

**BUILDING TOURISM DESTINATIONS:  
LISTENING TO THE LEADERS**

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The global tourism community takes great pride in the ability of the sector to enhance the economic, social, environmental and ideological wellbeing of nations, enriching the lives of travellers and hosts alike. It brings people, policies and practices together, unlocking minds, ideas, and resources. And it provides countries with a powerful spirit of competitiveness, which may in fact be best realised through cooperation.

Travel and tourism gets people, trade, investment, understanding and opportunity moving forward.

With close to 266 million people directly employed by the travel & tourism sector worldwide (equating to over 9% of all jobs worldwide), the responsibility to ensure that tourism 'works' is a widely shared one. Hundreds of thousands of business leaders carefully monitor metrics to ensure the ink stays black, the returns continue to be realised.

And within governments, public sector players carefully navigate tourism development to ensure that growth is inclusive, sustainable, well planned, well intentioned, well thought through, for the greater wellbeing for all people of the destination be they involved in tourism or not.

With so much at stake, where does the role of oversight and optimization ultimately sit?

Through CNN TASK's monthly 'Compass' articles, as part of examining the drivers of tourism growth, a closer look will be taken at various leaders in the sector, both in the public and private sectors, from across the traveller experience chain. Using examples from across the travel and tourism world, windows will be opened to different ways of thinking, and different ways of working.

The goal: to reveal where the compass of tourism growth is pointing for destinations seeking meaningful, equitable growth through tourism economy development and advancement.

### A CLOSER LOOK AT THE INVISIBLE

When it comes to tourism industry activity, it is the efforts of the private sector – the business community – that commands the greatest attention. The commercial operations of tourism accommodation, infrastructure operations, attractions, and supporting services are most able to enjoy the visibility and appreciation of onlookers for their contribution to tourism sector growth and advancement. The busyness is most often seen and heard through business.

Often unseen, and unappreciated, however, is the effort made by government to guide, nurture and path clear effective tourism sector development. At the head of the table when it comes to government-lead development of travel and tourism: the Minister of Tourism (also referred to as the Secretary of Tourism).

With economic, social, environmental and other crisis challenging the wellbeing of nations across the globe, the importance of the tourism economy has enjoyed a rise in awareness and credibility over the past decade. This understanding is fueled by nations recognising the ability of the tourism sector to help nations get people, programmes and promises of earnings back on their feet. As a result, the importance of the role of the Minister of Tourism has increased. As has its profile.

But what exactly is the mandate of the government's chief champion for tourism?

And how do they turn the promise of enrichment into a working, long-term reality?

While different destinations will have slightly differing details in their mandates, essentially the role of the Minister of Tourism is grounded in the same principles: responsible, sustainable, inclusive, cooperative and equitable growth and development of the tourism sector and its resulting economy, executed for the benefit of *all* people of the destination, as well as the competitiveness of the nation in attracting visitors, investment, earnings and positive image.

But how do they make it happen? Vision, creativity, leadership ability and agility are job requirements, as clearly revealed when examining the role of a Minister of Tourism through the reflections of one such leader. Destination in focus: the Seychelles.

### PUNCHING ABOVE ITS WEIGHT

An island nation in the Indian Ocean neighbouring Africa's eastern coastline, while small in geographic size and remotely located, the Seychelles has become a destination with a reputation for 'punching above its weight'. Its vital statistics clearly reflect the critical role of tourism, successful tourism, to its future growth and well-being:

Population:	88,000
GDP in 2013:	USD 1.13billion
% GDP from Tourism:	56.5% (compared to 9.5% globally)
Visitors in 2013:	265,000
Visitor Exports generated by Tourism:	37%
% Employment from Tourism:	greater than 55%
Ranking in WEF Tourism Competitiveness (2013):	#1 in Africa (#38 on global ranking)
% Total Investment going to Tourism:	25%

The man behind the tourism machine that is the Seychelles: Alain St Ange, Honourable Minister of Tourism.

How does he define the responsibility of tourism leadership that sits squarely on his shoulders? In his own words:

*"It is accepted by one and all in Seychelles that Tourism remains the pillar of the island's economy. As the Seychelles Minister responsible for Tourism my mandate remains to take the Government policy forward.*

*This also means remaining in touch with the industry players and with our people. The policy covers above all the duty to defend and protect the tourism industry, and to ensure that it is consolidated for the long term.*

*To achieve this I know that I need our people to be integrated in the tourism industry of our Seychelles. This is why the Government of Seychelles invited Seychelles to work in a united manner to claim back its tourism industry. This appeal has worked and today more Seychellois, than even before, are benefitting from their tourism industry.*

*Today, the situation is very different indeed as more informed travellers with higher expectations of their holiday experience, seek to get beneath the skin of the country they are visiting and to return home culturally enriched by the experience.*

*Whether we realise it or not, we are all being transformed by this dynamic and by what it bodes for our increasing interconnectedness, and for the terrain we must navigate in the future.*

*We are, I believe, all discovering that for our tourism to remain attractive to this new generation of clued-up, increasingly discerning globe-trotters we must exploit the wider set of our destination's attributes, digging into our respective cultures to lend travellers a fresh perspective on all that we have to offer. This in turn, implies greater engagement with our populations whose support we need to take our tourism industry to the next level and who can find their livelihoods transformed in return as a result of this exciting new synergy."*

Central to the success of tourism destinations is making tourism an industry that all nationals are able to genuinely support, whether they work in the industry or not. Embedding the understanding around the value of the tourism economy is an essential basis of understanding for holistic support of the sector through all parts, and players, in the nation's economy and society.

Why is Seychelles an example in this regard? As explained by the Hon. Minister of Tourism:

*“I have always known that if I wanted to build awareness across Seychelles I needed to make the industry more relevant to all people of Seychelles. Tourism is so important for Seychelles that it needs the population at large to remain updated so that the importance of the industry is appreciated, and the relevance of the industry that remains the pillar of their economy is understood. This means that every single national must be continuously informed of what tourism does for them, why it matters to them.*

*This is not a behind the scenes job. The position of Minister of Tourism is not about sitting behind a desk. Because when visitor arrival numbers are down, when length of stay drops, the buck stops with you, when the yield from tourism is down, the buck also lands with you. A Tourism Minister must also be ready to be involved with local business interests, guiding local development, as well as international Bodies and Conferences to ensure the country remains as visible as possible and in so doing remain relevant in the world of tourism. Ministers of Tourism must work with passion and only passion. It cannot only be a position with a title.”*

For many destinations, and their tourism leaders, it's not only about a responsibility within borders. For many destinations, regional cooperation is vital to not just tourism growth, but survival. Creative approaches to sector advancement, including competition through cooperation, leveraging partnerships, eliminating barriers and stimulating year-round visitor activity, have become essential strategic levers for many destinations.

When reflecting on the tireless efforts made by the Seychelles in developing strong operating relationships across the African continent, Hon. Minister St Ange takes on an 'abundance' based approach:

*“I believe that unity is strength. Developing regional partnerships can only grow the region's tourism cake. This is obvious even to the most naive and skeptical observers. No island can be an island on to itself. This is a policy of the past and a remedy for disaster.*

*A transformative aspect of today's brand of tourism we are following as Seychelles is cross-border approach as we are witnessing with the upcoming 2014 edition of the Carnaval International de Victoria, now co-hosted by Seychelles, La Reunion, Madagascar, Mayotte and South Africa KwaZulu Natal. This is a clear example of States which may once have considered themselves as rivals in tourism, coming together in an initiative to market, not only themselves but their region.*

*Another example of Seychelles playing its part is in the Indian Ocean Vanilla islands and the East3Route cross -border tourism investment initiative between Mozambique, Swaziland, South Africa and now Seychelles.*

*These kind of collaborations between neighbours and erstwhile rival states bears a clear message of the benefits of co-operation in the global marketplace and the potential for transforming lives across entire regions through joint tourism initiatives.*

*Today the world in which we live is changing very rapidly as the internet, social media and increased inter-connectivity between peoples at all levels of society is bringing about change at an unprecedented pace and intensity. There is practically no area of human endeavor that has remained untouched in this roller-coaster ride on the back of these ever-burgeoning technologies which create fantastic opportunities, as well as challenges in this brave new world we are entering.*

*As a classic example of a people-oriented industry, tourism, upon which many of our region's economies depend to a greater or lesser extent, continues to experience profound change, forcing us to re-evaluate our approach to what makes our respective destinations attractive to consumers, and which channels we use to get the message across in the*

*ever-more-crowded, global market place. Less than two decades ago, Seychelles was very much relying on its sun, sea and sand ticket to attract visitors to our shores, even though it is widely accepted that we have the best in a sun, sea and sand holiday. Today we are all the stronger as a destination, and as the people of the Seychelles, because we our thinking smarter, and working smarter.”*

One nation, one destination, one leader, one perspective.

In any destination across the globe, the role of government is vital to the success of tourism sector growth, development and competitiveness. Likewise, the role of tourism is for the unification of the people of the destination through economic, social, environmental and ideological advancement and identity.

A critical stakeholder in the mix: the Minister of Tourism.

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