



9th April 2021

By Email: sharon.belmar@govt.lc

Dr Sharon Belmar-George
Chief Medical Officer
2nd Floor
Sir Stanislaus James Building
Waterfront
Castries
St Lucia

Dear Dr Belmar-George,

The Executive of the Saint Lucia Hospitality and Tourism Association seeks an urgent audience with representatives of your Ministry, to discuss heightening concerns regarding the restrictions on co-mingling of local and foreign guests at resorts. This issue has been flagged by our members as one of the most challenging ones which currently stagnates the smooth reopening of our industry, which continues to be our best hope of driving investment, employment, and social stability at this time. The current restrictions seem to be working against our best intentions to reopen our tourism sector after over a year of losses for all industry partners including farmers, vendors, employees, wholesalers, food, and beverage providers to name a few.

Review of international best practices suggest that some more competitive destinations have found a balance between health, safety and profitability for citizens and businesses alike and we would like to share our observations with you and your team. Given the prolonged nature of the pandemic, with no end in sight, and the vaccination process taking many more months at the least, the SLHTA is concerned about the implications on mental health, social stability and financial well-being of thousands of workers who remain unemployed.

More specifically, we wish to discuss in detail with you and your team, adjustments to the enclave tourism strategy currently in practice and vaccination strategy moving forward. The current restrictions are hurting our restaurants, shopping malls, duty free retail operators, vendors and attractions when guests are compelled to go through many hoops to get there and end up just staying on property. These practices are hurting general demand for the destination, as is visible on Trip Advisor forums and from feedback from travel professionals and guests who have certain expectations of a tropical vacation experience. Many of our 3-4 star EP properties currently open are having a very challenging time appealing to vacationers who are unable to explore the island during their stay. This is having a particularly negative impact on properties which are not near a beach.

The current protocols are hurting our ability to fully tap into the long stay market, especially as a long stay marketing initiative will soon be announced by the SLTA. It is our experience that many of these visitors who want to stay long term would like to do so at the COVID-19 certified hotels that they started out with but are hindered by the current prohibitions on "mixing" of persons who are in "quarantine" with those who are "free" to move around. In addition, this current policy negatively affects public perception of the accommodation providers, hurting our ability to engender public confidence in tourism. This goes against the message that our tourism protocols work and is not in keeping with WHO, CDC and other recommendations.

Our second highest source of arrivals pre-COVID-19 was the Caribbean market. It will be near to impossible to attract much from this market as they will certainly not accept an enclave approach and will not accept being placed in "bubble only" hotels as there are just not enough of these hotels on island. It is creating needless administrative burden for small business in the non-accommodation sector to keep locals, bubble travelers and international visitors separate. We need to allow these protocols to work, as to this point there is very little evidence of visitor to guest transmission. In fact, data from guests who are doing a second test to return home shows that most had not contracted the virus while on island.

Barbados, Antigua, Bahamas and Jamaica all allow guests who have a negative test (and often a second negative test while on island) to enjoy the island to the fullest.

The current model of operating our tourism industry suffocates the micro, small and medium sized operators in multiple sectors and this is a dangerous recipe for economic disaster.

Collectively, these non-accommodation operators represent the essence of our touristic offerings and their pleas to be allowed to operate in accordance with the safety protocols need to be addressed with urgency.

We look forward to indications of your availability to meet at the soonest so that we may expound on the issues highlighted herein.

Respectfully,



Karolin Troubetzkoy
President
St Lucia Hospitality and Tourism Association

CC: SLHTA Executive Committee