



Ribbon Cutting Ceremony for Baha Bay

**The Most Hon. Dr. Hubert Minnis
Prime Minister and Minister of Finance**

Baha Mar

Thursday, 1 July 2021

10:00 A.M.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

A pleasant good morning.

Let me begin with this wonderful declaration:

The Bahamas is coming back.

Scores of jobs and economic opportunities for Bahamians, including new opportunities, are on the way.

We are coming back stronger than ever!

Indeed, today, is yet another wonderful and powerful sign of the recovery and revival of The Bahamas.

Our major tourism market is the United States of America.

They have one of the highest vaccination rates in the world, and their economy is growing robustly.

After over a year and a half of challenges, Americans are ready to travel.

The Bahamas is a near-by, well-known destination that managed the pandemic well.

The sacrifices we made to abide by the public health rules are paying off.

We have attractive properties across our spectacular island-chain.

We are open for business and ready to warmly welcome guests at hotels and vacation rental properties.

In recent months our visitors have returned in large numbers.

Airports are busy.

Resorts are reporting increased occupancy levels.

Cruise ships have returned – and there are more to come.

Some ships are even homeporting, bringing added economic benefits to our country for resorts, taxi and tour drivers and other tourism service providers.

The vacation rental market is experiencing tremendous growth.

Before 2020, much of this rental business was seasonal, typically during the winter months and during certain holiday periods.

But more and more renters are now seeing bookings throughout the year.

This is a very promising sign for Bahamians in the rental market.

One international newspaper recently described The Bahamas as the best island nation in the world to visit.

The newspaper stated:

“The quintessential island paradise, the Bahamas is just fascinating. It is home to about 700 beautiful subtropical islands, and is a holidaying paradise.

“It has some of the best hotels, and of course natural wonders that are unmatched. If you are looking for a truly memorable holiday experience, the Bahamas is definitely it.”

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Baha Mar is helping to lead our recovery.

It is fitting that we are here on the first day of a new month to inaugurate Baha Bay, Baha Mar's beachfront water park, which resides on 15 acres near aqua and jade waters.

May I congratulate Graeme Davis and his dedicated team for this milestone, which is a \$200 million dollar investment.

Baha Bay expands on the luxury options at the Resort, welcoming guests of all ages.

I am pleased to note that Baha Bay has created over 500 direct job opportunities and continues the search for enthusiastic and ambitious associates through the Baha Mar Academy.

I am equally pleased to note that in this very month, Baha Mar will have over 3,500 associates.

Your outlook for the months ahead are very promising.

Your pace of bookings exceed those of 2019, which was a banner year with unprecedented numbers.

And your occupancy numbers continue to rise.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

During 2020, Baha Mar continued construction on Baha Bay.

The amenities here are impressive. They include:

- 24 water slides;
- a group raft rides;
- the most spectacular wave pool in the Caribbean;
- an action river winding through exuberant tropical landscape; and

- a first of its kind Surf Simulator and more.

The amenities and options also include:

- a Kids' Island for younger guests;
- 30 private VIP cabanas;
- nine elevated food and beverage options; and
- an 8,500 sq. ft. private beachfront event space

Both Bahamian and international guests will also enjoy a selection of elevated culinary concepts with innovative cuisines.

Public access and day passes will be available late summer 2021.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In February 2019, a certain hotelier told *Penta* magazine, published by Barron's:

“In 2019, tourism in the Bahamas had a record-breaking year, welcoming 7.2 million visitors – the highest number of arrivals in the history of the country.

He also declared: “I am resolute in my confidence and have full faith in the resilience of the tourism industry in the Bahamas.”

Graeme: You should recognise these words, because they are yours.

Your confidence and faith in the resiliency of The Bahamas were well placed.

Five months later, The Bahamas is roaring back!

In a recent newspaper story, one realtor in The Bahamas from a leading firm, noted:

“At the beginning of 2021, we were hopeful that our market would experience signs of recovery due to the easing of local restrictions and the reopening of international travel.

“However, the level of activity throughout The Bahamas since January has far exceeded our expectations and has broken all previous years’ sales records. ...

The realtor also stated: “We are also experiencing a surge in condo sales, vacation homes and vacant land investments from both local and international purchasers.

“While Nassau was the first market to feel the turnaround, activity in Abaco, Eleuthera and Exuma soon followed, with sales activity now at unprecedented levels.”

Ladies and Gentlemen:

While today’s opening is representative of the revival of our economy and tourism sector, it is about much more.

It is about much more!

Baha Mar and the many other current offerings and new tourism developments throughout our archipelago of possibilities, represent a new era for Bahamian tourism.

The spirit of this new era is about the more vibrant, creative and purpose-driven celebration and promotion of Bahamian culture and heritage.

This era is about the dramatic expansion of the creative economy in The Bahamas.

This era is about greater:

- Bahamian ingenuity;
- Bahamian artistry;
- Bahamian talent and enterprise; and
- Bahamian business, cultural and artistic entrepreneurship.

To encourage and further Bahamian creativity and ingenuity, the Government of The Bahamas has pledged the historic sum of

\$250 million in funding to small businesses over five years through the Small Business Development Centre.

This will include capital and mentoring for businesses in the creative economy.

It also includes access to capital for those involved in organic farming and food production, including food for the many visitors to our shores.

We are going to create a Junkanoo Village on 13 acres at Gladstone Road.

We want to see the dramatic expansion of heritage tours for hotel guests and for cruise passengers.

Bahamians must realize the full range of concessions and incentives available to them in every sector of our economy.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Baha Mar's commitment to the celebration and promotion of Bahamian culture and arts is represented in many areas at the Resort.

One of these is the "Current Baha Mar Gallery, [which] has produced museum quality exhibitions of Bahamian and Bahamian-based artists. ...

"The gallery is known for its support of a [broad range] of artists and media from the pre-Independence era of art to the more contemporary art practices of today."

Leading this collaboration is one of our preeminent artists, John Cox, who has helped to inspire a generation of younger artists.

Adorning this new park will be stunning Bahamian murals, designed and painted by a pool of wonderful artists teeming with Bahamian imagination and ingenuity.

I want these artists to know how very proud we are of them, and how proud I am of them.

This evening, a solo exhibition of new paintings by Navaro Newton will open at The Current, running from July 1st to July 15th.

“Born in New Providence and raised on ... Andros, Navarro fell in love with nature and the creative arts at a young age, [and he began] his formal education in Visual Arts at the College of the Bahamas.”

I encourage as many Bahamians as possible to visit the exhibit.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Though The Bahamas is coming back strong, we have a long way to go.

We have to get more Bahamians back to work as quickly as possible.

We have to create more opportunities for Bahamians for the ownership of our economy.

We can only do this together.

There is something each of us can do to help this economic revival to gather pace.

We must continue to get vaccinated.

The vaccines are the way to end this terrible pandemic.

Vaccines are the way to ensure we limit future outbreaks.

They are the way to ensure more visitors come to our shores in order to help revive our economy.

Tourists will increasingly want to visit places that have highly vaccinated populations in order to ensure their safety and that of their children.

Let us end this pandemic in The Bahamas by coming forward in large numbers to take the live-saving vaccines.

I encourage all the associates at Baha Mar to get vaccinated.

The vaccines are safe and they are painless.

I close by thanking everyone who made today possible, including the thousands of new and returned associates at Baha Mar.

I wish you all an early Happy Independence.

May God bless you all and may God bless our Bahamas.

Thank you and good morning.
