



DEPUTY PREMIER &
MINISTER FOR TOURISM & TRADE DEVELOPMENT

Navigating Change - Focused Commitment



TOURISM 2026-27 BUDGET

STATEMENT

Mr. Chair, thank you for the opportunity to present an overview of the Ministry of Tourism and Trade Development 2026-2027 budget. I look forward to providing this finance committee with a more in depth understanding of the ministry's planned expenditure over this budget period.

It is seven months since I assumed responsibility for this Ministry. I have spent these months listening to industry partners, to public servants, to visitors, and, most importantly, to Caymanians whose livelihoods depend on the growth and success of our tourism industry. What I have learned has influenced not only the budget before you today, but the strategic direction of the Ministry for the years ahead. I won't pretend the road ahead will be easy. There's a lot to fix, and even more to create. I will not stand here and claim to have all the answers, but I do have a clear vision for success and the determination to leave our industry better than I found it. One thing is certain, under my leadership it will not be business as usual: **change is happening.**

MINISTRY OF TOURISM & TRADE - BUDGET OVERVIEW

For 2026 the Ministry of Tourism and Trades Operating Budget is **\$30.7 million**, of which \$2.8 million is for the core ministry and \$27.9 million is allocated to the Department of Tourism.

In 2027, the budget increases to **\$31 million**, of which \$2.9 million is allocated to core Ministry operations and \$28 million to the Department of Tourism.

Overall, this reflects a budgetary increase of \$3.4 million or 13% for 2026 and \$0.3 million for 2027.

Of the **\$3.4 million** increase in 2026:

- \$1.5 million is required to cover increased personnel costs - including the unbudgeted Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) awarded to staff last December 2024, plus pension and health insurance obligations.
- **\$1.5 million** is earmarked for supplies and consumables which includes items such as professional fees, advertising, marketing and essential travel.
- The remaining **\$400,000** pertains to a change in reporting standards for leases, which has led to a sharp increase in the recording of depreciation.

Department of Tourism

The Department of Tourism has responsibility for marketing and promoting the Cayman Islands, product development, tourism related training, and providing industry support.

The Department's budget of **\$27.9 million in 2026** and **\$28 million in 2027** is invested in global campaigns, digital advertising, airline partnerships, and industry development initiatives. These investments ensure that Cayman remains visible, competitive, and compelling to travellers.

With a modest increase in the budget for 2026 that remains relatively flat for 2027, the Ministry and the Department of Tourism, like many other entities within government, are tasked to become more efficient with service delivery, and more discerning with the initiatives we support.

Prudent fiscal management will be emphasised, without losing sight of the human impact of our decisions; and without compromising standards or quality of service. We will also explore opportunities to strengthen our revenue base, and diversify our tourism product to support the industry's continued growth, and by extension growth in our economy.

FOUR STRATEGIC PRIORITY PILLARS

For this first budget cycle under my watch, my Ministry's focus will concentrate on four priority pillars, which I will speak to individually. They are:

1. **Sustaining and Growing the Tourism Industry:**
2. **Training and Empowering Caymanians:**
3. **Enhancing the Tourism Product:**
4. **Trade Diversification.**

Every initiative pursued, every project approved and every dollar spent by my Ministry will connect to one or more of these four pillars, and in turn will contribute to the Governments Broad Outcomes relating to:

- Building a diversified, resilient economy that supports prosperity and innovation.
- Supporting a highly skilled and adaptable Caymanian population, and,
- Ensuring sustainable infrastructure and environment development that protects our natural resources.

This overarching framework will guide us in being more fiscally responsible and transparent in delivering meaningful results that serve the long-term best interests of our people.

PILLAR ONE - SUSTAINING AND GROWING THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Industry Performance (Jan -Sep 2025)

Mr. Chair, with that framework established, I now turn to the Ministry’s first priority pillar: Sustaining and Growing the Tourism Industry. Responsible growth begins with a clear understanding of where the industry stands, in order to chart where we aspire to be. I will begin with a brief look at the industry’s recent performance followed by the growth forecasted for this budget period. Starting with the stayover sector:

Stayover Arrivals

Between January and September of this year, our islands welcomed 338,385 air arrivals which is up 2.4% from 2024, and is the third highest total for this period in our recorded history.

For 2026 and 2027: air arrivals are forecast to increase by approximately 2% year over year.

Accommodation

Our accommodations sector offers **8,426 rooms** across all three Islands, which is an increase of 316 rooms compared to September 2024. Importantly, the market continues to evolve: Hotels make up 33% of room stock, apartment/condos account for 50%, and guest houses /villas contribute 17%, allowing us to serve a range of visitors and budgets.

In 2026 the opening of two new hotel properties will increase our national inventory to 8908 rooms. One GT will add 100 rooms and the Grand Hyatt, which will be the largest Hotel in Cayman will add 382 rooms, creating jobs, expanding our product and reinforcing our position as a desirable and resilient vacation destination.

| Room Stock by Property Category | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------|-----|-----|-------|------|
| Category | GCM | CYB | LYB | Total | % |
| Apartment (Condos) | 4,100 | 55 | 49 | 4,204 | 50 |
| Guest House (Villas) | 1,283 | 102 | 45 | 1,430 | 17 |
| Hotels | 2,654 | 71 | 67 | 2,792 | 33 |
| Total | 8,037 | 228 | 161 | 8,426 | 100% |

Tourism Accommodation Tax (TAT)

Revenue collected between January and September 2025 from tourism accommodation charges (commonly known as TAT) was **\$36.2 million**, up \$1.8 million or 8.13% from the same period in 2024. TAT collection for the full year 2025 is projected to be \$46 million.

For 2026, the Ministry of Tourism is forecasting TAT revenue to be **\$48.8 million** rising to **\$49.1 million** in 2027.

Airlift Outlook: January-April 2026

From December and into 2026, we look forward to the strongest growth in airlift capacity our islands have seen in recent years, which is extremely positive for winter and spring arrivals and very exciting news for the industry.

55,000 more seats will be added to our destination between January and April 2026, raising seat capacity to 358,512. This represents an increase of 18% compared to the same period in 2025.

As well as growth in seats, the number of flights into our islands will climb by 23% to 2,196, which is 411 more flights than January to April, 2025.

This includes service from Porter Airlines, a brand-new carrier to our islands that will be operating from Toronto starting in December. Porter Airlines initially announced a once weekly service and have already increased to three times weekly due to customer demand before the service has even launched.

Porter is also introducing service from Ottawa – which is a first for Cayman – and also improves access for travelers coming from Quebec and Montreal.

And that's not all Mr. Chair.

- Jet blue and Spirit airlines will be re-introducing service from Fort Lauderdale,
- Delta Airlines will be offering service from Detroit and New York, which are two new gateways for them.
- As of October, American Airlines resumed its daily Mami overnight service and is increasing its Chicago service to daily operations from December.
- United Airlines is also expanding its service out of Chicago from 1st Jan 2026

These new services are due to demand from high-value markets, and reflects the Department of Tourism's successful airline strategy and strong partnerships with international carriers.

Mr. Chair, this island is going to be very busy with more airlines, more flights and more seats coming into Cayman. This is welcomed news for industry, particularly our taxis, attractions, restaurants, retailers, tour operators and hoteliers.

CRUISE SECTOR

FCCA Overview

Looking now at the cruise sector, I know that people who work in this sector were worried about their future, and the future of cruise tourism in Cayman, following the outcome of the referendum on cruise piers.

Having recently met with cruise line executives at the FCCA conference, I am pleased to report that our cruise sector is not disappearing, and I am now in a position to provide the country with an update, based on those discussions.

12 meetings were held over two days with various cruise executives, and they each reaffirmed Cayman's position as a high-demand port of call.

While there is strong guest satisfaction with our island's safety, cleanliness, and natural beauty, they also spoke candidly about our tourism product and areas we must improve.

- Tendering remains the most significant operational challenge, particularly for larger vessels and during peak arrivals.
- The visitor experience at Public Beach needs attention, and there are concerns about jet ski safety, limited swim zones, and insufficient amenities for passengers.
- Attractions such as Pedro St. James and the Cayman Turtle Centre are under-utilised, which means opportunities exist to make these experiences more interactive to increase visitation.
- Passenger spend is flattening because nearly 45% of cruise passengers are repeat guests and are familiar with our attractions. Coincidentally, 45% of stayover visitors are also repeat guests, which highlights a need for more authentic and culturally rich experiences and activities for guests to enjoy when they visit Cayman.

Overall, the discussions at FCCA were productive and the forecasts for passenger arrivals are positive, with George Town remaining on the itineraries of several major cruise lines, including Royal Caribbean, Norwegian, MSC, Carnival and Disney.

Cruise Passenger Arrivals 2025 – 2027

For 2025 passenger arrivals are forecast to be 1.1 million from 363 ship calls, rising to 1.3 million passengers from 449 ship calls in 2026. Those numbers are correct as of 6 November 2025, and reflect the cruise lines confidence in our islands.

For 2027, early projections estimate 1.7 million passengers and over 500 ship calls but those figures are likely to change up or down given that it is still two years away.

| YEAR | PASSENGERS | SHIP CALLS |
|------|----------------------------|---|
| 2025 | 1.1 million (1,113,952) | 363 cruise calls. This would have been more but calls were cancelled due to hurricane Melissa. |
| 2026 | 1.3 million (1,375,894) | 449 ship calls booked. |
| 2027 | 1.73 million approximately | Over 500 ship calls |

I am also exploring the possibility of having more cruise calls going to Cayman Brac to bring a regular economic boost to that Island. Since returning home from the FCCA conference I have had a further call with one of the cruise lines to advance that discussion, and I look forward to making an announcement when a positive agreement is reached.

I sincerely hope this update will allow the businesses and operators who work in this sector to breathe a little easier and feel more hopeful about the future.

Revenue Collection

Mr. Chair, aside from the jobs and livelihoods it supports, cruise tourism is an important financial contributor to our economy. According to a report released by the FCCA on *The Economic Contribution of Cruise Tourism to Destination Economies*, cruise passengers visiting Cayman spent an average of US\$116 per person in 2023-2024 – placing Cayman 9th of 33 destinations.

Applying that average spend to the passenger forecasts, cruise passengers will contribute over **US\$129.2 million** in 2025, and **US\$159.6 million** in 2026 to our economy. This is in addition to the passenger fees collected by the Port Authority that cruise lines submit for every passenger aboard their ships.

Economic contribution is an important measure of success, but it only tells part of the story. The true value of tourism lies in how the revenue translates into training, development, and opportunities for our people—opportunities that strengthen the industry, make it more inclusive, and ultimately enhance the experience for our visitors.

PILLAR TWO — TRAINING AND EMPOWERING CAYMANIANS

Scholarships and Training

That is why Pillar Two focuses on **Training and Empowering Caymanians**. As Minister, I am determined to ensure that tourism is a catalyst for opportunity and advancement, preparing our people for the jobs of tomorrow, especially as AI become is increasingly embedded in daily operations.

Tourism must work for Caymanians — and Caymanians must work in tourism. That principle underpins my approach to training and the Ministry’s investments in workforce development.

To this end, funding for TP 12 — Tourism Scholarships and Training has increased from \$1.1 million annually, to **\$1.45 million**, to allow more Caymanians to pursue tertiary education and skills development training. And this enhanced level of funding will continue through 2027.

With training costs rising year over year, the Ministry’s allocation for scholarship and training was consistently underfunded, requiring supplementary top ups to meet its obligations to students. To correct this, the budget now provides an additional CI\$350,000 each year which is more in line with actual costs and should eliminate the need for supplemental funding during this budget period.

DOT Training Budget

The Department of Tourism’s education-focused outputs — TOU 16 and TOU 19 — will also see significant increases over this budget cycle.

TOU16: relates to Tourism Sustainability Programmes – and will increase from \$2.2million in 2025, to \$2.6 million in 2026 and \$2.66 million in 2027 – reflecting a 20% increase over 2 years.

TOU19: relates to Tourism Education and Awareness Programmes – and will increase from 1.4 million in 2025, to 2.2 million in 2026 to 2.3 million in 2027 – reflecting a 58% increase over 2 years.

| | 2025 | 2026 | 2027 | % increase |
|-------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------------------|
| TOU16 | \$2,215,037 | \$2,605,233 | \$2,661,126 | 20% increase over 2 yrs |
| TOU19 | \$1,457,599 | \$2,270,068 | \$2,302,472 | 58% increase over 2 yrs |

Those investments are directed at providing Caymanians with skills and qualifications to assume roles within the tourism industry. If our people are expected to participate, we must ensure they have the training, resources and pathways to succeed. That is how we build a future workforce and a future industry, led by Caymanians.

PILLAR THREE: ENHANCING THE TOURISM PRODUCT

Cayman Islands National Attractions Authority (CINAA)

Mr. Chair, empowering Caymanians for roles in tourism is linked to ensuring the product they represent is something to proudly promote. This brings me to Pillar Three: **Enhancing Our Tourism Product**. I have spoken about significant growth in airlift, accommodations and cruise passenger arrivals which translates into more tourists visiting our attractions.

Four of our most iconic sites: Pedro St. James, the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park, the Cayman Craft Market, and the Hell attraction fall under the remit of the Tourism Ministry and are managed by the Cayman Islands National Attractions Authority or CINAA.

In 2026, funding for CINAA will increase by **\$320,000**, or 16%, bringing its annual allocation to **\$2.3 million**. This includes increases of \$150,000 for both Pedro St. James and the Botanic Park and increases of \$10,000 each for the Craft Market and Hell.

A new Board, chaired by Mr. Charles Clifford, is now in place at CINAA, bringing renewed direction and strengthened governance to the Authority. I am also pleased to share that Cabinet has approved the purchase of land adjacent to Pedro St. James, paving the way for expansion and enhancement at this national treasure.

Sadly Mr. Chair, there are aspects of our tourism product that fall short of the high-end standard we aim to provide - and improvements are urgently needed.

During my early site visits to Smith Barcadere and Consuelo's Beach, I found maintenance issues and conditions below the level expected of a premier destination. While those specific issues have since been addressed it is only a start. There is more to be done, particularly to address the concerns at Public Beach, which even the cruise line executives raised.

The experience at Public Beach cannot be described as high-end luxury, and we should not be selling a product we are not proud of - or marketing a standard we do not consistently deliver. These issues are not superficial. They strike at the heart of the beach experience for visitors and residents alike, and affect the strength of our tourism brand. I therefore intend to work closely with the relevant ministries to drive the necessary changes and improvements.

On that note Mr. Chair, I applaud this government for moving with urgency to protect the southern end of Seven Mile Beach where erosion had reached critical stage. Inaction posed a serious threat to our environment, our tourism industry, and our reputation as a premier destination. The replenishment plan approved by Cabinet will prevent further damage to our best-known tourist attraction and preserve it for future generations to enjoy.

Beautification Committee

To ensure that our Islands reflect the beauty and standards we uphold, \$250,000 has been budgeted over 2026-27 for the Beautification Committee, which operates under the stewardship of my Parliamentary Secretary, Ms. Heather Boddan. The small details — clean signage, proper lighting, well-maintained facilities — shape the perception of our Islands just as powerfully as attractions do, and are just as important.

VEDG Programme

With respect to tourism product diversification, I am renewing the **Visitor Experience Development Grant**, which supports Caymanian entrepreneurs in bringing new tourism experiences to market.

The Ministry has budgeted \$500,000 in 2026-27 for the development of new products and services primarily for visitors, to provide them with an authentic Caymanian experience. This is an effective way to diversify our tourism product while ensuring that the benefits accrue to Caymanians.

I should note that I found this programme in place when I arrived, and I have no reservations continuing the legacy of a former Minister, if it delivers benefits for Caymanians, and to the industry

Film Commission

The Film Commission also continues to evolve as a promising new frontier for tourism. Cayman is now a member of the Association of Film Commissioners International, and Ms. Brittany Kelly is the first Caymanian to attain Film Commissioner certification. This noteworthy achievement reflects Cayman's commitment to the highest global standards in film commission practice and industry engagement.

\$1 million dollars is allocated in the 2026- 2027 budget for the Film Commission rebate programme, which is a positive step towards positioning Cayman as a film-friendly destination, to attract productions to film on our shores.

By supporting the film commission, my Ministry is aiming to give our Caymanian creatives an opportunity to hone their skills right here at home, and mitigate the brain drain in the creative industry in Cayman. Films bring visibility, creative opportunity and a modern dimension to our tourism product. This sector is small now, but it is strategic, and it will grow.

National Tourism Plan

Mr. Chair, achieving long-term tourism success requires responsible management and early in the New Year, the Ministry and Department of Tourism will begin developing a new National Tourism Plan that will be future-focused and set clear priorities within a comprehensive guiding framework. The plan will ensure that the industry's development keeps pace with global trends, embraces innovation and aligns with national priorities – while keeping Caymanians at the heart of the strategy.

PILLAR FOUR: TRADE DIVERSIFICATION

Moving on now to my Ministry's fourth focal pillar: **Trade Diversification**

Mr. Chair, the Portfolio of Trade Development is working to address one of the most important long-term economic challenges facing these Islands: the cost of imported goods and overdependence on a single source market.

Last month, the Ministry convened a strategic consultation with some of the country's most experienced business leaders. The discussions were frank and constructive, and centred on how Cayman can diversify its trading relationships, reduce import dependency, and ultimately lower costs for consumers. That meeting was only the beginning. Over the coming months, the intent is to develop a National Trade Diversification Framework to guide our approach to global supply chains and strengthen our economic resilience.

CAYMAN AIRWAYS

Turning now to Cayman Airways, a vital national asset that is a proud symbol of Caymanian identity that keeps our islands connected to the world. Cayman Airways strategic value to our economy through tourism spending, local employment, supplier engagement, and community benefits was estimated at \$270 million in 2023 and \$275 million in 2024. That is a return on investment that few other public enterprises can match.

For 2026 and 2027, Cayman Airways will receive **\$18.5 million per year** in output payments:

- **\$3.1 million** for domestic air services, ensuring a reliable airbridge between all three Islands.
- **\$15.4 million** to support core tourism gateways and essential routes.

Additionally, the airline will receive equity injections of **\$10.5 million in 2026** and **\$8.5 million in 2027** to meet its recurring financial obligations with respect to staff costs, maintenance and other operational expenses.

In my first meeting with the new Board of Directors, I outlined a vision for Cayman Airways focused on controlling costs and maximizing revenues through strategic decision-making and sound business practices. Beyond maintaining the essential air bridge to the Sister Islands, the Board will concentrate on three priorities: objectively reassessing all routes based on national need and economic viability; establishing a clear path toward long-term financial sustainability; and upholding absolute compliance with all safety and security standards.

To help manage rising operating costs during this budget cycle, Cayman Airways will implement targeted fee increases and introduce new value-added products. One key initiative for 2026–27 is a bundled travel package that combines flights, accommodations, and activities – supporting local partners while encourage longer stays. Cayman Airways projects that these, and other revenue-enhancement measures will generate \$6 million in 2026 and improve the balance between capacity and demand.

CAYMAN TURTLE CENTRE

The Cayman Turtle Centre remains both a cultural institution and a cornerstone of conservation. Its operations are heavily dependent on cruise visitors, and while numbers are stabilising, they remain below pre-pandemic levels. To support financial sustainability, effective 1 November 2025 the Centre implemented a 6% price adjustment on the cost of admissions.

Ticket pricing for Turtle Adventure moves from US\$47 to US\$50 for adults (US\$27 to US\$29 for children), and Turtle Safari from US\$30 to US\$32 for adults (US\$21 to US\$23 for children).

Management will also be looking holistically at revenue and partnership opportunities with other SAGC's, as well as continued cost saving measures.

With conservation being a vitally important aspect of the Turtle Centre's mandate, species conservation plans were developed for the Green Sea and the Hawksbill Turtles respectively, given that both species are considered as critically endangered.

Adoption of these plans is essential for protecting the species and would enable the centre to pursue new revenue streams through partnerships with other conservation entities. I intend to collaborate with the Minister for Sustainability to bring both species conservation plans forward for the consideration of Caucus and Cabinet.

Conclusion

Mr. Chair, I have set a clear and ambitious agenda in this budget, one that invests in our people, strengthens our product, and expands our potential. Change is not always easy, nor always welcomed, but in the context of our tourism industry, some changes are necessary, while others are long overdue.

The tourism and trade sectors are in good hands, and I remain confident that the industry's brightest tourism years are still ahead. My Ministry team and I stand ready to deliver these initiatives with integrity, compassion, and unwavering commitment.

Our aim is to advance an industry where growth is sustainable, opportunities are inclusive, and the principle of Caymanians first remains firmly at the heart of our efforts, providing reassurance that this government has our people's best interests at heart.

I wish to thank my NCFC colleagues for their support, advice, and cooperation—not only in preparing this budget, but since the inception of this administration.

I thank my Chief Officer Mr. Stran Bodden, my Director Mrs. Rosa Harris, and the teams at the Ministry of Tourism and Trade Development, as well as the Board Members, Directors, Management and staff at: Cayman Airways; the Cayman Turtle Centre; and the Cayman Islands National Attractions Authority. Their professionalism and dedication strengthens my confidence that our industry is in good hands.

Members Contribution to Tourism

Mr. Chair, I would like to make one last observation. I look across at all 18 members in this Chamber - 19 including myself – each of whom has, in one way or another, contributed to building our tourism industry. And each of us has been blessed to benefit from it.

Let me begin with the **Leader of the opposition (Hon. Joey Hew)** - and this is the story that was told to me.

My father was the first certified Caymanian hotel manager and he was offered the job back in 1957 to manage the Pagaent Beach hotel.

He told the family he would accept under the condition, that the late

Ms. Valma Dilbert Hew, the Leader's mother, who was living in the Brac, be hired as his assistant. It was agreed and during this time she met Mr. Lenny Hew who was a guest at the hotel. I often joke with the Leader of the Opposition that if it wasn't for my dad he wouldn't be here today.

I also recognize the **Deputy Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Kenneth Bryan)** for his contribution to the tourism industry. He once worked at the Marriott Hotel. As the previous Minister he was faced with one of the greatest decisions this country has ever faced, and it was the reopening of our borders after COVID.

The Member from **George Town West (Hon. Pearlina McGaw-Lumsden)** worked at the Hyatt Hotel in sales at a boutique, and her mother worked at the Holiday Inn as a house keeper, and in the restaurant.

The Member from **Cayman Brac East and Mother of the House (Hon. Juliana O’connor-Connolly)** - her mom, Ms. Shirley Mae O’Connor also served faithfully in the hotel & tourism industry.

The Member from **Red Bay (Mr. Roy Tatum)**. His mother, Ms. Maggie Tatum worked as a cook and bartender at the Brac Reef and the Divi Tiara; while his father, Mr. Arlin Tatum was a charter boat captain at Southern Cross Club in Little Cayman. The member himself even had a stint in the industry as a teenager, working at the Brac Reef as well.

The Member from **George Town East (Mr. Roy McTaggart)** his father - the late Bill McTaggart, affectionately known to all as ‘Uncle Bill’ - was manager of the Yacht Club in the late 1950s, which is where The Wharf Restaurant is today.

His assistant was the late Mr. James “Sonny Boy” Bodden. My dad, Ms. Valma, and Bill McTaggart, shared many great stories from those days. Stories that remind us of how small, close-knit and determined our community once was.

Also part of that early group was the late Bob Soto, a pioneer in his own right.

The Member from **Bodden Town West (Mr. Christopher Saunders)** his father, the late Roy Saunders, was a bartender for many years at Holiday Inn and was one of the very best! The Member himself worked as a night auditor at the Sleep Inn Hotel - from 11pm to 7am - before heading straight to his regular day job at 9am.

The Member from **Bodden Town East (Mr. Dwayne Seymour)** spent several years with Cayman Airways at the front counter, before going on to open his own company at Owen Roberts Airport.

The Member from **Cayman Brac West (Hon. Nickolas DaCosta)** his mother, Ms. Tammy Banks worked as a night auditor at the Divi Tiara, while the member and his wife have managed condo properties along the Seven Mile Beach.

The Member from **East End (Hon. Isaac Rankine)**, his father spent several years on the Cayman Aggressor fleet as a cook, and he also worked as a fishing guide and captain of my dad’s charter boats.

The Member from **North Side (Hon. Jay Ebanks)** his grandmother – Ms. Alex Johnson - managed numerous rental villas in the Rum Point/Cayman Kai area. The member himself has managed properties and provided maintenance and construction services, continuing the family legacy.

The Minister for **West Bay North (Hon. Rolston Anglin)** his late mother - Ms. Clovena Anglin - worked alongside the Cumber family in their hospitality businesses, and his father, Mr. McClurn Anglin served at the Turtle Center for over three decades.

The Member from **West Bay Central (Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks)**, her late father – Mr. Austin Ebanks - began his career in the North Sound as first mate to Capt. Crosby Ebanks' first mate. At a time when visionaries like Captains Marvin, Crosby, Gleason and Dallas, saw Stingray City's future potential, Mr. Ebanks went on to purchase his own boat, 'The Dove' and launched his own North Sound excursions for visitors.

The Member herself joined the tourism industry straight out of high school, working with Cayman Airways and rising to the rank of Senior Cabin Crew member.

The Member from **Prospect (Hon Michael Myles)** his mother served in tourism for 32 years, beginning at the Holiday Inn before managing condos along Seven Mile Beach. The member has also contributed by training Caymanians for roles in tourism through his own organisation.

The Member from **West Bay West (Ms. Julie Hunter)**, her mother worked as a cook at Galleon Beach and Grand Old House, later transitioning to housekeeping at the Colonial Club, where she was beloved by guests. Her father served as Head of Maintenance at the Royal Palms and Coconut Harbor for many years. The member herself worked at the front desk of the Holiday inn.

The Member from **Savannah (Ms. Heather Bodden)** has devoted over 40 years to the tourism sector and worked alongside our National Hero, the late Honourable Jim Bodden, in creating Pirates Week. She also represented our Islands abroad on numerous promotional trips, proudly carrying the Cayman name.

The Member from **Newlands (Hon. Wayne Panton)** his own family owned the Bay View Hotel in George Town, and as a young man, he worked at the Casa Bertmar Dive Shop, from the age of 13 for several years.

And finally, Mr. Chair, the **Premier's father – Mr. Atlee** - once served under the Ministry of Tourism as manager of the Turtle Centre. He still boasts, to this day, of providing the Financial Secretary with a cheque when the Turtle Farm was profitable — and, Mr. Speaker, we all hope those days will return soon!

Mr. Chair, I would be remiss if I did not also mention my own family's long-standing connection to this vital industry.

As I noted earlier, my father was the first licensed Caymanian hotelier. My late dear mother, Mrs. Carolyn Celia Rutty, also played a key role in shaping our tourism story.

She owned and operated Cayman Travel, one of the early local travel agencies, and she was the very person who typed the original application to the FAA that allowed Cayman Airways to operate flights into the United States.

As for myself, I am privileged and honored to serve as Minister of Tourism and Trade, and before that, as part-owner and Managing Director of the Comfort Suites Hotel, and of several restaurants that served both locals and visitors alike.

Tourism, for my family and for me, is not just an industry — it is a way of life and a legacy that has shaped who we are as Caymanians.

As Minister, I am mindful of where we came from, and I will continue to honour those who came before us, by ensuring that Caymanians always have a place, and a future, in our tourism industry.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

ENDS