

# **‘Domestic tourism booming’**

THA Tourism Secretary thanks Trinis for good Easter weekend:



Tourism Secretary Zorisha Hackett PHOTO COURTESY THA



Visitors relax at Pigeon Point beach, Tobago, over the Easter weekend.  
PHOTOS BY QUAMINA PAYNE



Visitors disembark a glass-bottom boat after a tour of the marine park in Buccoo on Easter Sunday.

STORIES BY STEPHON NICHOLAS TOBAGO CORRESPONDENT

Secretary of Tourism Zorisha Hackett is saying a heartfelt thank you to Trinidadians, as she declared domestic tourism booming for the Easter weekend.

Thousands of Trinidadians flocked to the island for the fourday weekend, with airline tickets sold out weeks in advance.

After vociferous complaints from tourism stakeholders, Caribbean Airlines added additional flights to meet the heightened demand.

Additional sailings were also added to maximise sea routes to transport visitors to the island for the holidays.

According to Hackett, 20,241 passengers will use the seabridge between April 1 and 9.

She said the figures were provided by Infrastructure Minister Jearlean John based on 42 sailings utilising the Buccoo Reef, APT James, Galleons Passage and Blue Wave Harmony ferries.

In an interview with Guardian Media on Sunday, Hackett said the feedback on the ground has been tremendous.

“Based on Tobago Hotel and Tourism Association (THTA) input, it seems we are very much in that place we need to be and hope that we can be consistently based on our accommodation sector.”

Hackett said the popular beaches on the island, such as Store Bay and Pigeon Point, are overflowing with visitors, especially Trinis.

However, she observed Tobagonians were noticeably but not surprisingly absent.

“As Tobagonians, we are very traditional and superstitious, so we don’t do much of the beach-going on Good Friday and Easter Sunday (owing to superstitious about either turning into a fish or drowning),” she said.

“However, I realise our visitors are having a marvellous time when looking at what’s been happening out there on the marine park, all around the island, the traffic, what you’re seeing in the supermarkets. It seems the sector is

having some success.”

Hackett said consistency is crucial to the tourism sector and believes domestic tourism cannot be discounted.

“We want to say thank you to our twin- island support. The domestic tourism sector is definitely booming.

“On weekends like this, you see it more than ever. I want to shout out my Trinidadian brothers and sisters who decided to not venture further up the islands but to come right here in Tobago. We really appreciate it. We must always show that appreciation and not take it for granted. We are very grateful.”

The Bethesda/Les Coteaux representative said she hoped Tobagonians “are on their A-game” when it comes to customer service.

She said she has been seeing minor improvement, but it remains a cause for concern. Hackett said her division is partnering with the THTA to provide courses to the service sector to raise the bar and elevate visitor experience.

“Even through the education system, to show the importance of the sector to us and why we should be so warm and welcoming.”

Hackett said she is looking forward to the Carnbee/Mt Pleasant Sports Day at the Mt Pleasant Recreation Ground and the 98th annual Buccoo Goat and Crab Race Festival at the Buccoo Integrated Facility.

Hackett is one of the patrons of the Buccoo event and said the Tobago House of Assembly is supporting both ventures.

She also thanked Caribbean Airlines for having “open communication” with the division.

The division and CAL held a meeting on April 1, addressing airlift, particularly during peak periods.