

THE BAHAMAS HOTEL AND TOURISM ASSOCIATION
CELEBRATING

60 Years

of Service to The Bahamas



1952-2012

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Congratulates

The Bahamas Hotel
and Tourism Association
on

60

*Years of Service
to the industry and community.*





MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER Commonwealth Of The Bahamas



On behalf of the Government and people of The Bahamas I am pleased to extend congratulations to the President, Officers and members of The Bahamas Hotel Association on the occasion of its 60th Anniversary.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of the tourism industry to The Bahamas, as it continues to be the single largest contributor to the nation's economy and generate employment for thousands of Bahamians, both directly in the industry and through allied services.

The success of our tourism product has been built on the God-given gift of a pristine natural environment. Close, constructive partnership between successive Governments, the private sector and other stakeholders, many of whom are members of the Bahamas Hotel Association, has enabled The Bahamas to maximize our tourism

product and become one of the premier tourism destinations in the world. The Bahamas Hotel Association has worked closely with the Government for sixty years in seeking to develop and improve our tourism product.

The Bahamas Hotel Association will this year formally change its name to The Bahamas Hotel and Tourism Association, reflecting the increased scope of the organizations work, and the breadth of representation of stakeholders in the organization. I commend the Association for making this change, which represents a positive and dynamic response to an ever-changing industry.

The Government will remain a committed and constructive partner with the Bahamas Hotel and Tourism Association as we seek to achieve our mutual goal of continuing to improve our tourism product and striving for excellence amongst all those working in the industry.

I extend my very best wishes to the Bahamas Hotel and Tourism Association for a successful Diamond Anniversary celebration.

Perry G. Christie
Prime Minister



A MESSAGE FROM MINISTER OF TOURISM Hon. Obie H. Wilchcombe, MP



Dear Friends:

We extend heartfelt congratulations to the Bahamas Hotel Association on its 60th anniversary.

The Ministry of Tourism knows very well of BHA's commitment to the hospitality industry and to the prosperity of Bahamians. For this reason, we proudly stand next to you as partners in the constant pursuit of enhancing the products and services we are able to offer our guests.

We are quite aware that complete devotion to the industry and those who work in it has given BHA the passion to prevail in difficult times. Furthermore, BHA has assisted its membership in recovering from many challenges, effectively promoting hotels, allied members and the entire country.

Without a doubt, BHA has seen a vibrant and progressive 60 years. The Ministry of Tourism offers our assurance that we will continue to work along side the association for the continuous advancement of its members and all residents of The Bahamas.

Sincerely,

Hon. Obie H. Wilchcombe, MP
MINISTER OF TOURISM

NASSAU PARADISE ISLAND PROMOTION BOARD
AND THEIR MEMBER HOTELS
CONGRATULATE THE
BAHAMAS HOTEL ASSOCIATION
ON ITS 60TH ANNIVERSARY



NASSAU PARADISE ISLAND PROMOTION BOARD MEMBER HOTELS

ATLANTIS, PARADISE ISLAND

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SUITES

BRITISH COLONIAL HILTON

COMFORT SUITES PARADISE ISLAND

THE COVE ATLANTIS

GRAYCLIFF HOTEL

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NASSAU PALM HOTEL

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60th Anniversary Message From the President of the Bahamas Hotel and Tourism Association



Sixty years ago the Bahamas Hotel and Tourism Association was founded by a small group of hoteliers who envisioned The Bahamas as a year-round tourist destination. They recognized the power of working together as an industry and with Government to achieve common goals.

In its early years the organization focused on marketing the destination, providing international tour operators with letters of credit, and ensuring our visitors received a quality experience. From that foundation, the organization and its members, working in partnership with Government, have played an integral role in shaping our nation's tourism industry and by extension, in nation-building.

We invite you to page through this chronicle to learn more about how the Bahamas Hotel and Tourism Association, the Ministry of Tourism, the Promotion Boards and our many partners in industry, government and the community have strived to build our industry.

Behind all of this is our people and it is those who we salute! The thousands of employees who with pride have personified the essence of hospitality and created the Bahamas brand. We salute the countless volunteers who have selflessly given their time and talent to lead our organization; serving on boards and committees over the years. Our dedicated staff has been the foundation of the organization and have coordinated the many projects and activities envisioned by our leadership.

Looking ahead, our name has been changed to The Bahamas Hotel and Tourism Association. This reflects an organization which has broadened its mandate in name and action, and recognizes that "tourism is indeed everybody's business". It is the mandate for our industry in the coming generations.

We wish to thank the people of The Bahamas for making our country one of the greatest tourist destinations in the world, and challenge each industry stakeholder to ensure that is indeed 'Better in The Bahamas'.

Sincerely,

Stuart Bowe
President



PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, the Bahamas Hotel and Tourism Association (BHTA) commemorates sixty years of service to the hotel and tourism industry;

AND WHEREAS, since its inception, the BHTA and its members have demonstrated a commitment to the development of tourism throughout The Bahamas;

AND WHEREAS, through its various education, training and scholarship initiatives, the BHTA has led and supported the development of the Bahamian people and their participation in the tourism industry;

AND WHEREAS, the BHTA, in collaboration with its sister organizations, the Bahamas Hotel Employers Association, and the Bahamas Hotel Catering and Allied Workers Union, has worked on apprenticeship and other human resource development initiatives;

AND WHEREAS, following its founding, the BHTA and its members joined the Government of The Bahamas in marketing The Bahamas as a year-round tourist destination and in the establishment of the Promotion Boards, which give focus to the ongoing marketing efforts of the destination by the private sector;

AND WHEREAS, the BHTA, in recognizing the importance of working in partnership with agencies of the Government, continues to work collaboratively with, among others, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and the College of The Bahamas in an effort to support the development of the industry, its people, policies and infrastructure;

AND WHEREAS, the BHTA has now broadened its mandate and scope of work beyond the hotel sector, the cornerstone of tourism, to other sectors of the tourism industry;

AND WHEREAS the Bahamas Hotel and Tourism Association, its leadership, members and partners are worthy of commendation for their dedication and commitment to the development of the nation's tourism industry;

NOW THEREFORE, I, Perry Gladstone Christie, Prime Minister of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas, do hereby proclaim the week of November 25th to 30th, 2012 as "**BAHAMAS HOTEL AND TOURISM ASSOCIATION WEEK**".

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have
hereunto set my Hand and Seal
this 6th day of November, 2012

PERRY G. CHRISTIE
PRIME MINISTER

NEW BEGINNINGS, NEW FRONTIERS

BHTA takes first steps with new name

Sixty years of history gives meaning to the private sector industry association known as the Bahamas Hotel Association. Its accomplishments over the past six decades have made it a respected and influential voice in the tourism sector.

Moving forward, however, the familiar face is taking on a new name. Not to disassociate itself from the past; rather, to embrace a new vision of the future. One word can describe the organisation's vision: partnership, a defining principle for all the association's work.

As the Bahamas Hotel and Tourism Association (BHTA), the industry organisation is charting a new strategic direction, wholeheartedly embracing an inclusive vision of the tourism sector.

"The success of the BHA has been through partnerships. Tourism is far reaching in its effect on economies, countries and industries. Adding the 'T' to the name allows the BHA to engage all of the stakeholders who assist in the guest experience," said Stuart Bowe, president of the BHTA.

"We are very proud of the partnerships we have had in the past, especially the ones with the government, promotion boards and tourism related industries. We recognize that everyone who participates in the industry is vital to the overall customer experience," said Mr. Bowe.

Through its allied membership, the BHTA has always reserved a space for tourism partners. In fact, the growth in allied membership has consistently outpaced hotel membership within the organisation. This year, allied members will elect their first Vice President who will sit on the Executive Committee in 2013, amplifying their voice in the organisation's governance.

"The Caribbean on the whole is moving in this direction, because of the expanding effect. It is a natural move considering our allied members are growing faster than others. It recognizes that the industry is far deeper than hotels. The broader membership – inclusive of airlines, ground transportation, tour operators, credit unions, etc. – provides a greater voice when advocating on behalf of the industry," said Mr. Bowe.



ADVOCACY

One core area of advocacy where the BHTA is determined to make a meaningful impact is the reduction of hotel utility cost in the Bahamas. Mr. Bowe said: "A concentrated effort is needed to reduce the cost of utilities on a national level. If we don't lower the cost of utilities our competitive advantage will be threatened," he said.

The BHTA also plans to look closely at proposals to introduce value added tax (VAT) in the Bahamas. The BHTA is taking a leadership role and encouraging the government to embrace best regional and global practices for the sector.

"The VAT is a hot topic globally, and through research we are seeing mixed results when implemented. We are already considered a high price destination and recognize that all stakeholders in the supply chain need consideration. A compilation of best practices is needed along with the continued collaboration with stakeholders before implementation. We get one shot at getting this right. Either way, our decision affects the standard of living," said Mr. Bowe.

The Bahamas is widely accepted to be a high cost destination, so tourism related businesses have a hyper sensitivity to cost, as it directly impacts the destination's performance.

And there is also the matter of sustainability, which the BHTA is very keen on advancing. Mr. Bowe said: “The Family Islands stand to benefit greatly from tourism sustainability initiatives and the largely untapped natural resources of the Bahamas”.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Moving into the future, Mr. Bowe expects the BHTA to continue to lead as a progressive association, with a primary focus on human development. Creating a new cadre of tourism professionals from the best and brightest students is one way the BHTA plans to contribute.

“We are currently working on an interactive student database. Our industry is far reaching by nature; it is very diverse and there are many jobs and opportunities. We have to do a better job with connecting with the next generation of hoteliers in their space,” said Mr. Bowe.



Energy Conf Ad with Stuart and US Ambassador

Tapping into Generation X and Y, the post-1980s cohort which grew up being connected through media and digital technologies, will be critically important, said Mr. Bowe.

“Our goal is to develop world class human capital, increase worker productivity, and improve communications in the multi-generational workforce” he said.



Long Island Customer Service Workshop Participants

RESEARCH

The BHTA also plans to set up a new research arm. A number of Bahamians, who have completed masters and doctoral studies, are working with the BHTA.

“Our industry unfortunately has not fully established a research arm. That is a mission critical area! Research greatly assists us in decision making; it reduces some of the subjectivity, and assists in creating an improved framework of data collection. It is our responsibility to provide better industry data that assists owners and operators in making strategic business decisions,” said Mr. Bowe.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Ultimately, Mr. Bowe said the Bahamas has to catch up where the “tourism continuum” is concerned, by identifying leaders in every customer service sector and driving world class metrics. The BHTA plans to continue advocating for the support and creation of tourism continuum agencies that focus on global customer service standards.

“The tourism continuum is a relentless focus on customer service from the moment a visitor books a stay to their return in the future. We have service gaps both inside and outside resorts that require urgent attention. It is a process that requires a lot of time, planning and partnerships; and we see increasing levels of commitment from the promotion boards, the government and the private sector,” said Mr. Bowe.

“We have a great new airport, road improvements, new properties coming on stream, existing property upgrades, and we must ensure that the customer service experiences outside of the hotel properties are improved,” he said.

In reference to the local attractions, particularly the forts and other historical or cultural sites, Mr. Bowe said: “Those are works in progress.”

“Some of the businesses of the past that government has taken the lead in, require consideration as private entity operations. This strategy could potentially reduce government operating costs, while capitalizing on the expertise of the private sector,” said Mr. Bowe.

All around, the BHTA feels confident about the future and proud of its past. For its 60th anniversary celebration, Mr. Bowe said the organisation chose an anniversary supplement to reflect in a meaningful way on its past life as the BHA.



Happy 60th BHA! From your friends at RBC.

Congratulations. Sixty years of service supporting and promoting Tourism in The Bahamas is a grand achievement. The Bahamas Hotel Association's role in the growth of the nation's premier industry has been immeasurable. At RBC we celebrate this milestone with The Bahamas Hotel Association and its members and look forward to many more.

Strength at Work for You.

The Dawn of an Industry Creates New Hope for The Bahamas

TOURISM IN ITS EARLY DAYS

Bay Street was a shadow of its modern self. Land travel was mainly by donkey drays and horse-drawn carriages on unpaved roadways made from cracked rock. The first motor vehicle that arrived in 1904 was imported by American Vice Consul Henry Mostyn. The city was illuminated by oil lamps, lit in the evenings by professional lamplighters.

It was a time when royalty still held a great deal of relevance and celebrity signified a high level of class. Dinner was not just a meal one consumed, but rather a highly involved feast one experienced. Travel was not just a pastime; it was a privilege of the white upper class in a racially segregated world. Within this context, the Bahamas, an accessible yet remote island paradise in the tropics, gave birth to its tourism industry.

In the mass market culture of tourism today, travel is no longer considered a luxury. In the early days, however, tourists were no average world citizens.

“It was a requirement for a gentleman to wear a jacket to go on a plane. There were clothing standards to maintain and they were very strict about that,” said Freeport hotelier Andrew Barnett, former President of the Bahamas Hotel Association (BHA) and 1988 Hotelier of the Year.

In the hotel dining room, a guest could not be seated or served in the dining room without a jacket. “We kept a number of loose jackets in different sizes, and they would provide you with one if you forgot,” said Mr Barnett.

Telephones and televisions, when they became available, were primarily kept in the hotel lobby. Dining was not a short, rushed activity. It was an elaborate experience. Guests would sit down for two hours or more and indulge in a multiple course meal.

Many tourism leaders are nostalgic about these “exciting times”. According to some, this was the heyday of Bahamian tourism. However, many also admit, the early days were rife with contradictions. Tourism only lasted for about six months, from Thanksgiving to Easter. After the winter season, “business dried up”, said Lifetime Director J. Barrie Farrington, a recipient of the Ministry of Tourism’s Sir Clement T. Maynard Lifetime Achievement Award.

And the Bahamas, still a colony of the British Empire, for all of its innovating efforts was still faced with many trials and tribulations: from global economic crisis to domestic unrest; from catastrophic fires to devastating hurricanes; from labour strikes to political revolution.

The changing times did not elude the attention of a local “boys club”, otherwise known as an informal association of hoteliers. The small group of business owners rose to the occasion and formalized itself. The Bahamas Hotel Association emerged as a steady hand that would help propel the industry into the future.

New technology, particularly the advent of air conditioning post World War II, proved to be early game-changers, along with advancements in telecommunications and transportation. These innovations helped to propel the Bahamas from a winter novelty to a year round industry by the 1950s.

THE START OF THE BHA

Chief architect of the BHA Reginald G. Nefzger, then general manager of the British Colonial Hotel, had a vision of uniting hoteliers, a union he believed would yield long term benefits for business owners, the industry and the country as a whole. He constituted the BHA in 1952. The founding members included: The Royal Victoria, the Montagu, the Rozelda (later renamed the Carlton House Hotel), the Prince George, the Windsor, Cumberland House, and the British Colonial Hotel.

“The BHA started as a social club among half a dozen or so hoteliers in the late 40s. For two to three years it was just a social club. The hoteliers got together to discuss their problems. And then in 1952, seven of them decided to form an association. They did, and of course, once you form an association, you have to develop bylaws, and all of these things,” said John Deleveaux, former Executive Vice President of the BHA.

“The first set of objectives were mainly to look at the problems they were having, seek to promote the hotels and work with the Ministry of Tourism (which was the Bahamas Tourism Development Board at the time),” said Mr Deleveaux, who served as Executive Vice President for 13 years.



1950s-1960s BHA Leaders Gather in 1965

The “professional gentlemen” opted to appoint a woman to steer the ship during those founding days, German national Lorraine V. Onderdonk. During her time in the industry she was the manager of the Buena Vista Estate and Cumberland Hotel.





1966 Photo BHA Group in London

“Then it was really a man’s world. She was very tiny, very attractive. She kept them in line. She would get the facts; she did her research; she would know what she was talking about and she would hold her ground. At the end of the day, they realized, she was nobody to fool around with. She was very instrumental in setting the course. She was a pioneer in terms of the position,” said Mr Deleveaux.

Others in the BHA remember Ms Onderdonk as “a very successful coordinator”. Tourism leader George Myers, former BHA President and Lifetime Director, said Ms Onderdonk “demanded the respect of her membership” and essentially controlled the association.

Before the BHA hired Ms. Onderdonk to staff the organization, Mr Myers said: “The industry people had their own responsibilities first and the association was not top of mind all the time.” When that changed, he said the BHA became “more productive and beneficial to the membership.”

The founding mission of the BHA was to “promote, increase and regulate tourism through the cooperation, understanding and closer association among hotel owners and operators.” In practical terms, this meant fostering a working relationship with the Bahamas Development Board, the government’s engine for tourism development at the time.

“The driving force: I think they needed to codify some of the operations generally, and to have a single voice in respect of trying to promote tourism,” said hotelier J. Barrie Farrington, who was a former BHA director, and long-serving President of the Bahamas Hotel Employers’ Association (BHEA).



Some of the early actions taken by the BHA included: negotiating rates with tour operators and wholesalers; providing letters of credit to wholesalers, which protected hotels against default of business and entitled the wholesalers to marketing support from the government.

Settling on the start and end dates for the annual Winter season was an important and sometimes controversial negotiation that served to help hotels maximize returns from the Winter season.

The BHA also worked together to institute over-booking policies for hotel guests. The one time common practice caused great dissatisfaction amongst visitors, according to author Angela Cleare, a veteran in the tourism industry. She said the Ministry of Tourism, who received the complaints, worked with the BHA to standardize an industry policy.

From its inception, the BHA engendered a strong relationship with the vertical tourism market. Tour operator Williams Saunders, founder of Majestic Tours, joined the BHA in 1962 as an allied member. He is now a Lifetime Director.

“I knew that in order for me to hope to be successful I had to be a friend and work along with the hotels. It was just an automatic mix. As a tour operator, I had to be close to the hotels because they could give me information on who produced business for them (and help to promote my services),” said Mr Saunders, who plans to end his 60-year career later this year.

“That was how I made some of my connections because I knew pretty much everybody in the hotel business back then. I knew that is what it took to move forward and acquire contacts, so I worked very closely with the hotels,” he said. In the early years, the BHA efforts were largely limited to Nassau. Paradise Island did not come into prominence until the mid 1960s, said Mr Farrington, and the Family Islands and Grand Bahamas were not yet mainstreamed.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF PARADISE ISLAND

Hog Island was renamed Paradise Island in 1962 by an Act of Parliament. The government expected substantial development to occur on the island, and for the purpose of the Hotels Encouragement Act it was designated an Out Island, said Mr Farrington.

American multi-millionaire Huntington Hartford, heir to the international supermarket chain the Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Company (A&P), was one of the first major developers of Paradise Island. Mr Hartford built the world famous Ocean Club and Café Martinique restaurant. He was a “very rich, eccentric American”, said former BHA President and Swedish Consul General Anders Wiberg.

Mr Hartford purchased the island in the late 1950s from Swedish investor Dr Axel Wenner Gren, who owned about 90 per cent of the island. German architect Karl Schmidt, who designed Dr Wenner Gren’s other major property, the Lighthouse Club, Andros, played a large role in the landscaping and design of the island.

BHA Lifetime Director Nettica “Nettie” Symonette worked closely with Mr Wenner Gren and Mr Hartford at different points in her career. In 1962, she moved to Paradise Island, where she remained until 1972. As an assistant financial controller of the entire island, she was there during the island’s formative years.

The original facilities on the island included: the Ocean Club, the Ocean Club restaurant (which was destroyed by fire), the original Café Martinique (which was later demolished) and the Paradise Beach Pavillion, where millions of tourists and Bahamians would enjoy the beach.



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THE BAHAMAS HOTEL ASSOCIATION
ON 60 YEARS OF SERVICE
TO THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

1952 - 2012



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EXUMAS
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SAN SALVADOR

Congratulations

The Bahamas Out Island Promotion Board congratulates
the Bahamas Hotel Association for its 60th Anniversary
serving the Bahamas Tourism Industry.

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“Huntington Hartford was not a good business man. He was very flamboyant and more of a player. Unfortunately, he surrounded himself with other executives who did a good job at diminishing his fortune,” said Ms Symonette.

“Eventually he sold 75% per cent of his interest in Beach Head Limited to Mary Carter Paints. When Mary Carter Paints left PI, they sold their interests to Resorts International. Resorts International constructed the 100-room Beach Inn Hotel on Paradise Island, where I became assistant general manager and also constructed the 250-room Britannia Towers,” she said.

Britannia Towers received its casino license from the Bahamian Club on West Bay Street, which was the first casino in the Bahamas.

The Holiday Inn hotel chain constructed a 550-room hotel, almost opposite the Beach Inn Hotel. The Lowe’s Hotel was constructed on the Harbour Side of Paradise Island. Many private interests developed a myriad of other guest accommodations and residences.

Once Paradise Island began to develop, its hotel properties joined the ranks of BHA membership.

THE FIRST TOURIST

Although the BHA’s entry as an industry player marked a significant milestone for the tourism industry, it was not the beginning of Bahamian tourism. Long before the formation of the BHA, and even the early influence of Sir Stafford Sands, hailed as a tourism visionary and pioneer, the British archipelago to the South of the United States of America started to attract its first visitors.

In her book “History of Tourism in the Bahamas: A Global Perspective”, Mrs Cleare suggests the first recorded tourist could be classified as Christopher Columbus, regardless of how ungracious a guest he may have been. His arrival on the shores of historic San Salvador, Guanahani Island, heralded in a new era of global expansion.



Fast-forwarding through the early years of conquest, plundering, and settlement to the 1800s, there is documentation that suggests the Bahamian tourism industry started to formalize itself.

Early issues of the Nassau Guardian and Colonial Advertiser contained advertisements for guest accommodations in Nassau, according to the research of Mrs Cleare. Victoria House on West Hill Street was one such property. The house was reportedly built in 1740 by the notorious pirate Captain John Howard Graysmith.



It still stands today as Graycliff: the restaurant, hotel and humidor. The property has hosted such nobility as the Duke and Duchess of Windsor (formerly King Edward VIII) and Sir Winston Churchill.

In 1844, Victoria House was advertised by owner Nathaniel French as a guest house. Five years later, Mr French evolved his thinking. In 1849 he rebranded and reopened the property as French’s Hotel. It offered “strangers and invalids accommodations unsurpassed in the Bahamas”, with breakfast, lunch, dinner or supper available on a short notice, accompanied by the best porter, ale and wine.

Standing as the oldest hotel still in operation, Graycliff still offers “elegant guest chambers and spacious cottage suites”. Although its ownership has changed hands several times over the years, it never lost its charm. Today, Graycliff is considered a historic site in Nassau.

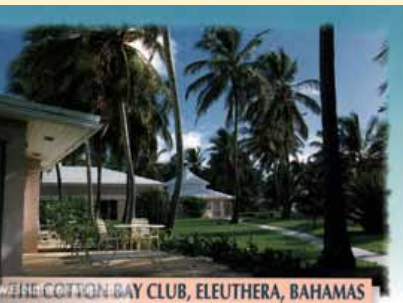
In the decades to follow, the government would make several legislative attempts, not all successful, to attract transatlantic cruise services and hotel investors to the Bahamas. By 1859, an American tourist with \$145 to spare could take the regularly scheduled three to five day round trip journey by boat from New York to Nassau. By 1861, tourists could stay at the luxurious Royal Victoria Hotel, which was said to be the “largest and most commodious ever built in the tropics”, with verandas surrounding three of the four floors and a world-famous tropical garden with some 200 species of exotic trees and plants.

The government subsidized the construction with approximately \$130,000 USD. It took several owners and over three decades for the Royal Victoria to fully establish itself. Henry M. Flagler, a wealthy oil magnate from Florida, was the last owner. He also built Nassau’s second large-scale hotel, Hotel Colonial, which opened its doors in 1900 with 400 “turn-of-the-century suites”.

In early 1900s, the colonial government had two successful legislative initiatives: it passed a Manufactories and Hotels Encouragement Act in 1913 and established the Bahamas Development Board (BDB) in 1914, as the institution responsible for promoting tourism, negotiating with carriers and coordinating tourism related matters. The BDB received an annual operating budget of 3000 pounds in its founding year.

In the years to follow, there was a boom in tourism development. From the ground arose a number of hotels, mostly small properties, including Lucerne Hotel, built by Roger M. Lightbourn in 1913 on Frederick Street. Across the road was the 20-room Allan Hotel. Windsor Hotel was the first in the centre of Bay Street. Roland Symonette’s 1920 Rozelda Hotel was the first apartment hotel. It was later known as Carlton House.





The Colonial Hotel was rebuilt by the government in 1923 after the original property was destroyed by fire. The 200-room Montagu Hotel had its official opening on New Year's Eve, 1926. It featured lake-front bungalows and the famous Jungle Club. The Parliament Hotel, another popular small scale development, opened downtown in 1938. Cable Beach Manor opened in 1940, the oldest hotel on Cable Beach, still operated by past BHA President Anders Wiberg.

EARLY HOTELS IN THE FAMILY ISLANDS AND GRAND BAHAMA

The first Family Island hotel was the Bimini Bay Rod and Gun Club, which opened in 1920. It also was the first hotel in The Bahamas with a casino, hoping to lure new-found wealthy Floridians and snowbirds because of its proximity. Unfortunately, the hotel met a tragic end in 1926 when a massive hurricane surge swept it away.

Harbour Island was an escape for the rich set early on. Pink Sands opened in the late 1940s and is believed to be the oldest hotel in the Family Islands. In the 1950s new landmarks were established in Andros with the opening of the Lighthouse Club and Marina and in Exuma where Club Peace and Plenty opened in 1958. Both are still operating today. The Cotton Bay Club also opened its doors in 1959 in Eleuthera and is re-emerging today in part with Bahamian investors.

On Grand Bahama, the Jack Tar Resort opened in 1959, the site where today Old Bahama Bay still operates. In 1963 the Lucayan Beach Hotel opened its doors.

These early hotels provided the traveler with a new and different off-the-beaten path experience and were the forerunners of what today has become a boutique-type escape.

FINDING NEW FORTUNES IN TOURISM

Despite the early growth in the hotel sector, there was only marginal growth in tourism arrivals to the Bahamas in the early 1900s. The Bahamas took a beating during World War II, and had a weak recovery compared to other North American destinations. In 1949, statistics show 32,018 visitor arrivals by air and sea, with stopover visitors by air capturing the largest share of the market.

“We were behind. Florida was where you saw the real boom. The Bahamas said, look at what is happening in Florida. They have these big hotels, why can't we do it too. The Caribbean was not thinking about it. They thought we were crazy,” said Mrs Cleare, describing how the government met in 1949 to address the crisis.

In the face of much opposition, the government decided to increase the budget allocation to tourism by 66 per cent (156,150 pounds), and appoint Sir Stafford Sands to head the Development Board. Both actions came into effect in 1950.

In 1954, the government passed a new Hotels Encouragement Act, which was aimed to spur on the modernization of existing hotels and a wave of new construction. The efforts paid big dividends. By 1957, the number of annual arrivals to New Providence and Paradise Island was 194,618, up from 32,018 in 1949.

In 1968, the Bahamas finally reached the laudable 1 million tourist target, for annual visitor arrivals. Many agree, the domestic efforts were significantly bolstered by evolving geopolitics.

“The real stimulus for tourism in the Bahamas started around the early 60s as a result of the trade embargo that took place with Cuba and the United States in 1961. You had a shift between tourists who were going to Cuba and were brought into Nassau. That is how real tourism started to take place,” said industry veteran Robert Sands, a former BHA president.

Cuba was one of the few competitive tourism markets in the Caribbean that posed a threat to the Bahamas in the early days. That score was fast settled however, when their tourism sector collapsed in the wake of the Cuban Revolution and the US Embargo.

CARIBBEAN RELATIONS

For the most part, the colonial government in the Bahamas capitalized on the Caribbean's apprehension for tourism, and also the stigma of underdevelopment that plagued neighbouring destinations such as Jamaica.

Eventually, the Caribbean region took the Bahamas' lead, and delved full force into the tourism sector. A regional partnership formed through a number of organizations, including the Caribbean Hotel Association (CHA). The Bahamas rolled solo for more than ten years after its formation in 1962.

“I was the one who brought the Bahamas into the CHA,” said Mr Wiberg. “Everyone here was very negative towards the Caribbean. At one point, in the early 60s, the Ministry of Tourism was passing out a little brochure saying, we're not in the Caribbean, we're in the Atlantic Ocean,” he said. It was a strategic move, he said, to differentiate the Bahamas in a competitive marketplace.

“The government was deliberately trying to capitalize on being so close to the United States, and so much safer and better organized than the Caribbean. Jamaica had a bad reputation in the 70s,” said Mr Wiberg.

When the CHA, led by executive director John Bell, sent a delegation to Nassau in 1974 “to talk us into joining”, Mr Wiberg said “everyone went into that meeting with sort of a negative attitude; well we'd listen to them but we are not going to do anything”. In the end, the CHA delegation managed to turn the Bahamian hoteliers around, and the Bahamas joined the pack. “The similarities are much bigger than the differences,” said Mr Wiberg.

The BHA has much to reflect on in its 60 year history. Every step of the way, as international events and domestic initiatives shaped the tourism industry, the BHA served as a powerful agent of change. From one challenge to the next, the BHA innovated and overcame. For countless opportunities, the BHA stood up to be counted. As the organization continues to thrive, its efforts are continuously bolstered by the strong foundation built in the early days of tourism.

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Transportation Takes Tourism to New Heights

Hip to Hop to the Bahamas

When the aviation industry was in its infancy, hoteliers like Charlie Pflueger, long standing General Manager of Exuma's Peace and Plenty Inn, would fly "white knuckled" across the Bahamas on twin engine airplanes with eight other passengers.



One particular thunder storm stood out so vividly to Mr Pflueger, he wrote about the experience in an autobiography. "I thought the pilot would turn away, but no. He sat there and had the damn thing going up and down like a yoyo. It scared the hell out of me. I was thinking, what is the matter with you," said Mr Pflueger.

He developed a strategy of "sizing up" his pilots before stepping on a plane. In those days, there was only one man at the helm. His tactics might have seemed crude, but Mr Pflueger surely was only trying to safe guard his promised threescore years and ten.

"I used to size up the pilots. If I saw a fat guy, sweating a lot and smoking a cigarette, I would say, I don't know if I want to get on that plane. I was trying to measure if this guy was going to have a heart attack in the seat, and I'm going to wind up flying

the plane, which I don't know how to do. In those days it was kind of fun and exciting. It was flying by the seat of your pants but it seemed to work," said Mr Pflueger.

In those days, there were no lights at the Exuma airport so residents with cars would drive out to the airport and park on both sides of the road to light up the runway for emergency night flights. Mr Pflueger's stories sound like the scenes from a MacGyver movie, but those were the early days of aviation in the Bahamas. This was not uncommon throughout the Family Islands. It wasn't until recent years that the main Family Island airports began to have night lighting, an initiative which was advanced by the industry and the Ministry of Tourism.

Tourism and Aviation: 'Til Death do us Part

The growth and development of the aviation industry has been closely tied to the evolution of tourism in the Bahamas. Veteran hotelier George Myers stressed that "airlift is the basic initial requirement for expansion" in the tourism sector. It is a tenet that holds true for most tourism experts, in relationship to the past, present

and future. Therefore, airlines and airports, along with hotels, played an integral role in tourism's public-private sector partnership.

This partnership has lured to our shores the world's most notable airlines, including Pan American Airways, British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) and Lufthansa. It opened up new markets and has been the single most important element to the growth of tourism in the Bahamas.

Evidence of this is the present expansion of the Lynden Pindling International Airport, which recently completed its second phase expansion. The new US/ International Arrivals Terminal improves on the world-class standards of the newly expanded US Departures Terminal. Construction of a new Domestic Arrivals and Departures Terminal is now underway. The expansion of LPIA has been a top priority for successive governments, supported fully by the BHA.

"Negative first and last impressions can damper even the most memorable experience" said BHA Vice President for the Family Islands Shavonne Darville, who also serves as President for the Bahamas Out Islands Promotion Board.

"Investments which have been made in LPIA, Freeport, Marsh Harbor and the soon to be commenced development of the Bimini and Cat Island airports go a long way towards developing our islands and improving services for residents and visitors. They also create conditions in the Bahamas for attracting new airlift and investments," said Mrs Darville. "While we've seen progress, more remains to be done to make it easier and more affordable for visitors to discover and enjoy our Family Islands. Airlift is our lifeline" she adds.

Modern hoteliers need no more reminder of the importance of air service to the Bahamas than to recall the turmoil caused by the 1958 general strike and airport closure. When negotiations failed to resolve a dispute between taxi drivers, tour operators and airport managers, the Taxi Cab Union, led by Sir Clifford Darling, along with Randol Fawkes of the Federation of Labour, called for strike action.

"The island was locked down for 19 days: No plane arrived or left; No cruise ship arrived or left," said BHA Lifetime Director Williams Saunders, also founder of Majestic Tours. He remembers standing in the middle of Bay Street one afternoon at noon. "I looked North, East, West, South, I did not see one human on Bay Street," said Mr Saunders, describing the eerie feel of downtown Nassau during the strike.

The events of September 11, 2001 brought a similar feeling when the skies shut down and arrivals came to a standstill for several days.



The year of the 1950 strike was the only year in the decade of the 50s that saw negative tourism growth. It was an otherwise prosperous decade, following the hard-hit years of World War II. During the war, Nassau's two airfields, Windsor Field and Oakes Field were used for military operations. After the war, Oakes Field reverted to civilian use, and Windsor Field was abandoned. Many Bahamian war pilots pursued careers in civil aviation.

Although the war took its toll on tourism in the Bahamas, it did fuel the first major expansion of the local airline industry. The jet engine was a wartime innovation. When jet-powered airlines came into commercial use, it opened up an entire industry of mass market tourism. Travel was safer, faster, less expensive and more widely available, adapting to the needs of leisure travelers. It contributed to the mid-century boom, and the eventual broadening of the base.

"Mass tourism created a demand for more air service. It is hard to imagine today, but Pan American flew 747s daily from New York to Nassau. And Eastern flew Lockheed 1011s, 300 seaters, quite frequently, even out of Miami. They were big jets, and they flew even on short distances. Today there are almost no big jets flying (short distances)," said Anders Wiberg, former BHA President.

The European market opened up through partnerships with Lufthansa Airways, BOAC and International Air Bahama, which channeled visitor to the Bahamas through London and Luxembourg.

In the 1950s, coinciding with the conversion of the Windsor airfield into an international airport that outmatched Oakes Field, Pan American expanded its service to the Bahamas, increasing its passenger load significantly over the decade. By the 1960s, between Pan American and its rival British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC), there were four to six daily flights serving the Nassau-Miami winter route. The trip took only 55 minutes and cost \$30.

Ultimately, seaplanes did not endure, but they served an important function in the days before jet engines. Pan American's amphibians were still the number one air carrier in the early 50s. However, it was Chalk's Flying Service, who made the maiden ocean flight to the Bahamas with a sea plane in 1919. It landed in Bimini, where scheduled flights were eventually introduced.

Looking into the future, many members of the BHA agree, the Bahamas destination will grow in step with its success at developing new markets and generating new airlift. Mr Wiberg suggested that bringing more direct flights to the Family Islands

is a high priority for the future of aviation. His view is supported by many industry experts.

BHA Lifetime Director George Myers, who joined the industry in 1963, said he is encouraged by the recently added direct link to Panama by Copa Airlines, as it will help to increase market access to Central and South America. He said the greatest potential for new markets in North America is "Texas, the southwest, midwest, and western United States", and Western Canada.

He hopes the national flag carrier Bahamasair will one day become a major contributor to tourism airlift from new markets. A task he considers critically important as the Bahamas continues to rely on US and Canadian airlines to service the destination.

"Sooner than later the national carrier has to become a major force in the transportation of visitors to this destination. If initially only within a two hour flight time radius. It has to start. Right now, it goes to Fort Lauderdale and Miami, Orlando: that is it. And it is carrying mostly Bahamians," said Mr Myers. His thoughts echoed those of others in the industry, who have even suggested that Bahamasair leave domestic flying to domestic private airlines, and focus on servicing new markets.

The growth of private domestic air service over the past decade has had a major impact on the aviation industry and the possibilities for the future. With Sky Bahamas and Western Airlines leading the way, a number of domestic carriers "have come of age" and are plugging the gaps in service in the Family Islands where reliable, affordable services is sorely needed. Many of them have been angling for changes in policy to facilitate the expansion of the industry, such as common carrier agreements, less of a tax burden for aviation fuel, and increased standards. Although much is left to be done, the stage has been set for domestic airlines to blossom in the future.

Many of the advances in aviation have been a direct result of cooperation between private and public sector partners, such as the BHA, the Tourism Promotion Boards and the Ministry of Tourism, and more recently the Nassau Airport Development Company. In the past two years, the Bahamas has landed significant airlift as a result of the partnership, and there is presently a high level of collaboration, particularly concerning the Family Islands.



Destination Marketing

A True Public-Private Sector Partnership



Tourism Minister Perry Christie at ASTA

When the Bahamas Hotel Association was formed its members immediately saw the need to collectively market the destination. For its entire 60 years, the BHA was a prominent force in tourism promotion, working along with the Bahamas Tourism Development Board and later the Ministry of Tourism and Promotion Boards..

As the importance of marketing became more apparent, the BHA facilitated the creation of three promotion boards to focus solely on marketing the destination. By 1970, the Out Islands, Grand Bahama and Nassau-Paradise island had established industry groups to work on marketing. BHA facilitated the formation of these into what today is known as the 'Promotion Boards'. In 1970, the Nassau Paradise Island Promotion Board was formed. Shortly thereafter Boards were established for Grand Bahama and the Out Islands. This approach was unprecedented in the industry at the time. It enabled private sector marketing resources to be directed towards geographic specific needs, while the government maintained a strategic focus on marketing of the overall destination.

Two BHA lifetime directors have been instrumental figures in the development of the promotion boards: Netica "Nettie" Symonette and George Myers. Mr Myers was a founding member of the Nassau/Paradise Island Promotion Board, and still serves as its chairman. He is well respected for his marketing acumen and business relationships, particularly with the airline industry. Joining him early on was William Naughton, past President of BHA and long-term Treasurer for the NPIPB, a position he still holds today. Ms Symonette served as the Treasurer for four years, when they managed a \$6 million budget. Later, she was instrumental in revitalizing the Bahamas Out Islands Promotion Board.

Magnus Alnebeck, General Manager for Pelican Bay and BHA Vice President for Grand Bahama has been active with the Grand Bahama Island Tourist Board since 2006. Previously he operated hotels in St. Lucia and the United Kingdom. "The Bahamas is indeed fortunate to have had a healthy level of collaboration

between the public and private sectors over the years. The work of the Promotion Boards and the Government historically has been instrumental to the success of The Bahamas. With recent developments in Grand Bahama, we look forward to taking that collaboration to new heights", states Mr. Alnebeck.

It's Better in the Bahamas

There is one message above all else that has defined destination Bahamas over the years of tourism promotion. It has stood the test of time and continues, as if serving as a mission statement, to chart a course for the future.



For many decades, the burden of the promise has rested on the shoulders of Bahamians; while the inherent call to action has brought with it many blessings. As far as promotional slogans go, there are hardly any better than It's Better in the Bahamas.

The year was 1976; the place, Manhattan, New York; more specifically, the office of marketing agency McCann Erickson, according to John Deleveaux, former Ministry of Tourism Deputy Director General and BHA Executive Vice President. One frustrated day, Mr Deleveaux travelled to the Madison Avenue office of McCann from his Rockefeller Centre office to meet with account executives, including John Fox and the company Vice President Jim Agnew, about the Bahamas' winter campaign. They had been working on a campaign for a long time, testing out a number of lines, looking for the perfect pitch to present to Minister Clement T Maynard.

"This guy John Fox says to his vice president, 'We have a problem. We have got to go down in two weeks to present to the Minister and Deleveaux doesn't like any of the stuff we've presented'. So (Jim) says, 'What's going on?' And (John) says, 'Well, we discussed this that and the other thing, and what John (Deleveaux) wants us to do is come up with a line that says It's better in the Bahamas'.



“Jim Agnew says, ‘What’s wrong with that?’ We said, what’s wrong with what? He said, ‘It’s better in the Bahamas.’ That is how it was born, really out of frustration,” said Mr Deleveaux.

The Bahamas has strived to continue delivering on the brand promise ever since. Under the leadership of Sir Clement T Maynard, the destination had great success. He was the longest serving Minister of Tourism and is credited with the modernization and Bahamianisation of the tourism product.

More so than perhaps any other minister, the record will show, the programmes introduced by Sir Clement are responsible for the widespread industry embrace by Bahamians towards the tourism sector, at a time when it was most challenging, said David Johnson, Director General in the Ministry of Tourism.

“The prevailing attitude in the region was that tourism was servitude. Sir Clement fashioned it in the Bahamas as a business. He introduced programmes like BahamaHost, People to People and Goombay Summer; encouraged visitors to embrace things Bahamian and for Bahamians to share their culture with visitors, not in a subservient way,” said Mr Johnson.

Sir Clements’ efforts were complemented by his Director General Sir Baltron Bethel, who first served as permanent secretary. Working together, the duo represented “one of the most powerful combinations in tourism management”, said Mr Johnson.

“Sir Clement was the policy shaper of Bahamianisation in tourism, Sir Baltron was the person who executed it,” he said. They gave birth to the Bahamas Hotel Corporation and were the first to join aviation and tourism into one ministry. The recruitment and training of black Bahamians happened in a major way under Sir Clement. In the direct promotion of tourism, Sir Clement brought black Bahamians, formerly employed at the service level, into the professional workforce. They were sent to serve as managers in the overseas offices.

Washington resident Bernard Davis was the first Bahamian hired as a sales representative. Following him were pioneers such as Athama Bowe, James Catalyn, Arlene Wisdom (Albury), Philip Mortimer, Van Isaacs and Mr Johnson.

The sales offices were established in the 1950s under Sir Stafford Sands, then director of the Bahamas Development Board (the forerunner to the MOT). He opened seven tourism offices in North America: New York, Chicago, Miami, Pittsburgh, Dallas and Toronto were the original offices, with Los Angeles coming later.

The Bahamas still maintains offices around the world: two in North America, an office in London, France, Italy and Germany, and representation in Beijing. The digital office, Bahamas.com, is perhaps the largest of them all.

The government initially recruited foreigners, from international shipping lines, cruise lines and airlines, to work in the sales offices, said Mr Deleveaux. The sales

and promotion teams met annually with the Development Board to develop the marketing plan for each season.

By 1965, the government was spending 90 percent of its tourism budget (or \$4 million) on advertising, public relations, sales aids, films, promotions, subsidies and the cost of maintaining overseas sales offices, according to the research of author and tourism veteran Angela Cleare.

Joint promotions between the MOT and BHA officially began in 1969, said Ms Cleare, when a Joint Promotions Committee, co-chaired by the MOT and BHA was established. The partnership brought greater collaboration in advertising, public relations and marketing for onshore and offshore promotions. The BHA became a key player in the marketing strategy conferences that took place annually.

“We would meet at a hotel for two to three days and map out our whole marketing programme. Tourism never did that without the BHA involved,” said Ms Cleare. “I was very impressed with the fact that they did not waste money. They sat down together, private sector and government, to see how they could maximize the limited funds, by determining together what they should do and follow through together,” she said.

Hoteliers developed a particularly strong relationship with airlines, said Mr Deleveaux, which frequently allowed hoteliers free travel for promotional trips, even in large groups.

During off-shore promotions, the MOT and hoteliers would wine and dine key industry players at extravagant receptions. Travel agents accounted for 70 percent of tourism business at one time; along with airline representatives and later wholesalers, they formed a core constituent for tourism promotions. “These promotional trips became a very important link between tourism and the hotels,” said Mr Deleveaux.

One of the most recent collaborations between the MOT and the promotion boards produced the successful Companion Fly-Free tourism promotion.

The Companion Fly Free campaign was an innovative promotion to shore up competitiveness. Mr Johnson said conditions in the airline industry saw the Bahamas lose the competitive edge it had traditionally derived from its proximity to North America.

From the 1970s, the Bahamas was always able to offer North American travelers, airfare that was cheaper than the rest of the Caribbean, or even Mexico. With the high level of taxes and other increases, this has become more difficult today. “The proximity advantage of the Bahamas always made it a preferred destination. When Vincent became minister he asked, what is the greatest challenge towards achieving new growth? The answer delivered was, we need to fix the cost of airfare,” said Mr Johnson.

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The government was not sold on an idea to remove taxes from the ticket, feeling at the end of the day that “a bird in the hand is worth more than a bird in the bushel”. The public/private sector partners – including Atlantis CEO George Markantonis, NPIPB Chairman George Myers and its CEO Fred Lounsberry – went back to the drawing board and conceived Companion Fly Free. Tests for the initiative proved positive and the programme was launched.

“I am convinced that had we not had that programme, double-digit declines would’ve occurred and we would’ve been faced with the dim possibility of even more layoffs. Because the number of people we were competing for had shrunk, we had lost our competitive advantage and the Bahamas would have continued to sink on a double digit decline,” said Mr Johnson.

Mr Johnson assumed the role of Director General after Venice Walkine retired from public service. She was the first female DG. She started her tenure in 2005 during a period of “unprecedented foreign direct investment”, said Mr Johnson. The government had around \$20 billion in investment dollars committed to projects in the Bahamas.

“With Vernice there was a strong focus on partnership, with the BHA and the Downtown Development Group in the redevelopment of Bay Street. She was a point person in the effort to move that forward,” said Mr Johnson.

The tourism director generals have played a major role over the years in shaping the development of the industry. As director general, Vincent Vanderpool Wallace established a much more “direct and integrated public/private sector approach to tourism marketing”, said Mr Johnson.

“Under Vincent, I think our efforts went from being cooperative to being truly collaborative and integrated. That was his primary contribution: deepening the partnership with the promotion boards especially and the BHA. He brought a private sector approach to tourism management to the MOT as a public sector entity,” he said.

Over the industry’s lifetime, the public/private sector partnership has worked through its growing pains. Mr Johnson said “a happy medium” exists today. “We are in a good place now, but we had ebb and flow with the government driving the partnership and the private sector driving the partnership at different times. It is now a joint, collaborative and jointly executed effort which is working quiet well,” said Mr Johnson.

Other joint initiatives between the MOT and industry partners include onshore promotions and special promotional seminars called “Teach-Ins”, targeted at travel agents. Former Bahamas Out Island Promotion Board President Charlie Pflieger of Exuma’s Peace and Plenty resort, remembers flying to Nassau from George Town to attend meetings with travel agents. He said professionals from around the world would converge for a few nights in a Nassau hotel to be exposed first hand to Bahamian hospitality.

The MOT and industry partners also attended numerous international

conferences together to promote the destination. There were several key conventions, where the Bahamas sent a large delegation, including the World Travel Market conference and the American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA) conference.

The BHA, Promotion Boards and the Ministry have also hosted the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association’s Caribbean Marketplace event on at least eight occasions over its 30 year history. This is the largest marketing event for the region bringing well over a thousand buyers and sellers together for deal-making. The event also exposes ‘buyers’ and the international travel press to the Out Islands and Grand Bahama through organized pre and post trips. The Bahamas hosted the event in 2012 and is again hosting it early in 2013.

The overbooking policy was also a collaborative effort between the BHA and the MOT. “It put more order into the tourism sector”, which enhanced the overall destination. Before the policy was developed, the MOT was stuck with a range of complaints from visitors concerning overbooking. The MOT and BHA developed a policy and “complaints went out the door”, said Ms Cleare.

Crisis management was another initiative done jointly with the MOT and BHA. Coupled with BHA’s Hurricane Cancellation Policy, the first of its kind globally, the impact of storms on bookings has been mitigated.

The Ministry, BHA and Promotion Boards also collaborated on market research. Before BHA got involved, statistics primarily recorded stopover visitors and cruise visitors. The addition of occupancy rates, average daily rates and available room nights helped members of the BHA to better analyze the results of marketing efforts. Many destinations throughout the region marvel at the sharing of competitive data that still exists today in the Bahamas. Frank Comito, BHA Executive Vice President said the value of such sharing “underscores the importance of collaboration”.

“Everything of significance that tourism did was done in partnership with the hotels, because the MOT’s view was that we own no hotels, taxis, buses. Our job is simply to bring buyers and sellers together. Seeing that hotels represent the cornerstone of the tourism product we always worked with the BHA and the Promotion Boards. I can’t think of any project that they were not involved. If you started to work on something and they were not involved then you would get a call,” said Ms Cleare.

“The whole idea was synergy and efficiency from the point of view of manpower and cost: Bringing the brains together from the public and private sector to come up with the best marketing programme. We have one of the best partnerships in the region,” she said.

A Community in Transition

BHA and Tourism Help Bridge the Racial Divide

Tourism insiders know the story well, but within the consciousness of post 1973 babies, there is virtually no recollection, only confusion and bewilderment, when the name Hugh Springer is evoked; even though the saga of the eminent Barbadian barrister became the focal point of the mainstream anti-racism movement in December 1953.



Mr Springer, the registrar of the University College of the West Indies with a negro-hue, was en route to London with “a number of prominent” colleagues, when their flight had to be diverted to the Bahamas because of engine troubles. What happened in Nassau, while being completely consistent with hotel policy, was an embarrassment to the industry and the white establishment.

While in Nassau, The Prince George Hotel was to accommodate the distinguished academics for dinner arrangements provided one condition was met. Mr Springer could not join the party on account of his colour. “He was advised to have dinner at the airport cafeteria,” according to historical accounts by author and tourism veteran Angela Cleare.

Refusing to go silently, Mr Springer turned to Member of Parliament Sir Etienne Dupuch, former editor of the Tribune newspaper, whom he had reportedly met earlier that year, for accommodation. Sir Etienne opened his home and his dinner table to Mr Springer and then used the power of his pen to raise awareness about the incident.

Historians do not recount the story of Mr Springer as if it was a revolutionary catalyst, but it is recorded as a barefaced example of how racial discrimination, which in many ways defined the era, manifested itself in the hotel sector. The entrenchment of racism and segregation in law and practice reflected a global reality that came to head mid-century.

“Back then, some of the major hotels did not accept black people. The (currentHilton) British Colonial was owned by the Sir Harry Oakes family.

No black people could register there and that was one of the major hotels. They had everything: their own beach, their own entertainment. It was just one of those things,” said Williams Saunders, BHA lifetime director and owner of Majestic Tours. He has worked in the industry for a little over 60 years.

“The Cable Beach area, as you see it today, was not there. The first major hotel in that area was called the Nassau Beach. It also did not take black guests. The Balmoral, that too was for white people only,” said Mr Saunders. **Hotels Abandon Segregation Policy**

Two years after the Springer incident, however, hotels led the charge in the public sector to abandon a historical stance of racial discrimination against the descendants of Africans in the Bahamas.

The hotel industry took its cue from the leadership of Bahamian publisher and parliamentarian Sir Etienne Dupuch, for the day after he proposed his resolution in the House of Assembly to ban racial discrimination in all public places in the Bahamas, the hotel sector voluntarily complied, based on a recommendation to members from the BHA. Even though Sir Etienne’s fellow parliamentarians dismissed the notion. Other racial barriers soon fell.

“The hotels were the first group of properties to open up. The banks were reluctant too. The hotels opened up and desegregated the day after,” said Ms Cleare.

Mr Saunders has many recollections of that era. When he started his tour company in 1958, the six local tour operators were all white. An iconic photo taken at the time shows the six men perched atop Fort Montagu with a cadre of black drivers lining off the beach next to a fleet of cars. Speaking of the evolution over the years and the current racial mix, Mr Saunders said “The only white person in the tour business (today) is me”.

The Growth of Black Hoteliers

Within this environment, an industry of black business grew in the hotel sector, with some notable entrepreneurs as Dr Claudius R. Walker, who built the Rhinehart Hotel on Baillou Hill Road in the early 1940s. The hotel had 14 guest rooms and an auditorium with the capacity to seat 300. Black weddings, concerts, political events, church functions and conventions were held at the Rhinehart Hotel, including an international convention of the Elks Lodge.

William Cash owned the Alpha Hotel on the corner of Shirley Street and St James Road. The McPhee Motel on Okra Hill was operated by the mother of Dr Bertie McPhee, a Bahamian who resided in Bermuda. Willie Neely owned the Weary Willies on Hay Street and Baillou Hill Road. Other black Bahamians operated guest houses, such as Mamie Worrell, Flo Major and Pearl Cox, as described in Ms Cleare’s research. Trumpeter Louis Armstrong was a frequent visitor of Flo Major, whose guest house “enjoyed full occupancy” for most of the year.

Black hoteliers catered to the demands of the African American and West Indian travel market as it grew over the years. Notable figures, such as Mr and Mrs W.E.B. Dubois and Harry Belafonte stayed at Worrell's Guest House on East Bay Street. Mrs Worrell was recognized for her notable contributions by the government during its first national tourism awards ceremony in 1976. She received the National Tourism Achievement Award, just one year before her passing.

Most black hotels were run as small family businesses. They were not members of the BHA, and were not considered hotels in the same sense as white hotels, said Lifetime Director Nettica "Nettie" Symonette, herself a black hotelier. She would pass some of them on her daily trek to work.

Other black owned properties included: The Corona Hotel on East Bay Street owned by "Stokes" Thompson; Olive's Guest House in Grants Town, owned by the Nottages; and the Dolphin Hotel – originally foreign owned – which was purchased by Vincent D'Aguillar. The Saxony Hotel owned by George Hastie and his brothers on East Street was "considered one of the more notable black hotels", said Ms Symonette. "For those persons who felt they arrived that was the spot. They would go there for dinner, entertainment, and to stay there," she said.

The Legendary Nettie

Of all her counterparts, the legacy and influence of the legendary Nettie is perhaps the most enduring. She secured her first job in the hotel sector in 1954 as secretary in the accounting office at the Lighthouse Club, Andros, owned by Swedish investor Dr Axel Wenner Gren, who also owned Hog Island. She entered the Lighthouse Club on September 15, 1954 through the kitchen door. Because of her positive attitude and her willingness to go beyond the call of duty she rose through the ranks. With a 100 percent increase in salary Ms Symonette could be seen entering through the front door.

"Elite guests" of the Lighthouse Club such as Major Sakorsky, who invented the helicopter, Dag Hammarskjöld, Secretary to the United Nations, Neil McElroy, US Secretary of defense, actress Ester Williams, band leader Benny Goodman, and others impacted Ms Symonette's life.

"It was amazing to see how wealthy and affluent guests paying their bills with \$1000 notes would return to a simple 10-room wooden structure like the Lighthouse Club every year," said Ms Symonette.

When the Nassau Beach Hotel opened in 1958, Nettie became the first Bahamian secretary to Ken Brown, resident manager. A former guest of the Lighthouse Club, Bob Creasy, gave her the job because of her proficiency and positive attitude.

In those days, there was an open door policy, whereby employers could import any category of non-Bahamians they wished. However, Ms Symonette's managers always felt she had unique qualities that could not be imported from abroad.

The Eleuthera-born legend proved to be ahead of her time when she opened the Family Island resort, Different of Abaco that was designed to highlight and celebrate the culture and heritage of the Bahamian people and the natural environment.

"Upscale visitors such as the President of Fannie Mae, Chairman of the Board

of Coca Cola, author John Grisham, Jimmy Buffet, Sea Hawk wide receiver Steve Largent, before he became a Congressman, and other millionaires and billionaires all appreciated the cultural experience at Different of Abaco," said Ms Symonette.

The resort was featured on CNN, ESPN, and in Florida Sportsman, Fly Fishing Magazine, Taste Magazine and Conde Nast, leading magazines of the world. Caribbean Travel and Life referred to the resort "as a little piece of heaven" and the best kept secret in the Caribbean.



"For the record in history, Nettie's Different of Abaco thrived. We speak of discrimination, but jealousy is just as evil. I did some things that others could and did not do, and consequently the cry went out, let's crucify her," said Ms Symonette.

For two years Ms Symonette endured a trying ordeal. She considered herself "in the lion's den and the fiery furnace". During this time she discovered gifts of writing and painting, personal talents she never realized existed.

What was intended for a two day trip to visit family in Nassau became a lifelong journey on a new road in pursuit of celebrating the heritage and rich culture of the Bahamas. Nettie began to express herself in a new space. Casuarinas was her first West Bay Street property, followed by Different of Nassau.

"Looking on the brighter side, I now view returning to Casuarinas as a blessing in disguise, for had there not been this bend in the road, I may not have discovered my creative talents, and my memoir, "A Girl Called Nettie", could not be as moving," she said.

In the age of mass market tourism, under which Nettie matured, the promotion of Family Island tourism and small resorts did not keep pace with her vision. Her wish to see the country fully embody heritage and culture in the tourism marketing mix has yet to successfully materialize.

Outreach to African American Tourists

Early efforts to help stimulate business in the African American market were led by Sir Clifford Darling along with a team of taxi drivers and travel agents. They lobbied the government for funds in the 1950s to include black faces in tourism promotions and to advertise in ethnic publications, such as Ebony



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TO THE BAHAMIAN COMMUNITY

DRINK RESPONSIBLY.

magazine. The team received 700 pounds from the Bahamas Development Board to promote black travel.

They travelled to Atlanta, Miami and Tallahassee to meet with religious groups and black leaders. Their efforts were seen as a success. They attracted the largest African American service organization for Women, the Links Incorporated, to hold a convention in the Bahamas. Some 100 members visited the island.

Black Resistance Efforts

Even as the Bahamas moved closer and closer towards independence, and the barriers began to break, Freeport hotelier Andrew Barnett said “the tension was still there, no doubt about it”. Although hotels had opened their doors to black guests, black employees were still marginalized and kept behind closed doors. Even Christmas parties for hotel workers were segregated, said Mr Barnett, a BHA past president and Hotelier of the Year (1988).

“The original British Colonial and Nassau Beach were two of the major hotels that started the change of having Bahamians move up the ladder into senior positions. The first, to my knowledge, Bahamian in a senior position, was political activist Oswald Marshall. He used to be the personnel manager of the British Colonial Hotel. You had Joe Bylden, deceased, who was a food and beverage manager. There was Mr Smith, ‘Smitty’, who used to be a maitre d’ at the British Colonial. I also recall Polo Moss, Felix Seymour and Billy Butler at the Nassau Beach. They broke barriers and were some of the first Bahamians that held management positions,” said Mr Barnett.

“You had to be twice as good as the foreign person you were replacing because they did not want you to have that job. The decision was theirs as general and resident managers, to still determine who would be the personnel. In some cases, the Americans were a little bit amiable to Bahamians holding key positions, unlike when it came to the Germans, Italians,” he said.

The Changing Landscape

When Majority Rule was ushered in, the new government took deliberate steps to create opportunities for black Bahamians working in tourism. John Deleveaux, former Executive Vice President of the BHA, said the Ministry of Tourism took steps to address the racial mix at overseas promotional trips.

The Ministry of Tourism and the BHA would partner to host international marketing events for travel agents and airlines. Before joining the BHA, Mr Deleveaux had a tourism career with the ministry. He would attend many of the promotional events in his senior management capacities with the ministry. In the beginning, the private sector group from the Bahamas would have “not a single black”, he said.

“After some of them, I remember coming back and saying to (Minister of Tourism Clement T. Maynard), I feel lonely out there. What’s going on? What can we do?” said Mr Deleveaux.

In discussions with the ministry, Mr Deleveaux said the BHA “was very cooperative”. Taking its own initiative, however, the MOT brought a



wider cross section of industry stakeholders on promotional trips, including members of the Bahamas Christian Council, straw vendors and taxi drivers. After awhile, more and more black Bahamians took up positions of prominence in the industry and “everyone became comfortable with one another”, said Mr Deleveaux.

As mass tourism flourished in the Bahamas, thousands of Bahamians migrated to Nassau to work in hotels, harbouring thoughts in the backs of the mind of one day owning a hotel. Many of them returned to the Family Islands and fulfilled the dream. Today, over 70 percent of licensed hotels in the Bahamas are owned and operated by Bahamians, most of them being small hotels and bonefish lodges.

While mega resorts continue to be owned by international companies, a global standard, there are also several large properties in the Bahamas that are Bahamian owned. Comfort Suites on Paradise Island is a conglomerate of Bahamian ownerships. There are several in Grand Bahama, including Castaways Resort and Suites.

Despite its challenges, the industry has made progress over the years, expanding access and opportunity for Bahamians. The economic and social transition is still underway. In many ways it was inspired by the early pioneers and the ability of many Bahamians to gain exposure through mega resorts.

The BHA and its partners have played a key role in the transformation, through its various education, training and scholarship initiatives. BHA itself has been a vehicle for black Bahamians to become leaders through its various boards and committees. By 1983 members elected the first black Bahamian president, Berkley Evans.

Mr. Evans was also the first BHA President representing a Family Island property, Treasure Cay in Abaco. He was part of an emerging breed of members who recognized the need for the organization to play an active role in improving the tourism product. “In addition to its longstanding role in marketing, we worked hard in those days to begin to place emphasis on improving our product. Once a visitor arrived, we wanted to make sure the experience met their expectations” stated Mr. Evans.

In the tourism sector, the Bahamas has also exported its talent to the world. The success of Bahamianisation at the managerial and supervisory level has produced globally recognized tourism leaders such as Russell Miller, former BHA President and former general manager at One and Only Ocean Club. Under his stewardship the resort was voted best of its kind in the world. He is now general manager of the Ritz Carlton in New Orleans. Michael Hooper, former BHA vice president and former general manager of the British Colonial Hotel is now the general manager of one of Hiltons’ premier properties outside of Chicago.

Today, over 20 percent of jobs in the hotel industry in The Bahamas are supervisory or management positions and the overwhelming majority of them are filled by Bahamians.

BHTA AND INDUS



- 1952:** Bahamas Hotel Association (BHA) established
- 1954:** Hotels Encouragement Act enacted with BHA support.
- 1954:** First Family Island Regatta in George Town, Exuma.
- 1954:** Bahamas Speed Week introduced to the Bahamas.
- 1956:** Sir Etienne Dupuch, Member of Parliament, tables historic resolution calling for end to racial discrimination in public places. BHA supports move and hotels self-comply.
- 1956:** Hosted American Society of Travel Agents Conference -first time outside of the United States.
- 1962:** First promotional trip jointly sponsored by Bahamas Development Board and BHA.
- 1964:** Ministry of Tourism established through Promotion of Tourism Act. Sir Stafford Sands becomes first Minister of Tourism.
- 1967:** Majority Rule and Sir Lynden Pindling becomes Minister of Tourism.
- 1968:** 1 millionth visitor for the year arrived.
- 1968:** BHA hosts over 2000 travel agents.
- 1969:** The Joint Promotions Committee, co-chaired by the MOT and BHA was established.
- 1969:** Lotteries and Gaming Act adopted.
- 1970:** Hotels Act passed with BHA support introducing new licensing system.
- 1970:** Nassau Paradise Island Promotion Board formed. Out Island and Grand Bahama Boards formed shortly thereafter.
- 1971:** Goombay Summer Festival established by the Ministry of Tourism with BHA support, lasting twenty years.
- 1971:** First President and Vice President elected for the Family Island branch of BHA.
- 1973:** Letters of Credit introduced to buttress relationship between wholesalers and hoteliers.
- 1974:** National Apprenticeship Cooks Programme introduced.
- 1974:** Bahamas Hotel Training College formed.
- 1974:** The Bahamas and the United States signed a treaty establishing US pre-clearance.
- 1975:** Ministry of Tourism's People to People Programme launched.
- 1976:** First National Tourism Achievement Awards ceremony held.
- 1976:** It's Better in the Bahamas marketing slogan coined.
- 1976:** BHA V. Lorraine Onderdonk Scholarship Fund established
- 1978:** BahamaHost programme launched by Ministry of Tourism with BHA support.
- 1980:** Industry establishes Pension Fund with Bahamas Hotel Catering and Allied Workers Union.
- 1981:** BHA Clement T. Maynard Scholarship Fund established.
- 1982:** Net rate system introduced.
- 1983:** Two millionth visitor of the year. Cable Beach Hotel and Casino complex opened.
- 1987:** Hotel Management and Personnel Awards established. BHA creates Cacique Duho. Nettica Symonette named first Hotelier of the Year.



TRY MILESTONES



- 1988:** Tourism introduced in social studies curriculum in all public schools.
- 1992:** BHA and Ministry of Education launch Adopt-a-School programme.
- 1993:** Sol Kerzner and Sun International purchase Resorts International.
- 1995:** MOT and BHA create national Cacique Awards. Duho adopted as official trophy.
- 1997:** BHA begins environmental and energy management initiatives.
- 1998:** Annual golf tournament established to support scholarships and work in schools.
- 1999:** BHA advocates for new terminal facilities. Works with Government to create Airport Authority.
- 2004:** Annual summer internship programme for educators established.
- 2004:** Ministry of Tourism introduces new Islands of The Bahamas logo.
- 2004:** BHA commits support for downtown revitalization efforts.
- 2004:** CARIBCERT skills certification program launched.
- 2005:** Initial Baha Mar agreement signed. Amended and finalized in 2011.
- 2005:** BHA and MOT agree workforce development strategy at first National Tourism Conference. BHA undertakes first Human Resources Needs Assessment for the industry.
- 2005:** Airport committee works with Government and advises on improvements to Nassau and Family Island airports paving way for major improvements.
- 2005:** US passport entry requirement extended. Industry undertakes rebate program to soften impact.
- 2006:** Sustainable Tourism Entrepreneurial Marketing and Management Project (STEMM) launched to support small hotels, marina and cluster development.
- 2006:** BHA and MOT, Royal Bahamas Police Force and Ministry of National Security support establishment of Tourism Police Unit and other visitor safety initiatives.
- 2007:** BHA, Bahamas Hotel Employers Association, and Bahamas Hotel Catering and Allied Workers Union establish Industry Partners Scholarship programme in honour of union leader Pat Bain.
- 2008:** BHA and Bahamas National Trust establish annual summer environmental youth camp
- 2008:** Ministry of Tourism and industry host Miss Universe Pageant. Travel visa requirement from over 80 countries permanently waived.
- 2009:** BHA creates Marina Operators of the Bahamas.
- 2009:** BahamaHost revamped by MOT in collaboration with BHA.
- 2010:** Junior Hotelier Programme launched in nation's schools.
- 2010:** BHA establishes Education Partnership Award. Mrs. Elma Garraway is first recipient.
- 2011:** Record scholarships awarded by BHA and partners.
- 2011:** Nassau Airport Development Company opens new US departures terminal; international arrivals terminal opens 18 months later.
- 2012:** Casinos committee recommends major overhaul for gaming industry.
- 2012:** Hundreds of Employees enroll in online foreign language training program.
- 2012:** Reading Companion Literacy Programme established in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, IBM, Project Read, and the Rotary Clubs of The Bahamas.
- 2012:** BHA changes its name to the Bahamas Hotel and Tourism Association (BHTA).



BHTA PRESIDENTS



REGINALD NEZGER
BHA Founding President
1952, 53, 60



WESLER T. KEENAN
1956



DENIS S. HICKMAN
1958-59



JAMES M. PIANTO
1965-1966



GEORGE R. MYERS
1969, 70, 78, 79



GENE BARRETT
1970-71



ANSERS WIBERG
1973, 75



WILLIAM F. NAUGHTON
1976, 77, 82



RON OVEREND
1980



MICHEAL J. WILLIAMS
1981, 86-89, 92



BERKLEY EVANS
1983



AARON RUBENSTEIN
1984-85



PETER KROLLPFEIFFER
1988



STEPHEN SAWYER
1993-94



ANDREW BARNETT
1997-98



DION B. STRACHAN
1998-2000



BARBARA HANNA-COX
2001-2002



JEREMY MACVEAN
2003-2004



EARLE R. BETHELL
2005-2006



RUSSELL MILLER
2007-2008



ROBERT 'SANDY' SANDS
1990-91, 1995-96, 2009-10



STUART BOWE
Current

OPERATOR MEMBERS:

Abaco Beach Resort & Boat Harbour
Abaco Inn
Bakers Bay Golf & Ocean Club
Best Western Bay View Village
Bimini Big Game Club - A Guy Harvey Outpost Resort & Marina
Blue Marlin Cove Condominium & Marina
Blue Water Resort
British Colonial Hilton
Cape Eleuthera Resort & Yacht Club
Cape Santa Maria Beach Resort
Club Peace & Plenty
Comfort Suites, Paradise Island
Conch Inn Hotel & Marina Ltd.
Coral Sands Hotel
Cotton Bay Estates & Villas
Fernandez Bay Village
Gems Of Paradise
Grand Isle Resort & Spa
Grand Lucayan
Graycliff Hotel & Restaurant
Green Turtle Cay Club
Hawk's Nest Resort & Marina
Hideaways At Palm Bay
Kerzner International - Atlantis
Lyford Cay Club
Nassau Palm Resort & Conference Center
Ocean Reef Yacht Club (Geltex Trading)
One & Only Ocean Club
Orange Hill Beach Inn
Paradise Harbour Club & Marina
Paradise Island Beach Club
Paradise Island Harbour Resort
Pelican Bay (New Hope Holding Co., Ltd.)
Pelican Beach Villas
Pigeon Cay Beach Club
Pink Sands Resort
Romora Bay Hotel
Runaway Hill Club
Sammy T's Beach Resort
Sandals Emerald Bay
Sandals Royal Bahamian
Sheraton Nassau Beach Resort
Sky Beach Club
Small Hope Bay Lodge
Stella Maris Resort
Sunrise Beach Club & Villas C/O Elkin Company
Sunshine Paradise Suites
Swains Cay Bonefish Resort
Valentine Resort
Viva Wyndham Fortuna Beach
Wyndham Nassau Resort & Crystal Palace Casino

ALLIED MEMBERS:

Abaco Community Tourism Foundation
American Eagle/Airlines
American Hotel Register
American Public University System
Arawak Imports Ltd.
Arawak Port Development Limited (ADPL)
Ardastra Gardens
Avis Rent-A-Car
Bahama Fantasies Limited
Bahama Islands Resorts & Casinos Co-opera
Bahamas Food Services
Bahamas Hotel Employers Assoc.
Bahamas Petroleum Company
Bahamas Realty Limited
Bahamas Speed Week Revival 2011 Ltd.
Bahamas Telecommunications Company Ltd.
Bahamas Waste
Bahamas Wholesale Agency (BWA)
Bahamasair
Bahamia Rental
Bahamian Brewery & Beverage Co.
Bank of the Bahamas International
Basden Elevators
Benelda.com
Best Island Travel
BOIPB
Bonnier Travel & Lifestyles Group
British Airways PLC
Burns House Ltd
Business Personnel Services Limited (BPSL)
Cable Beach Manor
Cable Beach Resort Association
Cacique International
Cambridge Group of Companies Limited
Caribbean Bottling Co.
Caribbean Gas Storage & Terminal Ltd.
Carter Marketing
Cole Ins. Agents & Brokers Limited #2
Commonwealth Building Supply
Creative Wealth Bahamas
D'Albenas Agency Ltd.
Dan Knowles Tour
Deloitte & Touche
Discover Financial Services
DMC Bahamas Ltd.
Dolphin Encounters
Downtown Nassau Partnership Limited
Dupuch Publications
Elektra Technologies
F&BH Inspections & Related Services
Fidelity Bank (Bahamas) Limited
Fun Foods Wholesale
G E Water & Process Tech. Capabilities
GBITB
Glinton Sweeting
Graphite Engineering Ltd.
Gunite Pools
H. Forbes Charter Co. Ltd.
Henry F. Storr Electric Co. Ltd.
Hotel Restaurant Supply
IBM Bahamas Ltd.
Island Destination Services Ltd.
Island Sun Tours Ltd.
Island Wholesale Ltd.
J.S. Johnson & Co. Ltd.
Jet Blue
Kaplan University
KPMG
Leisure Travel & Tours
Liquid Courage Limited
Lowes Companies
Luciano's of Chicago Restaurant Ltd.
Majestic Tours
Mandara Spa
Mechanical Supplies Corp.
Mike's Chinese Custom Tailoring
Milo B. Butler
Ministry of Tourism
Montagu Gardens
Nassau Airport Development Company
Nassau Paradise Island Promotion Board
Nassau Tourism Development Board
New York Times
NPIPB
Old Fort Bay
Palm Cay
PITDA
Poop Deck
Prestige Foods & Specialties Ltd.
Price WaterhouseCoopers
Providence Technology
Pure Salt Design
Purity Bakery
Quencom-cust
RBC FINCO
RCI, LLC
Ridge Enterprises Ltd.
Royal Bank of Canada - Cust
Scotiabank (Bahamas) Ltd.
Senor Frogs (Bahamas) Ltd.
Serena Williams Media & Public Relations
SIDDA Communications Group, Ltd.
Sky Bahamas Airlines Limited
Smith Orloff & Assoc
Stuart Cove's Aqua Adventures
The College of The Bahamas - CHIMI
The Dermal Clinic
Tru Bahamian Food Tours
Turning Point - Consultants
Underwater Explorers Society
USA Today Int'l Corp.
UWI Centre For Hotel & Tourism Management
Will & Ives Designer Clothing
Work Center
Zamar Productions

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Training and Development

The Journey of Building Bahamian

For the past 30 years, the hotel room count in the Bahamas has ranged between 13,000 and 15,000 rooms. However, the Bahamas is expected to increase its numbers by the most significant margin in a single phase since tourism statistics were first collected in the 1960s, when the international resort development Baha Mar opens its doors in 2014, creating 2,200 new rooms.

While 2014 will always stand out as an impressive year on the annual growth chart for hotel rooms, it will also affect many lives and livelihoods. The resort is expected to create 6000 new jobs, harnessing a new level of human resource capacity for Bahamians.

Tourism is an industry of national strategic importance, not just because of its economic viability, but also because of its potential to create jobs for the Bahamian masses and spawn new business opportunities. This was recognized by the government of Sir Lynden Pindling when it assumed power in 1967. Sir Lynden appointed himself Minister of Tourism, recognizing the importance of the industry.

“I think the government of the day saw tourism as an opportunity; it is a labour intensive industry; it was a sector that could absorb a significant amount of the working population. That had tremendous benefits, especially in light of the fact that we did not have a productive sector in terms of manufacturing and industry,” said Robert Sands, Baha Mar Senior Vice President, Government and External Affairs, who is also a BHA past president and Hotelier of the Year (1993).

Sir Lynden had assumed responsibility from Sir Stafford Sands, who became the nation’s first Minister of Tourism in 1964. The enactment of the Promotion of Tourism Act of 1964 established the Ministry of Tourism and placed it outside the ambit of the newly created public service for the purpose of greater autonomy. It was one of the early actions of the government after it attained internal self-rule and adopted a ministerial structure. Also holding the title Minister of Finance, Sir Stafford wielded an enormous amount of power and influence in shaping the direction of the industry.

Training Takes Centre Stage for BHA

The Bahamas Hotel Association (BHA) was invested in training from its early days. It sustained this focus over the years.

“Training is important because as the industry expands there is a need for qualified, trained personnel, and the association plays a vital part in encouraging the development of these employees, and also, in encouraging out-of-schoolers to join the industry rather than some other industry. The hotel industry is labour intensive and requires a lot of support,” said hotelier George Myers, former BHA president and Lifetime Achievement Awardee.

The BHA established a summer training programme for hotel executives with Cornell University, the institution known for having the first collegiate level programme in hotel and restaurant management. Cornell University was and continues to be the most prestigious hotel training institution in the world.

The legendary Nettica “Nettie” Symonette, the first Hotelier of the Year (1987) and owner of Different of Nassau, was an original participant in the Cornell programme. She attended Cornell for three consecutive years, and also took advantage of a University of Michigan training programme, with other upcoming hoteliers such as Jimmy Pennerman, Ruth Wynn and Felix Seymour.

In Nettie’s memoir, “A Girl Called Nettie”, she shares the impact professor Vance Christian had on her while being her mentor for six months. She also shares her relationship with then Dr Robert Beck, dean of Cornell University, in how he was responsible for her landing her the top job as assistant inn keeper of Holiday Inn, Paradise Island, six months before its opening.



BHA, BOIPB and Ministry Family Islands Seminar Circuit Supports Small Hotels - In 2000, Hotelier Nettica Symonette, Dion Strachan and the Ministry of Tourism officials met with small hotels and provide some training support.

In 1974, the BHA in cooperation with the Ministry of Education helped found the Bahamas Hotel Training Centre, which later became the Bahamas Tourism Training Centre. This umbrella organisation represented a merger of two existing hospitality training institutions, which were separately operated by the hotel industry and the Ministry of Education and the University of the West Indies Hotel Management Division. One of the first graduates, Chef Edwin Johnson, now operates Frankie Gone Bananas, one of the newest restaurants at Arawak Cay.

“We did a lot of good work, in our culinary section in particular. In our industry, we have some super culinary talent: Chefs who have excelled in their field; have been in shows, exhibitions, and have won many awards. In other areas, we have not done as well,” said BHA Lifetime Director J. Barrie Farrington.

Collaboration between the BHA, Bahamas Hotel Employers Association, Ministry of Education, Bahamas Culinary Association and the Bahamas Hotel Catering and Allied Workers Union produced a National Apprentice Chef Programme in the 1970s. It still exists today at the College of the Bahamas Culinary and Hospitality Management Institute.



Wyndham chefs and cooks attain Caribcert credentials in 2007 through BHA program.

Prior to this development, most chefs were expatriates. Through the programme, over 500 Bahamians have become certified international chefs. Many graduates now own and operate their own restaurants and have influenced the development of menus throughout the country.

In his 1998 annual report, BHA President Andrew Barnett remarked on the culinary successes, stating: “We are proud of our advocacy for greater Bahamian content in the menus of our hotels and restaurants through our cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Bahamas Culinary Association. It has led to the emergence and recognition of a talented cadre of young Bahamian culinary professionals, who have won award after award in international competitions.”



National Culinary Team Trains Hard: Captures Regional Gold.

Industry Pension Fund Major Milestone for Industry

The genesis of the industry’s pension funds began with discussions in 1979 between the Industry through the Bahamas Hotel Employers Association (BHEA) and the Bahamas Hotel Catering and Allied Workers Union for a new Industrial agreement. The employers gave a commitment to explore the possibility of an Industry Pension Plan and in 1980 an agreement between the parties emerged.

“This was not an easy fix” according the BHEA Executive Vice President Michael C. Reckley. “The accommodation of various points of views on the subject took many hours to produce the result that we see today. The Allied Industries Fund began in 1980 and today there are 8,167 active participants

and 3,651 inactive participants. In the Management Fund there are 3,787 active participants and 765 inactive participants.

Reckley, as the Secretary of both Pension Funds at their inception hailed this as a significant achievement.

Management Pension fund Director and BHA Treasurer Peter Maguire concurred. “This is an excellent example of a collaboration which has resulted in lasting benefits for the industry, its owners and employees, and the nation,” he stated.

BHA Outreach to Student Population

The BHA was largely responsible for the introduction of a tourism curriculum into the national education system in 1988. It also partnered with the MOT, under the leadership of then Director General Vincent Vanderpool Wallace to create the Adopt-a-School programme shortly thereafter. The programme sought to attract and direct the brightest and best students from the school system to the hotel industry.

The BHA established a number of scholarship programs, including the V. Lorraine Onderdonk Scholarship Fund in 1976, of which Brendan Foulkes was the first recipient and the Clement T. Maynard Scholarship Fund in 1981, of which Dionisio D’Aguilar and Tyrone Nabbie were among the first awardees. Since 2005, the BHA has awarded 94 scholarships to Bahamians valued at approximately \$400,000.



Adopt-A-School Programme Reaches Thousands of Students – Minister of Education Ivy Dumont and fellow educators, join BHA President Robert Sands and Minister of Tourism Frank Watson in presenting student Alan Wallace with first place prize for a student competition in the newly established programme.

Industry Achievement Awards

To celebrate the outstanding contributions of workers in the hospitality industry, the BHA drew on 500 years of Bahamian history. For its prestigious industry awards, the BHA selected the Lucayan duho, the ceremonial stool of indigenous chiefs, to symbolize the awards. In 1987, BHA commissioned artist Quentin Minnis to create the iconic Duho sculpture that is used to this day.

The BHA’s awards were eventually joined with the National Tourism Achievement Awards ceremony, an initiative of the government. The biennial Cacicque Awards is what eventually resulted. It is still one of the most highly regarded national ceremonies.



Cacique Award Winners Shine – Celebrating the fruits from many years of commitment to their professional development are the 1997 BHA award category winners. From left to right: Anville Ferson, Supervisor of the Year; Joy Smith, Sales Executive of the Year; Derek Smith, Manager of the Year; Dion Strachan, Hotelier of the Year; Pyvonne Rolle-Schmid, Employee of the Year; Christopher Chea, Chef of the Year; and Barbara Foreman, Casino Executive of the Year.

BahamaHost was another initiative supported by the BHA working in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism. It was envisioned by then Minister of Tourism Clement T Maynard, who is credited with modernizing the tourism industry.

The BahamaHost industry training programme provided practical training in History, Geography, Culture, Economy and points of interest. The programme was redesigned several years ago according to BHA's volunteer Chairperson for workforce development activities Beverly Saunders. "Recognising the importance of customer service in 2009, the MOT launched a revamped BahamaHost under the direction of then Director General Vernice Walkine. The BHA worked closely with the Ministry in the revised programme pulling together human resource professionals and other industry players to develop a curriculum with a strong customer service focus" states Mrs. Saunders.

Foreign Labour Seeks Opportunity in Bahamas

The Bahamas thrived as a destination for visitors, but also foreign workers. Pointing to a study conducted by the BHA, Mr Wiberg said 23 per cent of all hotel employees were expatriates in the late 70s. By the 1980s, he said the number of foreign workers had shrunk to about 2-3 per cent. In the gaming sector, up to 95 per cent of casino workers were expatriates, said Mr Sands. Today, some 98 per cent are Bahamians.

"Everyone had heard about the Bahamas. A lot of people just came down here on a gamble hoping to find a job once they arrived. If they had some background in food, especially the Italians who are good at food, they came in as waitresses, cooks, or restaurant managers," said Mr Wiberg, who migrated to the Bahamas in the 1960s. He was BHA president in 1973 and 1975.

Mr Wiberg said work permits were not a challenge to acquire before the Pindling government. "It was an easy formality," he said. "You just went down and applied for it and you got it automatically."

The post-Majority Rule government believed it was in its interest to abandon the "open door policy with respect to bringing in people from outside".

"That was a message that was hard for some of them to accept," said BHA Lifetime Director Mr J. Barrie Farrington.

According to the BHA Human Resource Needs Assessment Study of 2005, over 21 per cent of jobs in the industry today are at the supervisory or management level, the overwhelming majority of which are held by Bahamians. The study also showed there are over 1000 different types of job classifications in the industry, suggesting that today there are even greater opportunities for upward mobility in the sector.

"We emphasize this in all of our programmes with the schools. Young people and educators need to realise the many and varied opportunities that exist in our industry. There is a place in the industry for just about every area of interest," said Beverly Saunders, BHA's workforce development chairperson.



BHA and Ministry of Tourism Sign Tourism Apprenticeship Agreement in 2009 - Over 100 young adults participated in a six-month training program which included skills development and employability skills training tied to three practical rotations in industry. Most of the participants secured employment thru the program.

Responding to the Challenges of New Beginnings

With the many transformations over the years, the Bahamas is once again on "the cusp of expanding" the sector, said Mr Sands, who is also a member of the BHA Past Presidents Committee.

As a member of the BahaMar team, Mr Sands plays a role in shaping the destiny of thousands of Bahamian workers. The thought is not as daunting as it might seem, he said, reflecting on the transition made in 1992 when Kerzner International brought an influx of thousands of new jobs.

“I can recall sitting in meetings back in 1992, when this huge company called Sun International was coming to the Bahamas and they needed to fill thousands of jobs. That was roughly 20 years ago, and at that time the population base was much smaller. The thought was, how in the world are we going to fill these spaces?” said Mr Sands, who worked as General Manager at the Nassau Beach Resort at the time.

“And the rest is history. We did. People transitioned from various jobs they held and it was supplemented with school leavers and persons who were properly trained,” he said.

The BHA's Most Recent Efforts

The BHA has supported the creation of several organisations which have advanced education and training initiatives for the industry. Most notable are the Bahamas Culinary Association (BCA) and the Bahamas Hotel Association of Human Resource Professionals (BHAHRP).

The BHA has ratcheted up its workforce development programme. Recognising its importance, in 2005 the organisation created a Workforce Development Unit.

Among the organisation's current initiatives is the Summer Educator Internship Programme, established in 2004. It is responsible for exposing over 900 educators to the inner workings of the industry.

The Junior Hotelier Programme, launched in 2009, is presently in over 17 schools and has reached over 4000 students. BHA has also been working with the MOE to revamp the high school tourism curriculum and hopes to see a Tourism Academy Programme launched into several of the nation's high schools shortly.

During the past two years, the BHA's customer service training initiatives have specially targeted the Family Islands.

In support of the industry's efforts to grow share into the Latin American market, partnerships have been developed with the College of the Bahamas and the MOT to provide foreign language training. And the BHA is also working with Live Mocha an international online training company to promote and administer a language programme with specially negotiated discounts for industry workers. As of 2012 over 1200 employees in the industry have enrolled in the programme, which offers about 38 languages.

In October, BHA and the College of the Bahamas announced the launch of the first of a series of skills certificate programmes to prepare Bahamians for the opportunities that the Baha Mar project will present.

“The BHA and the industry have a rich tradition of investing in people. We have a great success story to share when you look at the level of skills development and achievement of Bahamians over the past 40 years. This should inspire young

Bahamians to believe that they can excel in our industry,” said BHA Executive Vice President Frank Comito.

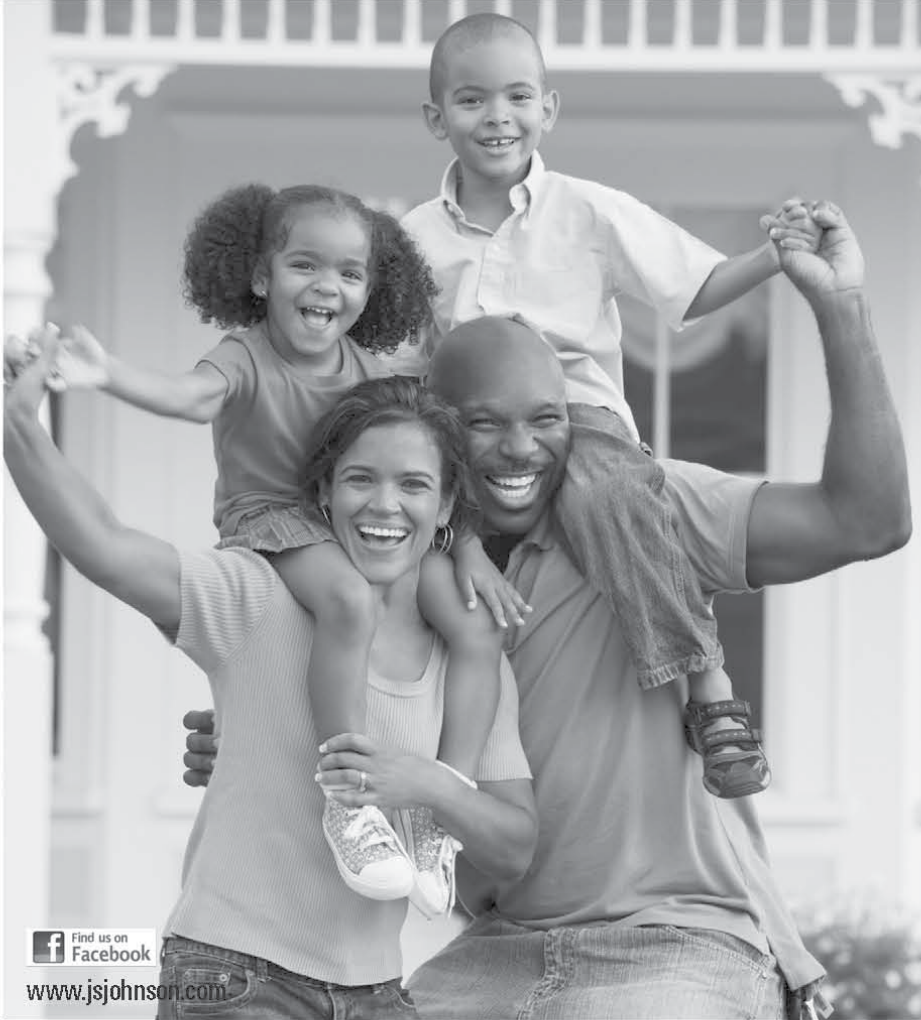
Looking ahead, Jerome Fitzgerald, Minister of Education, Science and Technology reinforced BHA's role. “A strong and comprehensive partnership between education and industry is critical to the economic growth and advancement of a nation. Throughout much of its history, the Bahamas Hotel Association has been committed to strengthening its affiliation with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. Through this partnership, our young people are exposed to workplace realities and develop a deeper awareness of the diverse career opportunities in the country's largest industry – Tourism. BHA is to be commended for its work and we look forward to greater collaboration as we lay the foundation for the workforce for tomorrow” said Minister Fitzgerald.



Bahamas Hotel Association of Human Resource Professionals Teams Up with BHA on Foreign Language and Customer Service Training. BHA President applauds network for their support.

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**“HISTORY OF TOURISM
IN THE BAHAMAS
- A Global Perspective”**

by
ANGELA CLEARE

The Most complete
documentation of
Bahamian Tourism
ever written.

... Mrs. Cleare has chronicled the effect on the Bahamian community of the income from tourism which over the years has become the major industry of The Bahamas, and has from being viewed with skepticism by the greater Caribbean been embraced with regional enthusiasm.

A unique feature of this book is Ms. Cleare's list of those whom she calls Tourism Giants and Slatworts of the Twentieth Century, who contributed to the place which the industry holds in the economy, its social life and its politics.

Mrs. Cleare has made a major contribution to the History of The Bahamas ...

Excerpt from Foreword by Hon. Paul L. Adderley

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The **GOLDEN** Era of Entertainment



The era lasted for five decades, starting as far back as the 1940s. The black Bahamian business community, growing in prominence and wealth, was organized around a thriving industry of cultural enterprise.

Making music and making money, one could say, but it was so much more. The golden era of local entertainment was a catalyst of growth in the tourism sector, bringing trickle down benefits to the heart of underserved communities.

The success of Bahamian musicians, singers, dancers and cultural entrepreneurs, not only enriched the lives of many in the black community, but it brought vertical benefits across the tourism spectrum, for hotels, tour operators, and the Bahamas government.

Tourist activity in the early 1900s was centralized on “the respectable seaward side of downtown Nassau”, according to historian Gail Saunders, in her history of the Bahamian people “Islands in the Stream”. In this space, white Bahamians found ample accommodation for their social pursuit. Blacks were only welcomed as the entertainment.

Black settlements across the island became entrepreneurial hubs for Bahamians, who built on the native culture of open-air dance halls. They established nightclubs to cater to the needs of the community, and built a faithful clientele by supplying the right sounds: big name acts such as Nat King Cole, Sam Cook and Jerry Butler.

“From Fox Hill in the East, where you had the Jungle Club, all the way to Adelaide, and everything in between; there were some 40 to 50 night clubs operating successfully,” estimates Freddie Munnings Jr, whose father Freddie Munnings was one of the most notable owners of the Cat and Fiddle.

The Silver Slipper on East Street, built by Edgar and Clarence Bain, and the Zanzibar on Baillou Hill Road, co-owned by black entrepreneurs Milo Butler, Bert Gibson, Preston Moss, and Felix Johnson, were two of the earliest nightclubs, built during the 1930s and 40s. Shortly after came establishments like the Cat and Fiddle, which was less of a night club and more of a cultural “institution”, said Mr Munnings Jr.

Artists not only appeared on the Cat and Fiddle stage, but they mastered the art

of performance in that space. They were also nurtured at the Central Highway Inn, established by Percy Munnings, and the nightclub Hatch on Wulff Road, which launched the career of Jay Mitchell, said Mr Munnings. Nightclubs were incubators of excellence, which is why it came as no surprise when they grew in popularity amongst the tourists.

“What used to happen with the hotels, going back to the Royal Victoria (which opened in 1861), when they would close at 10pm, the guests in the hotel would follow most of the black entertainers who were not allowed to fraternize in the hotels,” said Mr Munnings.

Hotels hired “society bands” at first, which provided entertainment in the large dining halls. Bahamian entertainers were contracted, as well as bands from the United States, both white and black.

“The guests used to follow the black Bahamian musicians Over-the-Hill. That is how the night clubs flourished. In the hotels the bands played American style music – Benny Goodman, Count Basie, Ruddy Williams, the Chocolate Dandies, big band sounds. When they came Over-the-Hill, they played the authentic Bahamian Goombay music, which they enjoyed much, much more. So much so, the nightclub industry became so popular, it took all of the guests out of the hotels,” said Mr Munnings.

William Saunders, owner of Majestic Tours, said his night club tours were popular amongst tourists. He would take them club hopping from the Cat and Fiddle to the Drumbeat and then back to their hotels or the cruise port.

Cruise ships at the time were restricted from offering entertainment services within a three-mile radius of port. Passengers had an incentive to disembark and seek out local entertainment. The crew also provided a constant clientele for the local clubs, said Mr Munnings.

It was truly a golden era, of thriving enterprise for Bahamian cultural entrepreneurs; thoughts of which have long been a source of pride and sadness for those who lament the state of the industry today.

“The debate on entertainment is certainly filled with controversy. A huge part of the success of the Over-the-Hill entertainment was a direct result of segregation. The locals had no place to go for entertainment during the early years, certainly not the traditional places. They could not go into the hotels, so they created

entertainment spots Over-the-Hill. And then they began to take guests from both cruise ships and hotels,” said Hotelier of the Year Robert Sands.

Even as native clubs thrived, Bahamian bands had no trouble finding employment in the hotels. During the 50s and 60s, particularly, live music generally flourished. It was standard for hotels to have live music during the day and night. There was a band by the pool and a band by the bar, recalls Freeport hotelier Andrew Barnett, a BHA past president and Hotelier of the Year (1988).

“(The Nassau Beach Hotel) had bands inside and outside; bands at dinner time and bands late at night,” according to hotelier George Myers, BHA lifetime director. The hotel employed five bands on a full time basis in 1967, he said. The Nassau Beach hotel also had five to six local bands as an integral part of its operation in the 70s and 80s, said Mr Sands.

The popularity of native music also grew as the local recording industry took off. The Pyfrom family, who owned souvenir shops, “played an integral role in the development of the industry”, said Mr Munnings. They recorded many local artists, such as George Symonette, Berkeley “Peanuts” Taylor and Freddie Munnings, to create souvenirs for their shops. It helped to publicize native music. Greek night club owners, for clubs like Sloppy Joes and Dirty Dicks, also became involved in this practice, said Mr Munnings, because guests who frequented their night clubs also came looking for keep sakes.

Although the entertainment industry had a solid run, it did not survive into the 21st century.

“Certainly today, while entertainment still exists, it does not exist at the same quantity that existed in years gone by. I think there are a number of reasons for this. I think both entertainers and hotels maybe have to accept joint responsibility for this. I think to some degree the demand for having this quantum of outlets has been decreased and the cost to provide it had just gone so high that it was a no return situation for the operators. But I do believe there is a place for having some form of local entertainment in hotels going forward, and we just have to find the right mix, balance that both parties can mutually benefit,” said Mr Sands.

Former BHA executive vice president John Deleveaux said desegregation dealt an unexpected blow to the industry. Nightclubs thrived before the barriers came down.

“But as soon as they allowed Bahamians to go to the hotels, they began to like the difference. It’s like, instead of appreciating their own, they enjoyed this different culture to which they were being exposed. As that developed and went on, Bahamian night clubs began to suffer and you see what is happening today,” said Mr Deleveaux.

The gradual contraction of the industry also came when hotels grew bigger and started to produce their own in house shows, said BHA lifetime director J. Barrie Farrington. When the Britannia opened on Paradise Island in 1969, he said it featured shops, casinos and a cabaret show. The advent of casinos in major hotels in the 1960s had a major impact, added Mr Munnings.

“They realized all of the guests were leaving the hotels. What they did, which destroyed the night club industry, was they brought the popular entertainers into the hotels and created their own night clubs. Peanuts Taylor’s club began to demise, so he moved into the Nassau Beach. Ronny Butler moved into Lowe’s Hotel on Paradise Island with George Myers,” he said.

Remembered today for their contributions to the golden era of entertainment are men such as Joseph Spence. Tony Mckay, Berkeley “Peanuts” Taylor, “Duke” Errol Strachan, Freddie Munnings, Ritchie Delamor, “Sabu” Butler, Paul Meeres, George Symonette, Alphonso “Blind Blake” Higgs, John Chipman, Ronnie Butler, “King” Eric Gibson, George Moxey, Tony Seymour, Bert Cambridge, Count Bernardino, Andre Toussaint, Smokey 007, and many others.

There was also a cadre of women, who performed on the entertainment scene at risk of being called “women of the street”.

“They referred to them as loose women, because they were not supposed to be performing in any night clubs,” said Mr Munnings.

“You had Bahama Mama Maureen Duvalier and Naomi Taylor, a brilliant exotic dancer. She was called the Jungle Queen. Becky Chipman, the god mother of the fire dance. Big Biner, who was 400 pounds, but she was very agile. She danced like a gazelle. She started out in Gambier, even back in the 40s. Then you had Little Rita, she was a midget, just over two feet tall. She was also a dancer. Eloise Lewis, one of the first females to record on an international record, Decca International”.

Looking into the future, hotelier George Myers said the entertainment industry will have to adapt to meet the requirements of the modern visitor and the new tourism industry.

“Today, the band is not nearly the attraction it was back in the olden days. Therefore the entertainment today has to become an attraction for the visitor to want to be able to participate in it; otherwise it doesn’t do any good,” said Mr Myers.

Whereas hotels used to have one main dining room with a captive audience, major hotels today have six to eight restaurants. Each one is themed differently, which suggests “you wouldn’t have the same kind of music in each one”. In the age of technology, where hotels make widespread use of electronic sound



systems, bands are no longer cost effective if they are only serving as a means of providing background music.

“Those are the kinds of things that have changed. Today, a guest who comes here for seven days does not want to eat in the same place every night. They want a variety of restaurant offerings, a variety of menus, and likewise a variety of entertainment. There has to be a least four, five different things. It can't be the same thing every night,” said Mr Myers.

While the future of the entertainment industry is uncertain, those charting a new course can certainly take pride and draw strength from studying its glorious past.



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ECOTOURISM AND EVENTS

The Promise and Potential of Tourism Niche Markets



In the 50s and 60s, the Bahamas had great success developing world class events that attracted a steady flow of tourists. Sailing events, angler tournaments, powerboat and car races, just to name a few, all helped to fill hotel rooms and boost the Bahamian economy.

Lifetime director of the Bahamas Hotel Association (BHA) J. Barrie Farrington even remembers an annual dog show at the Montague Beach Hotel. Unfortunately, the wagging tail event was one of those efforts “that didn’t work out too well”.

◀ *Ardastra Gardens circa 1951... an early nature experience.*

On the other hand, Mr Farrington remembers the Miami-Nassau Powerboat Race, once called “the world’s most rugged ocean race” by legendary American offshore racing champion Samuel Griffith. It was before the construction of the Paradise Island Bridge, so yachtsmen would descend on the harbor, from the East and West, for the annual winter event.

It was the brainchild of American race car promoter Captain Sherman “Red” Crise and yacht designer Dick Bertram. The 184-mile race set off on May 6, 1956, as one of the first offshore powerboat races ever. It inspired an entire industry of racing. By the 1960s, there were similar races around the world, in Italy and on the English Channel.

For many decades, events were staged through partnerships with private promoters, the Bahamian government and local hoteliers. They served as a boon for Bahamas tourism.

◀ *1959 Promotion for Nassau Speed Week*

In the late 70s, Exuma’s Peace and Plenty Hotel, operated by Charlie Pflueger, hosted the Bahamas

Bonefish Bonanza for five consecutive years. The tournament provided a boost to the destination in the slow October season. Legendary American golfer and golf course designer Jack Nicklaus, along with a number of international writers and fishing guides would participate in the annual tournament.

By the 1990s, Exuma had become such a popular fishing location it hosted the World Championship Bonefishing Tournament. These events attracted high net-worth travelers, such as American Major League Baseball (MLB) player and coach Davey Johnson and Dusty Baker.

“They did a number of things for us. They gave us a lot of publicity, some of

which we couldn’t afford to buy. “We had a lot of fun with the tournaments,” said Mr. Pflueger.

The George Town, National Family Island Regatta was the first of its kind in 1954. The event paid homage to the Bahamian work sloop, which at the time, was considered a quality, but dying breed.

For three days of racing, 70 Bahamian sloops, schooners, and dinghies gathered in Elizabeth Harbour to show off the boat building skills once common to all of the islands.

The event offered “a fine opportunity for Bahamian sailors to all gather in one place, have some sport, and a chance for cruising yachtsmen to witness one of the last working sailing fleets in action and at the same time introduce them to the magnificent cruising grounds here in The Bahamas,” wrote Commodore Emeritus Howland Bottomley in a brief history of regatta.

Over the years, regattas became a mainstay for Family Island resorts. They were so popular with domestic travelers, who “booked all of the rooms”; however, they were never very successful in creating an influx of international tourists, said Mr Pflueger. None-the-less, they remain important events on the Family Island event calendar, allowing small hoteliers almost guaranteed periods of full occupancy.

The Ministry of Tourism and Family Island hotels have also developed close ties in recent years working on special events like homecomings, heritage festivals, and fishing tournaments.

Bahamas Speed Week had a successful 13 year run in the Bahamas, also thanks to Captain Sherman “Red” Crise. The recent return of Speed Week evokes bitter-sweet memories for some Bahamians. Tour operator William Saunders is convinced, had the Bahamas not closed down Speed Week, the local race would have rivaled “what Daytona is today.”

“We were ahead of them,” said Mr Saunders, referring to the fact that Bahamas Speed Week, which started in 1954, had become established years before Daytona held its first major race.

In the area of culture, there was also early innovation and early success. Bahamas Goombay Summer, a 13-week festival in Nassau and Freeport was introduced in 1971 and had a 20 year run. It included folklore shows, art exhibitions, local entertainment, Junkanoo, fashion shows and other festive events. Former BHA Executive Vice President John Deleveaux credits it as one of the most successful promotional events, successfully boosting tourism arrivals after the 1970 recession.

The event emerged as a partnership between the BHA and MOT. It responded to several critiques that were dogging the destination at the time. Some critics believed the Bahamas as a destination was in decline, feeling as though “it was not safe, there was not enough to do; we have no culture; the natives and tourists could not mix together.”

Goombay Summer responded to the critique and breathed new life into the destination, said Mr Deleveaux. It also ignited a desire by the Ministry and industry to begin to pay closer attention to the visitor's experience and our product, hence outgrowths like adding Bahamian cuisine to hotel menus Bahamahost, the People-to-People program and Bahamian Goombay punch.

The Future of Ecotourism

By the 1990s, the BHA formalized its environmental committee, led for many years by hotelier Jeremy MacVean. The committee took a pro-active approach to promoting sustainable energy and environmental management systems. In 1997, the BHA hosted several seminars, including "Going Green makes Cents" and "Greening your Hotel". The BHA introduced the Green Globe ISO Certification in 2000, and provided workshops for hotels to learn about the industry's best practices.



◀ *BHA Embraces Sound Environmental Practices starting with 2002 "Greening Your Hotel" seminar series.*

Some early adopters have won regional environmental awards. Great Exuma won a Green Area Award at the annual Caribbean Hotel Industry Conference (CHIC) Awards, and Small Hope Bay Resort in Andros was a finalist in the Green Small Hotels category.



◀ *BHA, Ministry of Tourism and the Bahamas Out Islands Promotion Board sustainability project planning retreat. Project provides training and support to over 100 hotels*

The BHA supported the Coastal Awareness Month Committee and Bahamas National Trust in establishing a youth camp to promote environmental awareness and an appreciation for its link to tourism.

Charlie Pflueger, long standing General Manager of Exuma's Peace and Plenty Lodge, said the resort was "real big on ecology" in the 1960s. The hotel went to great expense to install solar panels on the roof for hot water, and other initiatives. It also incorporated bird watching tours and other ecological attractions in its visitor offerings.

"Instead of Styrofoam we were using recycled paper that would not last 1000 years in the dump, so we have been pretty active in that," said Mr Pflueger.

When Mr Pflueger managed the Beach Inn, also in Exuma, he said the resort installed "a very expensive septic tank system" to recycle the wastewater. It was used for sustainable landscaping on the property.

Family Island resorts have typically led the way with ecotourism, not only incorporating it into a model of sustainability, but also using it as a source of attraction.



◀ *Club Peace and Plenty celebrates 50 years. Owner Barry Benjamin receives numerous awards as a pioneer in sustainable operations. Minister Vanderpoole-Wallace and BHA Executive Vice President Frank Comito join owner in celebration.*

Tiamo Resort, South Andros, is a recent example of best in sustainable practices in use by a hotel. It garnered numerous regional and international awards for its efforts.

One of the first awards for ecotourism went to BHA Lifetime Director Netica "Nettie" Symonette. She won the first Cacique Award for Ecotourism for Different of Abaco, where her unique resort celebrating the culture and heritage of the Bahamas was extremely well received by the international community.

Ms Symonette has been a consistent voice advocating for the promotion of ecotourism in the country's tourism marketing mix.

"The creation of ecotourism projects is of tremendous appeal to international travelers, who just want to get away from the big life, the big scene and be close to nature. Bird watching, for example, is huge. Kayaking, shelling, simple things a visitor can do. It is just something that they have not discussed and they won't. They don't appreciate it, because they don't know," said Ms Symonette.

In the future, islands such as Andros, Abaco and Exuma could achieve great success on the ecotourism front, according to Mr Saunders. He said not all tourists visit the Bahamas for the large scale resorts, and those who seek other types of attractions create a large market for ecotourism.

◀ *Old Bahama Bay Awarded Blue Flag distinction. BHA convenes nation's marina operators at property in 2008 to celebrate achievement and pave way for establishing the Marina Operators of The Bahamas.*



Andros for instance has the third largest barrier reef in the world and one of the largest mangrove systems in the world. The diversity of oceanscapes and marine life in Exuma, Mr Saunder's said, "would blow you out of the water" if you were a yachtsman or a person who loves the water or fishing.

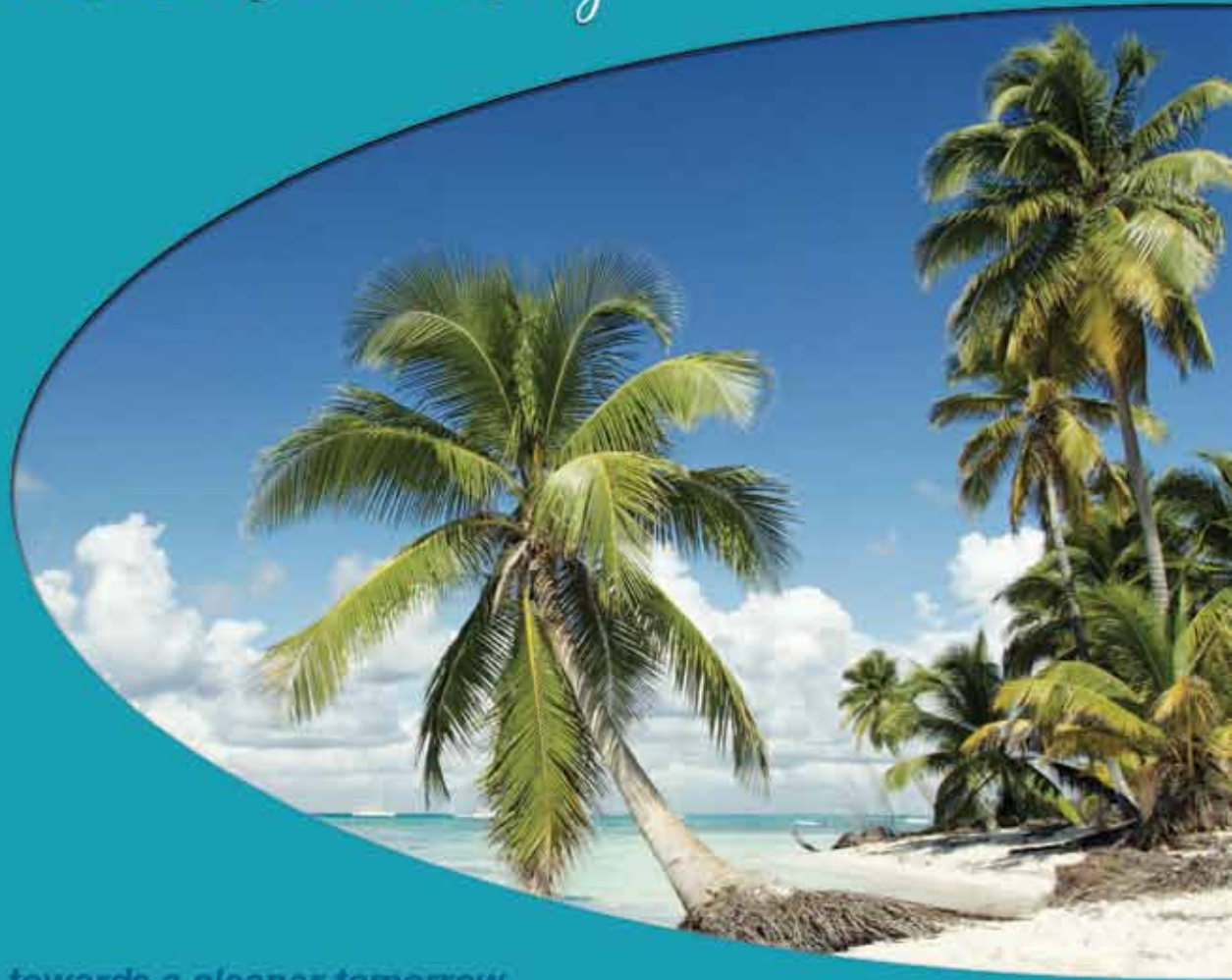
Hotelier Nina Maynard, who represents the small hotel's interests on the BHA Executive Committee stresses the important role of the small hotels and Family Island hotels in particular in developing niche markets.

"Over the past five years we've done extensive work with the nation's small hotels, assessing their needs, helping them to determine their niche market opportunities, and providing training and information to help them become more marketable. There are already pockets of success, but there is tremendous untapped potential. BHA continues to be an advocacy arm for the small hotels and the Ministry of Tourism is working on giving them more access to online bookings. Looking ahead, the public and private sectors must find ways to do more to develop this aspect of our tourism industry," states Ms. Maynard.

In recent years we have seen an emergence of special events including marathons, cycling, and other sports and fitness-related activities, hopefully providing a harbinger of more to come.



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Tourism Beyond

BHA history, 60 years into the future



Sixty years is worth several life cycles in the hotel sector. In the past sixty years of tourism, during which the Bahamas Hotel Association (BHA) has played a significant role, change has been constant. Hotels have risen from the ashes and been returned to dust. Entire landscapes have been transformed, some to almost unrecognizable states. So what will the BHA look like sixty years into the future? What will be its accomplishments to boast and its obstacles to have overcome?

One certainty is that the BHA will have a new name: the Bahamas Hotel and Tourism Association (BHTA). Reflecting on 60 years of history, industry leaders fashioned a guess about the future of tourism in the Bahamas and the BHTA.

“This industry is changing so dramatically. I don’t have a clue. We may be concerned about short trips to the moon in another 60 years; a day visit to the bottom of the ocean. I think you have to think big. The industry is changing so rapidly,” said hotelier Robert Sands, who has worked for more than 30 years in the industry.

“The mere fact we have come so far in just 20 to 40 years is absolutely phenomenal. I think it will be a highly technological environment. The offerings are going to be totally different,” said Mr Sands.

Former BHA president Anders Wiberg said the way of the future is sustainable tourism in the Family Islands. He is optimistic about the future of small hotels. To prepare for the future, he said the BHTA needs to invest in technology and promote ecotourism.

His comments are echoed by the current Minister of Tourism Obie Wilchcombe stating “Small hotels, particularly in our Family Islands, present Bahamians with the greatest opportunity to be owners in our industry. They fit wonderfully into allowing our people to do what they do best....providing a warm, personal touch to the hospitality experience”.

Technology has redefined how hotels connect with consumers. Booking engines, for example, are the primary means by which travelers book their hotel rooms. Long gone are the early days when travel agents and wholesalers supplied hotels with their primary source of clientele. This has presented an obstacle to development for Family Island properties in particular, said Mr Sands, which is a challenge that needs to be addressed. In recent years BHA, the Bahamas Out Islands Promotion Board, and the Ministry have advanced improvements in telecommunications, banking and technology which are beginning to put small hotels on a better competitive footing.

Times are indeed changing quickly, said John Deleveaux, former executive vice president. The BHTA will need to look ahead and anticipate the needs of its members.

“I think a good association, doesn’t sit back until members say what they need. I think we’ve done a good job. You really need to know what is happening around the world and anticipate the needs years down the road,” said Mr Deleveaux.

Throughout the years, the work of private sector groups has been supported by leadership at the highest level of public service. The Bahamas has had twelve Ministers of Tourism in its lifetime: Sir Stafford Sands, Sir Lynden Pindling, Livingston Coakley, Clement T Maynard, Perry Christie, Brent Symonette, Frank Watson, C. A. Smith, Tommy Turnquest, Neko Grant, Vincent Vanderpool Wallace and Obie Wilchcombe, the current minister.

All of them stood ahead of their Caribbean counterparts in rejecting the colonial stigma associated with the industry, promoting instead a “service versus servitude” perspective.

Just last month at the opening of the newest airport terminal, Prime Minister Perry Christie referenced lyrics from the national anthem – “see how the world marks the manner of our bearing” – to highlight the way in which tourism puts the Bahamas on the world stage. He encouraged airport employees and other stakeholders to be proud of the Bahamas and to demonstrate a level of customer service that would reflect the pride they feel.



Working with Educators: Summer Educator Internship Program completes Ninth Year. Over 900 Educators have Participated. BHA President Stuart Bowe, Minister Jerome Fitzgerald, Nettica Symonette host final workshop this summer following week of internship experiences.

Frank Comito, BHTA Executive Vice President, said the tone that was set on a consistent basis by public and private sector leaders over the past 60 years had a positive trickle down effect on the entire industry.

Lifetime Director George Myers said he thinks there is no question the BHTA will continue to play a significant role in the development of the industry going forward, perhaps more so than in the last 60 years.

“There is going to be much more of a need for a cohesive approach to promotion, government relations, employee training and development. There is no question

the BHA has to continue to evolve as the requirements evolve, and it has done so in the past, so it will continue to do so in the future,” said Mr Myers.

At the end of the day, Mr Sands said the BHA’s efforts and those of other private or public sector groups must translate into the best visitor experience in order to stay competitive for another 60 years and beyond. Whether or not the Bahamas can once again become an iconic destination, where people feel they must visit will be the test.

Hotelier J. Barrie Farrington, a lifetime director, and Vernice Walkine, former Ministry Director General and currently a member of the BHA Executive Committee agree. They said the experience is going to make the difference in how well the industry sustains itself.



BHA 2012 Programs Land 13 Bahamians Scholarships This Year: President Bowe and Minister Fitzgerald meet with some of the recipients.

“We’re very good, but not as good as we can be. We need to improve on every aspect of the visitor’s experience, even before they step foot on The Bahamas. It must be welcoming, entertaining, pristine, and seamless in delivering exceptional service with our trademark Bahamian hospitality. Anyone can build a great airport or a nice hotel on a beautiful beach. It’s the people who are behind that which make the difference. It’s how we present ourselves, our rich culture and history, and how we exhibit our pride in being Bahamian.....these are the things which will differentiate us in the future,” said Ms Walkine.

“People with wealth can buy what they want. What they really want is an experience that is novel, unique, and memorable. You walk away from it feeling fulfilled. It really is the experience that they want,” said Mr Farrington, while also stressing the need for price points that cater to the mass market. Destinations that have exotic appeal drive tourism, said Mr Farrington, referring to the love travelers have for safaris, hiking up mountains, navigating the rainforest, even flying into space. The Bahamas will need to decide on its next big move: “Are we going to be reaching out to high tech billionaires and millionaires?” said Mr Farrington.

When Sol Kerzner first came to the Bahamas, Mr Farrington remembers attending an early meeting in the board room, during which Mr Kerzner described his vision.

“He wanted to create a mega resort that could withstand any challenge. If Cuba opened up, it didn’t make a difference. If Orlando expanded, it wouldn’t make any difference. If Las Vegas expanded, it didn’t make any difference. He saw just more and more activity; doing more and more stuff; being different. That would always keep us ahead. And he was very creative,” said Mr Farrington. With AquaVenture, Atlantis has done “amazingly well”.



Bringing Industry into the Classroom: BHA Director and Hotelier Nina Maynard shares her experiences with students at Anatol Rogers High School. With them is teacher Janelle Cambridge-Johnson.

Mr Bowe said Sol Kerzner will be remembered as a visionary who changed the game. In 1994, he said the industry was virtually at a standstill. Through the vision of Mr Kerzner in creating a fun, family resort, “Atlantis assisted greatly in putting the Bahamas back on the map. Seven people out of every ten in North America know the Atlantis brand today”, said Mr Bowe.

“It is also important to note the multiplier effect of the brand and the number of persons who have been employed at Atlantis: 7000 plus employees from 2007. There have been new businesses created and the number of allied members have increased annually. This includes food services, ground transportation, airlines, special events, marketing, banks. Many people have benefited from the Atlantis brand!” he said.

The stage is set for Sarkis Izmirlan, Baha Mar chairman and chief executive officer, to have a similar impact. Developers are expecting the Baha Mar resort project to mirror the initiatives that took place on Paradise Island, bringing about a “renaissance of tourism on Cable Beach”.

“The vision of Sarkis Izmirlan in developing a new complete destination on Cable Beach similar to the success that has been realised on Paradise Island that will propel the Bahamas as a preeminent tourism destination. I think Sarkis Izmirlan’s approach to utilizing best in class, world class brands in multiple hotels, amenities, golf courses, spas, etcetera, is an indication of the tenacity and vision he has for a better Bahamas. The results will be evident in the years to come,” said Mr Sands, Baha Mar’s Senior Vice President of Governmental and Executive Affairs.

Competition is now “extraordinarily fierce” in the tourism sector. Hotels are not only competing amongst each other inside the destination, but the destination itself is competing with places such as Las Vegas and Orlando, and cruise ships, which have become larger and less expensive to operate

compared to hotels, said Mr Farrington. And just as Cuba provided a boon for Bahamian tourism in 1959, it could pose a threat in the near future.

“The biggest challenge and the message we must communicate and get Bahamians to buy into is that too many other destinations have taken aim at the Bahamas’ grip on tourism and the Bahamas’ leadership and they have successfully designed and executed a tourism sector that is by and large biting into the Bahamas’ share,” said David Johnson, Director General in the Ministry of Tourism.

As a result, the Bahamas has not seen any real growth in tourism in the last ten years whereas other destinations have been able to forge ahead with significant growth.

“If we were to pinch ourselves and get real, we would see that other destinations have raised the level of their service and pushed the Bahamas somewhere back towards the middle,” said Mr Johnson.

Compounded with the high cost of labour and the high utility costs, Mr Johnson said the Bahamas is faced with a “deadly combination”. The cost to operate in the Bahamas “is off the chart” and these factors must be offset with premium service.

“We have to refashion ourselves to be a more competitive destination or we will not see growth. In fact, if we do not grapple with the challenges that are causing us to be less competitive, we will see what we have seen in Grand Bahama, shrinkage,” said Mr Johnson.

The challenges are great, but so too are the opportunities and the level of commitment, said Mr Bowe.

“There is an obvious commitment to the national development of the industry; an assurance from the government to working with the BHTA and the various boards; a commitment to improve the technology connecting us to the world; and a renewed focus on Grand Bahama and the Family Islands,” said Mr. Bowe.

This commitment was reinforced by Minister Wilchcombe at a recent BHA meeting when he said that airlift, small hotels development, Grand Bahama, the Family Islands, and improving customer service and the overall visitor experience were among his priorities. He noted that Bahamian music, food, and culture are integral to offering the visitor a unique experience and that more must be done by the partners to embrace this. “We intend to reach more visitors and potential visitors thru the new mediums, particularly thru social media. As has been the case in the past, our success will be tied to partnerships and commitments by all stakeholders” said the Minister.

“As we move into the future, the next generation of traveler is looking for unique experiences, which are not necessarily in the resorts. Of course there will always be a need for small, medium, and large integrated properties; but people are also looking for boutique experiences like a number of our Family Island offerings,” said Mr. Bowe.

It is clear to Mr Bowe and other BHTA stakeholders that the existence of the BHA over the past 60 years has added great value to the tourism sector, helping it to overcome challenges and seize opportunities. In the future, there is no doubt in their minds; the BHTA will do the same.



BHA, Ministry of Education, IBM, Rotary and Project Read Roll Out Reading Companion Program earlier this month. Aims to significantly improve literacy skills.



BHA 2012 Programs Land 13 Bahamians Scholarships This Year: President Bowe and Minister Fitzgerald meet with some of the recipients.

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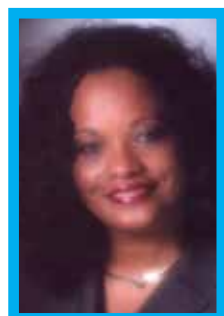
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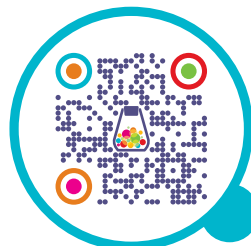
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