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## St. Kitts Making The Shift To High-End Tourism

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The shift towards a higher end tourist clientele for St. Kitts and Nevis is already in progress says Tourism Minister, Senator Richard Skerritt.

Hon. Skerritt informed a rapt audience at Saturday's (Nov. 16) 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Tourism Experience Awards ceremony that the government has made good on its promise to focus more on the quality rather than quantity of visitors to St. Kitts and Nevis.

"Here in St. Kitts and Nevis we promised you that there would be a shift towards the higher end of the market and that we would bring a more discerning visitor to the country- a visitor who wanted to engage the destination, a visitor that would be interested in and what to interact with our people, learn about our history, engage our natural beautiful environment, and more importantly a visitor who will be spending more money per person. And I'm happy to tell you that that is happening," he said.

How many visitors come to the islands was no longer important to the government, Hon. Skerritt said, but the amount of money that is being spent in the country and the number of small businesses that are benefitting from it.

"We don't deal with how many people come anymore; it's not that important to us. We just want every individual who comes to have the best possible experience that he or she can have and to leave here with no money in their pockets. And if they came here with more money, then it meant they would have spent more money."

The Minister pointed out just a few of the indicators that tourism in St. Kitts and Nevis is growing.

He revealed that he had received the design plans for the 5-star ultra-luxury 134-room resort, Park Hyatt St. Kitts, last week; noting that Chief Executive Officer of Hyatt Hotels Corporation for the Americas, Mr. Rakesh Sarna, "had such wonderful things to say about St. Kitts-Nevis" during their November 11 meeting in Chicago.

*Park Hyatt St Kitts*, the Federation's second 5-star hotel, broke ground in June of this year and is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2015.

The number of taxi and tour operators had sky-rocketed from just over 100 to over 350 in the past 6 years alone, Skerritt informed. He said another 200 were "trying to get in because people see that there is opportunity".

"Every week we are giving concessions and helping small businesses to get more ready for competing in the tourism sector. And so we know that tourism is growing," he added.

Hon. Skerritt also disclosed that a Fox Sports crew was in St. Kitts filming for the World Poker Tour Alpha8 super high-roller series which took place Nov. 16-17 at the Marriott. He spoke of the exposure St. Kitts would be receiving from the coverage since the event, which attracted some of the biggest and wealthiest names in poker, was televised for rebroadcast on Fox Sports.

The Tourism Minister encouraged members of the private and public sector involved in the industry to continue to strive to produce quality service and products.

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