Bath Fountain Hotel and the Milk River Hotel and Spa into the hubs of spa towns.

In concert with the Enterprise Team, the Ministry of Tourism is responsible for undertaking the preparatory due diligence studies to assist investors in making informed decisions, while the Development Bank of Jamaica (DBJ) provides Transaction Management Services.

The Government of Jamaica is seeking to identify suitable investors to transform the facilities into world-class spas. This will support the diversification of Jamaica's tourism product by aiding the island to further tap into the lucrative health and wellness market segment. This is a key objective of the Ministry's Blue Ocean Strategy.

A pre-feasibility study to support the privatisation, completed in 2016, recommended that a number of due diligence studies be completed: These include:

- Land Surveying (to include topographical)
- Civil/Structural Engineering Assessment

- Mechanical, Electrical and Plumbing Engineering Assessment
- Architectural Assessment
- Quantity Surveying
- A Flood Mitigation Study for Milk River Hotel and Spa
- A Socio-Economic Assessment for the Bath Community in St. Thomas

The objective of the Socioeconomic Assessment is to enable the Government to plan for the divestment in an integrated manner. The Assessment will provide information on the prevailing social, economic and cultural conditions in the community. This information will be used to identify the most suitable options for the privatisation and redevelopment of the facility. The Ministry of Tourism expects to conclude the due diligence studies in calendar year 2023.

To advance the privatisation process, in October 2022, The Enterprise Team in collaboration with the DBJ and the Jamaica Promotions Corporation (JAMPRO), hosted a Pre-Market Sounding Investor Forum. The objective of the Forum was to assist in the identification of the factors that increase investor interest in the divestment of the Bath Fountain Hotel (BFH) and Milk River Hotel & Spa (MRHS).

Madam Speaker, the Pre-Market Sounding:

- Gauged interest in the investment community for the divestment by the Government of Jamaica (GOJ), of MRHS and BFH facilities, in their current state.
- Identified factors that would increase or decrease investor interest in the acquisition of these assets through a development lease modality.
- Provided some initial feedback from the market on the feasibility of the proposed private-public partnership (PPP) project.
- Improved marketability of the partnership opportunity.

- Provided information to develop a request for proposal (RFP).

After the completion of the due diligence studies, the Enterprise Team will stage a full market sounding to select suitable investors for the properties.

### ***Montego Bay Convention Centre (MBCC)***

Madam Speaker, the MBCC prides itself as one of the most important multipurpose spaces in Western Jamaica. Its 2023-2024 theme is "Untapping the potential of brand Jamaica to build resilience and stronger business communities." This means fully capitalizing on all partnerships while strengthening our footprint and reach.

During the 2022/2023 fiscal year, MBCC executed over 140 events, including the World Freezone International Conference from June 8-15, 2022, with overall income amounting to some \$197 million exceeding its own source income, which was budgeted at approximately \$142 million.

As the MBCC continues to forge local and international partnerships, there are three main priorities and areas of focus for the 2023/2024 fiscal year. Firstly, to execute a robust marketing campaign covering all digital, experiential, and traditional marketing areas. This will integrate a full-scope integrated experience, spanning various content types to showcase the property's 139,302 sq. ft. of beauty. Since November 2022, the centre has reached over 2 million online users through display and search engine marketing campaigns.

Another area of focus for the convention centre is infrastructural development, which will see us further outfitting the property with world-class equipment and tools to drive more revenue, improve customer experience, and compete globally with other Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) operators. Madam Speaker, employee relations and advocacy will be the cornerstone of the

centre's operations, so training and development of talent will be a critical objective as we aim to limit human resources risks.

### ***Tourism Logistics Centre***

Madam Speaker, tourism has long been a significant contributor to our country's economy, and we are committed to developing and growing this vital sector.

To this end, Madam Speaker, I am pleased to announce that the Ministry of Tourism will develop a Tourism Logistics Centre in partnership with other key stakeholders. Jamaica is strategically located as the fourth node in the international logistics chain and the only node in the western hemisphere. We are capitalizing on this advantage to create well-needed infrastructure that covers air, sea, and road.

The Tourism Logistics Centre will focus on providing goods and services unique to the tourism industry, not only for Jamaica but for other Caribbean islands and Central and South American countries. This hub will facilitate tourism support through many sectors, including manufacturing, training, landscaping, Business Process Outsourcing (BPOs) and a small business incubator for Jamaican Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). The potential for growth and development is immense.

For the 2023/2024 fiscal year, the Ministry will complete the establishment of a joint committee with major stakeholders encompassing all areas required to accommodate implementation. The draft plan for implementation is also expected to be completed in the 2023/2024 fiscal year.

We believe that the Tourism Logistics Centre will bring significant benefits to our country and create many new opportunities for our citizens. We are committed to



working with our partners to ensure its success and to continue to build a thriving and sustainable tourism industry for Jamaica.

### ***The Future of Tourism***

Madam Speaker, I would like to draw your attention to the intersection of technology and tourism. The rapid advancement of technology has revolutionized the way we experience and engage with the world around us, including the travel industry. The metaverse, biometrics, and traveller expectations are combining to shift the landscape rapidly.

Firstly, let us talk about the metaverse. The metaverse is an immersive and interactive virtual world where users can engage with one another and participate in various activities. In the coming years, the metaverse will take traveller engagement to the next level.

According to recent studies, 43% of travellers will use virtual reality to inspire their choices, with 46% more likely to travel somewhere they otherwise would not have if they could experience it virtually first. However, some are keen to spend multiple days in the metaverse, with over a third (35%) revealing they would take a multi-day augmented reality (AR) or virtual reality (VR) travel experience. As haptic feedback technology advances, virtual travellers will soon be able to feel the sand between their toes and the sun on their skin without even having to step outside.

Secondly, biometric payments are becoming increasingly mainstream for both retail and travel payments. Apple Pay and Google Pay are examples of biometric payment systems that are already in use. However, over the coming years, travel is likely to take biometric payments to the next level. Airports already use biometrics for travel

document identification, so the logical next step is to leverage this identity check for any payments travellers make during their trip.

Finally, the introduction of AI GPT-3, the largest neural network, could have huge implications for the way software and apps are developed in the future. GPT-3 stands for Generative Pre-trained Transformer 3 – the third version of the tool to be released. It generates text using algorithms that are pre-trained having been fed around 570 GB of text information gathered by crawling the internet along with other texts selected by Open AI, including the text of Wikipedia. This technology will allow for more personalized and efficient services in the travel industry.

The combination of the metaverse, biometrics, and traveller expectations is transforming the travel industry. Remote workers will settle into an increasingly nomadic lifestyle, and AI GPT-3 will change the way software and apps are developed. As policymakers, it is essential to recognize these trends and plan accordingly. The future of tourism is technology, and we must embrace it to ensure the best possible experience for travellers.

Madam Speaker, I, therefore, encourage our workforce and those seeking to enter the tourism industry to prepare for the change. The post-COVID industry requires a diverse range of talents, including those in fields like nuclear science, robotics, and nanotechnology. The future of work in tourism will significantly transform the sector, as machine intelligence and the Internet of Things will revolutionise the way basic services are provided.

Madam Speaker, this transformation is expected to eliminate 70% of informal activities in tourism that pay lower remuneration, paving the way for more skilled and higher-paying job opportunities.

### ***Future-fitting our SMTEs***

As we prepare for the future, Madam Speaker, through the Tourism Linkages Network of the TEF, we will be launching an exciting new initiative that will help future-fit Jamaican small and micro-enterprise entrepreneurs through digital technologies. As we all know, the COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed the way we do business, and it has become clear that to succeed in the post-COVID tourism industry, Small and Medium Tourism Enterprises (SMTEs) must be organized and equipped to use digital technologies.

To address this need, Madam Speaker, we are launching a new project that will facilitate the training of Jamaican SMTEs in a range of digital marketing skills, including Google Digital Marketing, Reliable Soft Academy Training, SEMRUSH Academy Training, ClickMinded Digital Marketing Training, HubSpot Online Marketing Training, Udemy Digital Marketing Training, Simplilearn Digital Marketing Specialist Training, Copyblogger Online Marketing Training, Udacity Digital Marketing Training, and Optinmonster Digital Marketing Training.

Through this initiative, we hope to expand room occupancy and opportunities for spending in Jamaica, while also creating jobs, alleviating poverty, and contributing to economic development. By future-fitting our SMTEs to the modalities of post-COVID tourism, we will be able to deepen and expand Jamaica's tourism product and help our entrepreneurs to maximize their internal operations and efficiencies, global reach, and standards and service quality.

This project is an important step in diversifying and strengthening Jamaica's economy, and we are committed to providing our SMTEs with the tools and resources they need to succeed in the digital age. We look forward to seeing the

positive impact this project will have on our tourism industry and our country as a whole.

### ***Multi-Destination Tourism and Connectivity***

Madam Speaker, the Caribbean is experiencing a destination crisis, and air travel has become a significant challenge. As a critical player in the region, Jamaica must lead in enabling solutions to this problem. We need to implement a hub-and-spoke system, with local airports offering flights to a central airport with international or long-distance flights. This air transportation system will make air connectivity much easier and more seamless. Kingston will play an essential role in this arrangement by facilitating transit to the Eastern Caribbean and other Caribbean countries.

Several smaller airlines have emerged in the Caribbean, with some offering connecting flight routes that allow for connections to other islands. These gateways are expected to increase arrivals and ease access to the island.

To sustain tourism in the Caribbean, Madam Speaker, we must create a regional multi-destination framework. Multi-destination tourism is critical to increasing the region's attractiveness as a tourist destination and growing market share.

To accomplish this, we must also strengthen international cooperation networks to increase and better share tourism revenues. We must promote multi-destination tourism by allowing visitors to take a single trip that includes visits to two or more destinations.

We can guide tourists around the region and showcase the Caribbean's multifaceted cultural heritage and rich, diverse landscape by utilising our gastronomy, art, music, and culture. This can be accomplished by promoting food festivals, farm-to-table dining, rum routes, art walks, carnivals, music festivals, and other one-of-a-kind experiences.

I am pleased to report that we are on track to finalise a multi-destination agreement, with Mexico, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Panama, and Cuba playing key roles. This new architecture will allow visitors to seamlessly travel to two, three, or more geographically adjacent countries at attractive package prices during their vacations, making it a particularly appealing option for long-haul travellers. We anticipate this agreement will extend the tourism industry's economic benefits to approximately thirty-three million people.

## CLOSING

Madam Speaker, together with our committed tourism partners, we continued to push forward with transformative strategies to facilitate tourism's full recovery and continued growth for the benefit of all Jamaicans.

While we are elated at the tourism sector's record rebound, this is no time for complacency. It cannot be business as usual if Jamaica intends to maintain its current post-pandemic growth trajectory. It cannot be business as usual if we are serious about building a sustainable, resilient and inclusive regional tourism industry that benefits all of our citizens. Likewise, Madam Speaker, it cannot be business as usual if Jamaica is to sustain its competitive advantage in the global tourism market as a premier vacation destination.

We therefore continue to push forward with key priority projects and initiatives to shape a tourism governance infrastructure to boost the sustainable development of the sector.

Madam Speaker, we have outlined our vision to achieve economic development, job creation and inclusive growth.

We are building capacity by:

- Up-skilling and certifying thousands of Jamaicans to work in the tourism sector
- Creating a secure future for our tourism workers through the Tourism Workers Pension Plan, and adequate and affordable housing
- Strengthening linkages with other sectors of the economy, particularly the agricultural and manufacturing sectors
- Ensuring thousands of small farmers across the island connect directly with the hospitality industry, earning them hundreds of millions of dollars
- Providing marketing and financial opportunities for SMTEs
- Boosting the benefits derived from the industry by locals and communities
- Promoting broader participation by all Jamaicans
- Ensuring the safety, security and sustainability of the natural and built environments.
- Investing billions of dollars in infrastructural development

Madam Speaker, with God's guidance and careful stewardship, we will achieve the outcomes of economic growth, development for our people, and a brighter and more prosperous future for all.

Thank you, stay safe and God bless you.