

Gov't to 'get cracking' on cruise shake-up

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cruise ship crew" to influence passenger perceptions of this destination. Revealing that the ministerial duo visited St Maarten at the suggestion of cruise line executives, a number of whom accompanied them on the trip, the Minister of Tourism said he was constantly told that ships' crews can help 'make or break' a destination.

Agreeing that crew, especially those involved with promoting the different Caribbean destinations, needed to be "sold on the Bahamas" and "won over to our side", Mr D'Aguilar said the fact cruise personnel spend more per capita in St Maarten than their customers do in Nassau showed the extent of the task facing this nation.

"One thing they've [St Maarten] targeted, which we don't seem to be able to tap into at all, is the crew on these ships," he told Tribune Business. "A comment by one of the cruise line executives was their crew spend more in St Maarten per capita than our cruise passengers spend per capita in Nassau.

"We don't tap into, recognise the crew as an important segment. The cruise executives emphasised constantly that if their crew enjoy and like a destination, and talk that to the passengers, that helps your destination. If the crew don't like the your destination, or do not find it reasonable in terms of expenditure and things to do, they talk down your destination."

Previous reports by the Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association (FCCA), which represents the major cruise lines that call on the Bahamas, described crew perceptions of this nation as 'been there, seen it,

done it', meaning that they find little new or exciting to do when voyage itineraries take them to Nassau.

The impact this has in depressing visitor spending was disclosed in the last Caribbean cruise economic impact assessment, which revealed that St Maarten's per passenger yield of \$191.26 is almost three times' greater than the Bahamas' \$64 average.

Data published by the Central Bank shows that despite a 23.7 per cent increase in cruise passenger arrivals from 2010 to 2016, rising from 3.8 million to 4.7 million per annum, total spending has remained stubbornly at \$300 million. This is because per passenger spending yields have fallen from \$78 to \$64 over the same period, a drop of 18 per cent.

Mr D'Aguilar has targeted an increase in spending yields as a priority, and yesterday said it was critical for the Bahamas to win over onboard marketing directors who inform cruise passenger about the activities available in each Caribbean destination.

"While we hear these complaints all the time that passengers are informed the Bahamas is not safe, don't take too much money with you and that it's not an interesting destination," he told Tribune Business.

"The cruise lines say it doesn't happen, but we have to focus on the cruise ship directors on every ship, and make sure we develop a relationship with them. We have to drill down to a granular level to these individuals to find out what their concerns are and sell them on the Bahamas.

"It's very important that persons on the ship interacting with the passengers; it's very important to have them on side. It seems as if the crew on these

ships like St Maarten as a destination."

Mr D'Aguilar said he had identified "a number of issues" that make St Maarten the region's highest per capita cruise spending destination, including a pleasant shopping environment where passengers were not hassled or bothered by vendors, hawkers and others to make purchases.

Suggesting that the Bahamas' Caribbean rival had created a seamless experience and flow of passengers between destination and cruise port, Mr D'Aguilar suggested this nation needed to examine its tax structure for shopping - including duty-free retailing - and the provision of a quality beach near Prince George Wharf.

"We need to look at what tourists buy and how we can affect our tax structure to allow them to spend more," he told Tribune Business. "In St Maarten, they do a lot of electronics sales. There's the perfume and jewellery, and they have no duty on clothes.

"Persons come from far and wide in the southern Caribbean to buy clothes because it's inexpensive. Another takeaway is the wonderful set-up they have that allows people to shop and stroll at their own pace in an environment where there aren't people bothering you to buy this and buy that."

Mr D'Aguilar said research showed that 70 per cent of cruise passengers on Caribbean voyages were seeking a beach experience, meaning that the Bahamas needed to offer a suitable destination in close proximity to Nassau's cruise port.

He suggested that Junkanoo Beach, stretching all the way to Arawak Cay, needed to be improved, but added that upgrading the experience will

come second to sorting out Prince George Wharf as the main cruise gateway to the Bahamas.

While the Government's plan to adopt the 'NAD model', and outsource the port's management to the private sector, has not altered, Mr D'Aguilar said it has yet to determine the best structure for doing so.

Arawak Port Development Company (APD), the BISX-listed Nassau Container Port operator, and its prospective joint venture partner, Global Port Holdings, the world's largest cruise port manager, have made no secret of their desire to bid, but the Minister yesterday indicated no release of a formal Request for Proposal (RFP) tender is imminent.

"This is something we urgently want to do, get

fixed and get cracking on," Mr D'Aguilar told Tribune Business. "This is one of the projects we want to work on. We're at the stage of having done the research, and now have to put pen to paper on the way forward.

"We're still in the preliminary stages, and trying to ascertain what the best strategy is to manage the port.

"We're not at that point where we can make any comment; it's still in the development stages. We haven't come to a definite way forward, how we structure it in the best interests of the country.

"Whatever deal we strike has to be in the best interests of the country and the destination. We have to get the balance right. It'll be done in short order."

Mr D'Aguilar said the Government was assessing various public-private partnership (PPP) and management models to determine which was most suitable, pointing to the '10 per cent Internal Rate of Return' minimum that was embedded in APD's set-up as one example.

"It was very clever," he added of APD. "You're giving someone a monopoly to run an asset of the state, but you do not want them to realise abnormal returns.

"Those are the things we're looking at, and what works here to get the investment we need, attract the capital, but ensure we remain a reasonably priced destination. We want the private sector to run it because that seems to have been successful."

Public Notice

The Bahamas Pharmacy Council (BPC)

Pharmacist Registration Examination (PRE)

The Bahamas Pharmacy Council wishes to advise all prospective applicants for registration as pharmacists under the provisions of the Pharmacy Act that with effect from the 30th June, 2018 the Council shall require all applicants to take the Pharmacist Registration Examination (PRE). The examination shall include testing of the core competencies for pharmacy practice in the following areas: Foundations in Pharmacy Practice, Pharmacy Law and Ethics and an Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE).

The Council has set the following dates in 2018 for the sitting of the examination:

EXAMINATION DATES	APPLICATION DEADLINE
JUNE 21ST, 22ND, & 23RD	MAY 11TH
SEPTEMBER 20TH, 21ST, & 22ND	AUGUST 10TH
DECEMBER 13TH, 14TH, & 15TH	NOVEMBER 9TH

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