



**CULTURE, HISTORY AND TOURISM:
A POWERFUL COMBINATION**

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Muy buenas noches y bienvenidos todos a Puerto Rico.

I am pleased you had the opportunity this afternoon to experience the magic of Viejo San Juan and El Morro. This World Heritage Site is a major source of pride for Puerto Ricans and a major selling point for our island as a tourism destination. We are very fortunate to have the asset of a rich, authentic Latin culture steeped in over 500 years of history. The area you toured today, built between the 15th and 19th centuries, represents our legacy from the past and an irreplaceable source of inspiration for the future. We recognize that this is a draw for tourism, especially as heritage and culture become increasingly important to today's travelers. We celebrate all that is our culture and are very proud to share it with you and anyone who steps on our shores.

Old San Juan is only a small example of what our island offers. We have 78 municipalities on our island, all of which have an equally rich city center with a plaza and examples of 15 century Spanish and European tradition. For example, our second oldest city, San German, is home to Porta Coeli, one of the oldest churches in the Western Hemisphere.

Now, more than ever, as competition is growing from far flung destinations worldwide and Mexico and Latin America nearby, the Caribbean as a whole must find new ways to remain competitive. As travelers become more adventurous, we must give them easy access to experiences they crave. As the "experience" of a vacation grows as a priority for travelers, we need to continue to develop products that give visitors the conveniences they expect while enabling them to feel a strong sense of the place they are visiting.

Cultural tourism is increasingly popular among travelers. In the U.S., our main feeder market and a major source of visitors for much of the Caribbean, 75% of adult travelers attended a cultural activity or event while on a trip, according to a recent TIA survey. This translates to an estimated 109.8 million U.S. adults. Additionally, although historical places and museums have seen a decline in visitor numbers and are not a major driver of travel, they are still an important part of any travel itinerary. A majority (58%) of U.S.

adult travelers included an historic activity or event on a trip according to the same TIA survey. This translates to an estimated 84.7 million U.S. adults.

With these numbers from the U.S. in mind, it is obvious why we must work to preserve our cultural and historical assets while making them accessible to visitors. We benefit from our weather and the various physical attributes of our islands and hotels, which give the Caribbean as a whole an advantage. We also benefit from the stability of our region, proximity to the US mainland, airlift and affordability relative to Europe. However, we cannot assume the competition won't catch up. Especially as more affordable and exotic places such as Central and South America and Asian countries become increasingly aggressive in their efforts to develop their products.

Increased support from our communities and visitors, as well as private and government investment are keys to success because we need to make preserving our heritage a priority. Heritage is a broad concept and includes the natural as well as the cultural environment. It encompasses historic places, natural environments, cultural practices and experiences. To experience heritage is to gain an understanding of the long process of how a culture came to be, based on historic development rooted in the identities of those who create history, from the indigenous people to colonists and settlers. In Puerto Rico, this is evident in all aspects of our culture. You see Taino, African and European influences in our cuisine, dance, art, crafts and our people.

As an archivist and passionate historian, I understand the risk at which our treasures are put by the cost of preservation, natural disasters, instability of governments and other dangers to structures, traditions and biodiversity. We look up to organizations such as UNESCO, ICROM, OAS and FIAF that aim to set standards and challenge us all to play a role in protecting our natural and cultural heritage. We must follow their leadership and live by the examples they are setting worldwide.

Tourism continues to be the foremost vehicle for cultural exchange, providing a personal experience, not only of that which has survived from the past, but of the contemporary life and society of others. Tourism can be an immensely positive force for natural and cultural conservation by generating funding, educating the community and influencing policy. Tourism itself has become an increasingly complex phenomenon. We must take

into account so many issues, including the political, economic, social, cultural, educational, ecological and aesthetic dimensions that are inherent to tourism development. The achievement of balance among these areas presents many challenges and opportunities.

The challenges exist in creating sustainable tourism models that take into account preserving our assets. Excessive or poorly-managed tourism and tourism related development can threaten the very nature of what we are trying to promote. Although it is important to create conveniences for visitors via infrastructure and development, we must be wise about how we proceed to ensure the wellbeing of our communities, heritage and natural environment. Tourism should bring benefits to our communities and provide an important means and motivation for them to care for and maintain their heritage and cultural practices. The involvement and co-operation of lawmakers, community representatives, conservationists, tour operators, property owners, hoteliers, and anyone who has a direct or indirect involvement with tourism is essential to achieve a sustainable tourism industry and enhance the protection of heritage resources for future generations.

If tourism is to remain successful in the Caribbean we must work as one to develop unified models for this type of development. We must also partner to emphasize the natural, cultural and historic attributes of our region and position ourselves as a broader offering than just one island. We all stand to benefit from a shared mission that positions the Caribbean as more than just beaches and resorts, but also a region with a wealth of enriching experiences.

Against the backdrop of major competition in our industry, we must be supportive of each other and show a united front as a region that has a broad appeal. I understand this is difficult to do while maintaining what is unique about each of our islands, but we must seriously focus on working together to maintain what the consumer desires and make sure we are ahead of trends as a region. Tourism can provide an significant means of communication and dialogue between individuals and countries, as well as an economic activity and a means of presenting and enhancing our heritage. The Caribbean can serve as an example by taking a leadership role in demonstrating the power of the combination of history, culture and tourism.

Thank you very much for joining us in Puerto Rico. I do hope you enjoyed your afternoon in San Juan and that with the thoughts I've just shared with you, we can all begin to generate some fruitful discussion about how we can work together to share and preserve our most powerful assets.

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