

## Minister wants new ways to increase tourism earnings

TOURISM Minister Wykeham McNeill says the success of Jamaica's tourism sector should not be based solely on increasing visitor arrivals but that focus should also be placed on identifying ways of growing earnings per visitor.

The minister said that while there is good reason to have confidence in the tourism sector at this time, for too long the talk has been all about the growth in arrival figures.

“What we have to focus on now as a country is not just these figures, because while they are important indicators to know how many people are coming, it is just as important or maybe more important for us to find ways of growing what we earn out of tourism,” he said.

The tourism minister was speaking Wednesday at the two-day Seventh Regional Investments & Capital Markets Conference 2012, which was held under the theme “Forging Alliances: Opportunities Amidst the Crises”, at the Jamaica Pegasus Hotel in Kingston.

“What we want to do is not just to bring more people to Jamaica but we want to earn more from those people who come to Jamaica,” McNeill said, adding that Jamaica needs to retain more of this earning and this can be achieved by giving the visitors more to do when they come.

“The more attractions they visit, the more they feel the need to go out to spend money on the heritage and culture of Jamaica; the more events we host in Jamaica, the more they spend; the better it is. So we need to maximise on the visitors that are coming,” he said.

The time is ripe, he said, for Government and the private sector to take ownership of the potential presented by the tourism sector and turn it into reality. The idea, he added, is to identify ways to harness the potential of the sector and to have real investment opportunities materialise both for local and overseas investors.

The tourism ministry, said McNeill, must play a primary role of facilitator to create meaningful partnerships between private and public sector. The creation of these partnerships, he said, will generate greater information flow and dialogue across sectors, with the objective of strengthening the linkages across these industries. “This, I believe is the key to increasing the retention of tourism earnings and ultimately ensuring growth,” he said. “This may be nothing new in terms of the approach to the management of tourism globally, yet it is an approach that my ministry intends to place meaningful focus on, going forward, in our efforts to generate sustainable growth for our industry,” added the minister.

He said the current gross earnings from tourism is approximately US\$2 billion, which comes from 1.9 million stopover visitors and 1.1 million cruise passengers, while the daily spend is US\$115 for stopover visitors and US\$90 for cruise passengers.

“We need to increase the spend from these passengers that are coming and we need to increase it as much as we need to try and get more visitors here,” he said.

The greater the percentage of the tourist dollar that is spent on goods and services produced in Jamaica, the tourism minister said, the greater the overall retention of earnings from tourism. This, he added, will enable tourism to have a more substantial impact on the national economy and subsequently lead to more Jamaicans from a wider cross-section of the economy benefiting from the industry.