



Government Signs Supplementary Agreement for Proposed Southern Causeway



Desert Star Holdings (DSH) Limited has unveiled the proposed second phase of the Pearl of the Caribbean project earmarked for the southern town of Vieux-Fort.

At a briefing held in March, DSH updated a wide cross section of public and private sector entities; quasi government agencies and the media on the status of the project which is expected to be implemented in a phased manner over a period of 20-25 years.

Referring to an artist rendering during his presentation, (see photo in background) DSH Chairman, Teo Ah Khing, explained this latest venture which proposes reclaiming land and building a causeway between the mainland and the Maria Islands Nature Reserve.

“You notice there are two islands, the Maria Islands. They are completely preserved with isolation and preservation. We are going to do three things in relation to the islands,” Teo Ah Khing noted.

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“We are going to do detailed research on all the existing wild life and marine life on this island and continue to preserve and enhance. Secondly, we are going to allow local tourists, to be able to experience the very rare natural features right out there in the ocean, and allow it to be a tourist attraction added onto the already interesting attractions in Saint Lucia. Thirdly, with the creation of this 150 to 200 acres of new land, certain portions will be returned to the people of Saint Lucia. This is not just about the public parks or ocean parks that the visitors are going to enjoy,” he continued. “This is to allow us to put ourselves on the world map for the international research of wildlife.”

Reiterating the need for Saint Lucians to be more open minded about the development of their country, Prime Minister Allen Chastanet told the gathering that it is the intention of his government to fulfill its mandate of building a new Saint Lucia.

“Singularly, the most important aspect of success is implementation,” he remarked. “Today we are here to announce that we intend to have full Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) studies. We intend to allow the public to determine what they like and what they don’t like; and we intend to get feedback from the citizens of the south, to make sure that the plans that we have and the scale that we have is compatible with the capacity of Saint Lucia to be able to grow. Once we are satisfied that we have done those things, we must make the decision to implement.”

The Prime Minister explained that he will soon appoint a taskforce specifically for the Pearl of the Caribbean project to expedite the processes that will allow this billion-dollar investment to come to fruition.

Site preparation for the first phase of the project has commenced at Beausejour, Vieux-Fort. DSH has made its staff available at its site office to respond to queries from members of the public.

Meanwhile the series of public consultations on the Pearl of the Caribbean Project continues. Hosted by the Office of the Prime Minister in collaboration with Invest Saint Lucia, the Agency facilitating the Pearl of the Caribbean Project, the consultations have engaged groups such as constituency councils, the Chamber of Commerce and various youth groups.



In addition to the public consultations, a [Facebook page](#) has been set up to facilitate the timely dissemination of information on the project.

Inset: Above - Prime Minister Hon. Allen Chastanet and DSH Chairman Teo Ah Khing signing a new supplementary agreement for the Pearl of the Caribbean Project; below - public consultations on the Pearl of the Caribbean Project.

ISL Continues its Community Outreach



For the fifth year running, Invest Saint Lucia (ISL) will contribute EC \$5000 to the National Community Foundation’s (NCF) education scholarship fund.

ISL’s contribution is consistent with the educational component of its community outreach programme. The annual donation is aimed at supplementing the NCF’s existing educational assistance fund, that provides much needed financial support to students who have difficulty meeting the expenses associated with getting an education.

Although the NCF assists the disadvantaged with healthcare, housing and in several other areas, education occupies a large chunk of its budget with at least 150 students benefitting annually.

ISL’s donation will be presented at the annual National Telethon which is the NCF’s biggest fund raising event. It will be aired live on the National Television Network (NTN), from 1 – 6 p.m. on Sunday May 28th 2017.

In February, Invest Saint Lucia threw its support behind the Inaugural Under 18 IBF International 3x3 Basketball Finals and CBC/FIBA Americas Annual General Meeting.

ISL’s donation was demonstrative of one of the Agency’s guiding principles, that support for any outreach activity should fit broadly within the areas of health and wellness, the underprivileged, education and the environment.



The inaugural three-day regional event, which was held in Saint Lucia, featured a youth leadership workshop for boys and girls aged 15-18 about life skills, goalsetting and healthy living. Invest Saint Lucia remains of the view that such activities are important to the development of youth on the island

(inset: Earland Labadie and Dave Headley of Invest Saint Lucia presenting the winner's trophy)

OJO LABS Pledges its commitment to establishing Saint Lucia's first Artificial Intelligence Call Center

Over the last few months, Invest Saint Lucia has been facilitating the launch of OJO Labs, an artificial intelligence (AI) company founded in 2015 in Austin, Texas, by entrepreneurs John Berkowitz and David Rubin.

Berkowitz was co-founder of online marketing firm Yodle, based in New York and Rubin was CEO of Austin-based ProfitFuel, which provides local search engine marketing services to small businesses.

Together, they created OJO Labs Inc. which develops software to engage consumers in personalized and automated conversations; helping real estate agents turn prospects into clients.

Speaking during a March 14th presentation to the Cabinet of Ministers, David Rubin praised Saint Lucian workers for their commitment to learning new skills.

"We have some experience in my previous company employing Saint Lucians on the north side of the island," he explained. "We employed 150 Saint Lucians in mostly call center operations, and one of things that really struck us with Saint Lucians was how good they were with computers and how good they were at multi-tasking.

"The latest company we have started, OJO Labs, is really at the forefront of what we call artificial intelligence. We are building the first automated intelligence assistant for

the real estate industry. The initial industry is real estate, but it has applications across different industries. So, it's basically technology and neural networks that can respond to consumers' questions and inquiries and do that mostly automatically.

"Consequently, we need to employ artificial intelligence trainers and so these AI trainers will be tagging communications from consumers and teaching the machine what the intent of those consumers are."

"Based on our experience employing Saint Lucians, we think they would be excellent at this job. We are going to combine that job, with some opportunities on the call center side, and think that we will be able to employ quite a few people in the south."

Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister with responsibility for Commerce, Industry, Investment, Enterprise Development and Consumer Affairs, Bradly Felix, spoke about the quality of this investment.

"What really struck me, was the talent that David identified in the people of Saint Lucia as it related to their



ability to adapt, and work very skillfully on computer applications," Minister Felix noted.

OJO Labs has expressed its commitment to provide world class training to Saint Lucian employees in leading edge technology domains. This, the company hopes, will showcase Saint Lucia and help to grow the local call center industry.

It is anticipated that the community of Vieux Fort and its environs will benefit from this AI call center which is expected to operate in 30,000 square feet of space at the Hewanorra Free Zone.

Invest Saint Lucia continues to work closely with the relevant government departments to ensure the seamless facilitation of the Saint Lucia operation, which is expected to generate almost 100 jobs at its initial launch, set for August, 2017.

High Marks for Specialty Caribbean Expo

The inaugural Specialty Caribbean Expo was held at the Daren Sammy National Cricket Stadium from March 9th – 12th and featured high quality, innovative products and services from over 50 small and medium sized businesses from across the OECS.

The four-day exhibition, held under the theme: 'A Unique Buying Experience', was hosted by the Trade Export Promotion Agency (TEPA) in collaboration with the OECS Commission, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Investment, Enterprise Development and Consumer Affairs, and other partners including Invest Saint Lucia.



The Specialty Caribbean Expo provided the platform for networking among exhibitors, importers, buyers, distributors, wholesalers and relevant trade agencies in search of new products and services.

Speaking at the launch of the event, Invest Saint Lucia's Manager for Policy Advocacy, Research and Communications, Natasha Edwin-Walcott, noted the timeliness of the initiative.

“Much has been touted about the multilateral trading system and whether there are benefits for small vulnerable economies like ours, where our participation in world merchandise trade is less than 1 per cent. At a time when the Saint Lucian economy, and that of its neighbours experience persistent challenges, even after the worst effects of the financial crisis have been overcome, two things come to mind, on advancing the economy: one, is to increase our exports of goods and services: and secondly, to increase our inflows of Foreign Direct Investment.”

“For Invest Saint Lucia, as the country's investment promotion agency, charged with promoting, stimulating and facilitating investment in targeted sectors such as manufacturing, tourism and infrastructure, becoming a partner on this 'Brand Saint Lucia' initiative was never in question, as the trade and investment nexus cannot be over-emphasised.”

The event was officially opened with a ribbon cutting, by Prime Minister Allen Chastanet, who remarked that the

Expo is a clear signal of Saint Lucia's recognition of the importance of networking, as a means of capitalizing on various opportunities.

“This is a great event and an opportunity for us to strengthen our economic ties. I want to emphasize a critical component. If we are to going to be competitive in the world, we must learn to do so without trade agreements. We must do so by doing things differently, and by having products that are unique and desirable. But it means that we have to focus on the business of what we are doing, and we must understand where the weaknesses are and what we have to do to turn those things around.”

The host country for 2018 Specialty Caribbean Expo will be announced soon.

(Inset: Natasha Edwin-Walcott of Invest Saint Lucia addressing the press launch of the Specialty Caribbean Expo 2017)

ISL optimistic about 2017/2018 Investment Outlook

Investment Services Manager at Invest Saint Lucia, Alana Lansiquot-Brice delivered a thought-provoking presentation at the annual Caribbean Market Outlook Seminar hosted by First Citizens Investment Services.

Members of the financial and business community were provided with timely information on the performance of the economy from the perspective of the island's investment promotion agency.



“Information reaching us at this stage, following the administration of our annual investor survey, shows that in 2016, Saint Lucia recorded direct investment inflows of US \$126 million, but we expect that figure to rise given that there are a number of surveys still outstanding. US \$107 million of the figure thus far was allocated to direct foreign investment, and over US 18 million to local direct investment,” declared Brice.

“Based on the results of ISL's annual investor survey, the tourism sector accounted for 84% of direct investment, while the commercial sector represented 11%, manufacturing 4% and infrastructure accounted for 5%,” she noted. Brice added that as it relates to employment generated from direct investment into the economy in 2016, “preliminary figures indicate that direct investment

was responsible for close to 2000 jobs, 158 of which were permanent.”

Brice explained that targeted figures for direct investment and resultant employment for 2017, are expected to be met given all the new projects in the pipeline.

“We anticipate that the tourism sector in particular, will produce the desired revenue and generate sustainable employment. This is based on the presumption that the projects scheduled to begin construction and undergo expansion during this year, all materialise.”

Among the expansion projects earmarked for 2017 are Sugar Beach a Viceroy Resort, Serenity at Coconut Bay, and the Rendezvous Hotel.

Additionally, a few projects within the manufacturing and tourism sectors are scheduled to begin construction this year with an anticipated financial injection into the local economy.

The annual First Citizens Caribbean Market Outlook is billed as an essential seminar for the financial and business sector, and explores the expectations and projections for the local, regional and international economies and the global financial market. There was also a review of the performance of the Saint Lucia economy and discussion on expectations and projections for 2017.

Investment Prospects

Saint Lucia’s reputation as a sought-after destination will be further enhanced by the various investment prospects scheduled to come on stream during 2017:

- **In February, the island witnessed the official opening of the 456-room Royalton Saint Lucia Resort and Spa;**
 - **The 115-room, four-star Harbor Club on the Rodney Bay Marina is scheduled to open in September;**
 - **Sunset Bay, earmarked for Sabwisha Beach in Choiseul, is expected to break ground on its 120-room resort by June;**
 - **The 350-room/suite Sandals La Source is also scheduled to break ground by the second quarter of this year;**
 - **The imminent expansion of Port Castries, will see the island welcoming its first mega cruise vessel by December 2017;**
 - **Construction of the international horse racetrack as part of the US \$2.6 billion fully integrated Pearl of the Caribbean development, is expected to begin within the next few months pending the outcome of an environmental and social impact assessment.**
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