

N NEWS

BHTA chair urges all to support tourism industry



NEW BHTA CHAIRMAN Renee Coppin says Barbados could not afford for tourism "to go the way of sugar". (FP)

NEW CHAIRMAN of the Barbados Hotel and Tourism Association (BHTA) Renee Coppin has pledged the private sector organisation's continued support for the tourism industry and is encouraging the public's buy-in.

In her inaugural address at the BHTA's first quarterly meeting for the year yesterday, Coppin said since tourism directly accounted for 14 per cent of the island's employment and was a significant earner of foreign exchange, attention has to be paid to the ease of doing business, as Barbados could not afford for tourism "to go the way of sugar".

"We often feel the need to remind, although it should not be necessary, that tourism directly accounts for 14 per cent of the island's employment, contributes 40 per cent of Barbados' GDP (Gross Domestic Product) both directly and indirectly and earns most of the foreign exchange to support our significant import bill.

BHTA role vital

"Therefore, we take very seriously the BHTA's role to be the private sector organisation providing national leadership for vibrant and sustainable tourism development."

A hotelier, Coppin said the BHTA saw its success as "inextricably linked to the success of Barbados and was therefore committed to working with its membership and the Government

and partners in the private sector "to both propel; and support the Government towards active facilitation of business growth and success.

"We cannot afford for tourism to go the way of sugar. We must not allow the local narrative to become one which vilifies the industry and the very meaningful opportunities for employment and ownership that it offers Barbadians," she warned.

Hopeful

In this regard, Coppin said the BHTA had commissioned a study of public perception of the industry by the private research company CADRES.

"We want to truly understand how Barbadians feel about tourism so that we can help to address the real concerns they may face and try to work with all Barbadians to ensure that tourism remains our business."

Reporting on current hotel occupancies, the BHTA chairman said hotels had enjoyed an average occupancy of 68 per cent in January 2022, after the poor performances of 2020 and 2021 and she was hopeful this could be a sign that Barbados was finally coming to grips with the COVID-19 pandemic "in ways that would allow many operators in the tourism sector to sustain their livelihoods and rebuild their businesses".

She credited Government's Barbados Employment and Sustainable Transformation (BEST) programme with assisting in keeping the doors of tourism businesses open during the dark days of the pandemic when most hotel rooms were empty and business in other tourism enterprises had come to a halt.

\$300 million slush fund

Responding to critics of the programme, Coppin pointed out tourism was not "gifted a \$300 million slush fund" through it.

"A substantial portion of the money that was pledged must be repaid by the tourism enterprises. It was done by two main mechanisms - provision of matching grants where we had to find the funds to match the amounts given to us by Government, or by Government taking preference shares in the participating enterprises."

She added "the goal was to support engagement of our teams' training, greening digitisation and refurbishment".

"To date, 48 tourism enterprises including hotels, restaurants, watersports operators and others have accessed the programme to the sum of approximately \$48 million. Through it, 2 363 employees were brought back to work and it is expected that over the next two years a further \$144 million will be disbursed," Coppin disclosed. (GC)

NCF studies Crop Over proposals

THE PROPOSALS AND requests submitted by various Crop Over stakeholders are now up for consideration, says Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the National Cultural Foundation (NCF) Carol Roberts-Reifer.

The proposals have centred around additional venues for **Foreday Morning Jam** and **Grand Kadooment**.

However, Government is not yet ready to disclose all of the details related to the upcoming summer festival. "The meetings went very well and we are in the process of finalising the intricate details so that we can produce the Festival in an exciting and responsible way, as we are mindful of the pandemic," she said.

On February 26, Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley announced that after a two-year break because of the COVID-19 pandemic, plans were being put in place to stage the **Crop Over Festival** this year.

It was also announced that marquee events such as **Foreday Morning** and **Grand Kadooment** would be decentralised and held at eight



CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER of the National Cultural Foundation Carol Roberts-Reifer. (FP)

venues. Since then, Roberts-Reifer and Minister in the Prime Minister's Office Dr Shantal Munro-Knight have held meetings with Barbados

Association of Masqueraders, the Entertainment Association of Barbados, calypso tent managers and other stakeholders.

Meanwhile, Roberts-Reifer said they would not release all of the details including the venues until they were finalised, to avoid having to backtrack further ahead.

"It is not that we are wasting time. We are working as assiduously as possible to ensure that everyone has a good time regardless of whatever activity they are engaged in.

"We do not want to step out and then have to come back because we did not consider every single angle or possibility. We want when we come out that we are ready to produce an impactful festival," she added.

Since the talks began last week, the president of the Entertainers Association of Barbados (EAB) Rudy Maloney said the meetings were productive and some tent managers indicated they were keen on staging their events, even if they had to scale back. (TG)

Notice of Application for Naturalisation

Notice is hereby given that **Alessandro Giustolisi** of # 100 Rendezvous Gardens, **Christ Church**, is applying to the **Minister of Naturalisation**, and that any person who knows any reason why Naturalisation should not be granted should send a written and signed statement of the facts to the **Chief Immigration Officer within 21 days of this notice.**