BAHAMAS MINISTRY OF TOURISM
Business Plan Summary

“Becoming the regional example of outstanding tourism management”

July 2003-June 2004
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OVERVIEW

Tourism in The Bahamas will be changed for a very long time if not forever. Our most profitable franchise has been “price-no-object” impulse travel from the northeast US and south Florida. The necessary increases in airport and cruise port security measures in the wake of September 11th serve to reduce the ease and speed of travel and strikes at the heart of our business.

On the other hand, we believe that there are several strengths that might prove to be of substantial benefit to the Islands of The Bahamas compared to our primary competitors. While our business levels might not return for some time, also in part as a result of the economic slowdown in the US, we firmly believe that our share of business for warm vacation travel from the US will increase.

Although promotion will continue to be at the core of our marketing plan, there are a number of product and service improvement initiatives that we must advance in order to increase our chances for success.

As marketing people, we must continue to insist that those who provide the product and deliver our services constantly make improvements so that our job and visitor satisfaction are made easier. Marketing has little to do with making the impossible, possible; it has more to do with making the possible easier. There is no marketing program that can “make” persons travel to The Bahamas who are not inclined to travel at all. It is possible, however, for us to ensure that those persons who do travel to The Bahamas leave with a buzz that causes them to spontaneously recommend The Islands of The Bahamas to their friends and relatives on their return home.

Going back to first principles, below is a review our **purpose, vision, mission, objectives, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, our critical success factors and our programs.**

*************************************
We believe that the tourism business should be developed jointly with the public and private sectors working from a coherent philosophy and from one plan.

We continue to believe in the primary value of publicity but in this new environment, advertising will return to a prime position without being over-rated in value. In the past, we almost abandoned our product and service improvement initiatives under the false belief that good advertising is sufficient. From the perspective of most of our marketplaces, “The Bahamas” is a “known” entity. We believe that the greatest value of advertising is to tell something new and to reinforce something positive. We must use our advertising to tell the “unknown” story of The Islands of The Bahamas and to remind prospective vacationers of the compelling things that they have either experienced or heard about The Bahamas.

We must decide which activities are critical to our success and execute them quickly. Far too much of our time is spent dealing with relatively trivial matters that have little to do with the development of our promising managers or the execution of programs that will deliver on our objectives.

Those promising managers who focus on outcomes rather than on programs are more important than ever. All of the programs described below are intended to serve a particular outcome. If the specific program is not likely to advance our objectives, then each manager has a responsibility to challenge it and, if necessary, change it.

This will not be a recipe book. If anyone is looking for a detailed prescription regarding how we are to execute each project, they will be disappointed. It does not exist. The tourism industry for the foreseeable future must be driven by initiative, innovation and creativity, not prescriptions, because many of the past prescriptions are no longer relevant.
Finally, everything below is an attempt to focus on the urgent and the important instead of the true but relatively trivial. In no way does it attempt to provide an exhaustive list of everything that we need to do. It does attempt to provide a list of everything thought to be urgent and important.

**OUR PURPOSE**
Our purpose at the Ministry of Tourism is to guide the development of our nation as a collection of diverse yet easily accessible islands, each of which is celebrated globally for the delightful experiences that it provides for visitors and for the sustainable economic and social benefits that it brings to our investors and residents.

**OUR VISION**
Our vision is to become the world’s leading practitioners of outstanding tourism management such that our services, our products, our style and our talent, are in demand for application as examples to other destinations.

**OUR MISSION**
Our mission is to make it increasingly easier to create, sell and deliver world-class vacation experiences to the individual islands of The Bahamas; world-class according to those who work in the tourism industry and live in the respective islands, world-class according to those who invest in the industry, and world-class according to the visitors to each island.

**OUR OBJECTIVES**
We are in the tourism business for four principal reasons:

1. To earn foreign exchange for The Bahamas and for Bahamians;
2. To provide for increasing employment of Bahamians
   a. By improving the talent available in the Ministry
   b. By improving the talent available in our industry;
3. To ensure the broadest distribution of income from tourism;
4. To Bahamianize the tourism industry as far as possible.
OUR MOST IMPORTANT STRENGTHS

? Our proximity to North America will prove to be more important than ever. Fewer North Americans, in the near term, will wish to be on large aircrafts for very long trips.

? There is a wealth of knowledge and talent available within the Bahamas tourism industry to assist with our purpose.

? We have a large number of airline seats with very high frequency from south Florida.

? Within the Grand Bahama and Nassau/Paradise Island areas there is a greater variety of choice for the customer compared with many competing destinations. For example, the Nassau/Paradise Island area offers accommodation as diverse as the Ocean Club, Breezes and Dillet’s Guest House, and offers activities as diverse as casino gaming and diving.

? Nassau/Paradise Island has grown to provide many global, well-known hotel brands, in addition to the unique vacation attraction that is Atlantis. All of these have created some positive momentum for the entire country and has gone a long way in restoring the country’s reputation. By and large the reputation of Nassau/Paradise Island is positive in the marketplace. Although our egos do not like to admit it here it is: Brands and products make the destination as much as destinations make the products. The Bahamas is better because Atlantis is here; Atlantis is here because The Bahamas makes it possible and credible.

? The natural attributes of The Bahamas easily lend themselves to promotion of many special interest markets, and all indications suggest that travel for special interest is far more resilient than travel for general beach vacations. Let us make no mistake however. Today the collective volume of travel for special interest vacations to The Bahamas is less than the volume for general vacations. That is why we must be careful not to shift our resources
in the special interest direction too radically, too quickly. Besides, the promotion of general market vacations reaches those with special interests. On the other hand, much of the promotion for special interest travel is too narrow to reach the general interest market.

The Islands of The Bahamas are still generally regarded as safe and friendly for American, European and Canadian citizens. According to our research, word of mouth recommendations are improving in the marketplace and substantial positive publicity has been generated for the country in the past five years.

With the Bahamas dollar on par with the U S dollar, easy and secure entry requirements, U S Customs and Immigration pre-clearance and English as the spoken language, it is easy for most of our visitors to enjoy The Bahamas without the problems that many other destinations have with regard to these factors.

Fast ferry and cruise ferry service to Grand Bahama has never been more important.

We will soon have detailed knowledge about our visitors having eliminated the continuing problems with the Immigration Card.

Bahamasair appears to be more willing to assist in tourism development than ever before.

At the moment, and barring any European attacks in this matter, our non-stops between UK and The Bahamas are more important than ever before.

The Bahamas, by being perceived as relatively less exotic than some of our neighbours in the region, might prove to be more comforting to Americans than some other destinations.
Our People-to-People program is about to break into a realm that allows for more affordable and more frequent hosting by the best of our citizens.

The growing number of internationally known celebrities of Bahamian extraction.

The growing number of internationally known celebrities that are purchasing second homes and frequenting The Bahamas.

OUR WEAKNESSES

The cost of doing business in The Bahamas is too high. This prevents us from going after markets that are flocking to competing destinations in our region. We envy the growth to these competing destinations without addressing the primary reasons for that growth.

Service quality is still weak and training in the fundamentals of service together with better supervision are needed to improve existing service quality. This matter is urgent.

The history, art, music, and culture of The Bahamas have not been incorporated in our products and services which leave our destinations with weak personalities and poor emotional bonds with our visitors.

On the other hand, we continue to believe that a test of the attractiveness of our culture is the degree to which it is attractive to our visitors and insist on incorporating elements of our culture in locations and promotions, even when they produce a yawn from prospective visitors. “My culture is for me; not for the visitor.” Our Ministry must constantly test and properly present those elements of our culture that resonates with our visitors with the full understanding that we are in the marketing business, we are not the Ministry of Culture.
Packages to The Bahamas, which include airfare, transfers, and hotel accommodations, are perceived as reasonable but the cost of enjoying a vacation once in The Bahamas is seen as very expensive.

At the same time, more and more customers are disaggregating packages and booking individual components themselves online. We must facilitate this trend.

It is still too difficult to book many products in The Bahamas.

Awareness of Nassau/Paradise Island is so far ahead of the rest of the country that “The Bahamas,” as research has constantly shown, is often understood to be “Nassau/Paradise Island.”

The absence of Grand Bahama Island from general mainstream tourism marketing requires that higher than normal levels of expenditure will have to be deployed to assist in turning the island around.

The tourism plant on most Family Islands is still underdeveloped and access is still too difficult, especially for short stay vacations.

Our homegrown talent within the Ministry of Tourism is inadequate so a very small group is doing most of the heavy lifting.

The industry continues to find it difficult to attract the best talent into the sector.

Many Bahamas Ministry of Tourism offices are not adapting as quickly as they should to the new requirements of the marketplace.
We make very little effort to prepare for and welcome non-English speaking visitors.

Bahamasair does not see the development of air service to the Family Islands as a priority.

**OUR OPPORTUNITIES**

Proximity, nonstop flights, US Customs & Immigration pre-clearance, English spoken, friendly people all need to be reinforced. Many of these have been taken for granted.

The Bahamas has a large list of past visitors for direct marketing purposes, which is second to none in the region.

New technologies provide The Bahamas with the greatest tool in history to lower our cost of doing business while deepening and broadening exposure of our products and services globally.

The Islands of The Bahamas, if properly positioned, can be perceived as a “closer Caribbean” for north Americans and as an alternative Caribbean for Europeans.

The private sector continues to work more closely with the Ministry of Tourism than ever before. This enables the private sector to work on matters in the national interest and in their self-interest while exposing the Ministry of Tourism staff to the best practices in that sector.

We need to recognize that the collective marketing spend of the private sector exceeds that of the Ministry of Tourism so any such collaboration is clearly in our national interest. With the new branding coming on stream, we have a chance to effect our “Intel Inside” campaign for the first time.
The continued closure of Cuba to easy access by U.S. visitors allows The Bahamas time to put its house in order prior to the inevitable opening up of that destination. For our purposes, Latin America has been closed to The Bahamas but open to Cuba. The United States has been closed to Cuba but open to The Bahamas. We should seek to open The Bahamas to Latin Americans.

Cruise only passengers are beginning to be viewed as visitors on familiarization trips of The Bahamas rather than as the enemy. Efforts need to be made primarily through our newly opened “Welcome Centre” to show these passengers all that they have missed in The Bahamas as a result of their short visit by cruise ship and entice them to return as a stopover visitor.

Combination vacations, especially family vacations, between The Bahamas and south Florida appear to be growing in interest, and resorts are responding with quality programmes.

The image of The Bahamas in Latin America and Europe is still that of a high quality destination.

The Bahamas can develop the skill set to get into the global travel business not just The Bahamas tourism business. We are beginning with our Immigration Card project.

OUR GREATEST CURRENT THREATS

Times have been good for so long, and our visitor numbers continue to grow in spite of external shocks, that many of our people do not recognize that we are at a critical juncture and they have not changed their behaviour in accordance with that fact.

The recent expansion in the regional cruise inventory is leading the cruise lines to intensify their efforts to “steal” land-based vacation business to the detriment of The Islands of The Bahamas. Their heavy discounting of packages makes cruise values better than ever. Far too many people continue to believe, erroneously, that
cruise traffic to The Bahamas does not negatively affect stopover traffic.

Too much of our tourism products are imported which leads to high leakage of valuable foreign exchange.

There is still a very large negative impression of The Bahamas in the marketplace because of vacations taken many years ago and because of poor service on some recent vacations. We need to continue to work to eliminate those impressions.

Casino gaming, once a particular strength of The Bahamas, has proliferated throughout North America and is expanding throughout the Caribbean.

Contracted labour, and utility costs in particular, continue to be amongst the highest in the region and productivity in many areas may be below the average for the region. This places a squeeze on profitability and leads to a negative impression of The Bahamas as a place to invest.

Too much of the Ministry of Tourism's budget is consumed by overhead costs and fixed contracts with large investors.

Talent recruitment within our Ministry and within our industry has been placed on the back burner.

ASSUMPTIONS

There will be no other terrorist attack in the US or Europe, especially the UK, in the period under consideration.

The economy and consumer confidence in North America will show continuing growth now that the main part of the campaign in Iraq is over.
Inflation will remain low and disposable income in our primary markets will remain strong.

A refreshed advertising campaign in North America and a new TV campaign in the UK will reinforce the new positioning of The Islands of The Bahamas in the marketplace.

Competition from the cruise ship industry will intensify, but the governments of the Caribbean will address the imbalance between cruise lines and stopover visitors to the benefit of land-based vacations.

Service and products in both Nassau/Paradise Island and Grand Bahama Island will not deteriorate during the current slowdown.

Cuba is not likely to be a major factor in the US marketplace in 2003/2004.

Air service to The Bahamas will be adequate for the demand.

Airfares to The Bahamas will be proportionate to those for competing destinations from our major markets.

The Four Seasons Resort in Exuma will open successfully in late 2003.

**CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS:**

We consider the following to be indispensable to the medium-term success of tourism in The Islands of The Bahamas:

1. Private/public sector cooperation and coordination of resources in executing a coherent singular plan.
2. Attract the best Bahamian talent to the tourism industry, and ensure that they receive the best training and the long discussed knowledge transfer from knowledgeable Bahamians and work permits holders.

3. Empower our Experience Czar through use of the information gathered from the Immigration Card, and launch a measurable national service initiative to improve service throughout The Bahamas, with our special focus being the tourism industry. There must also be an effective national effort to extract more revenue from those visitors who are in our country today, and we must integrate more of the uniqueness of The Bahamas into that experience.

4. Destination Bahamas and Bahamas.com must deliver the basics more effectively before the “bells and whistles,” especially for the smaller properties in The Bahamas.

5. Our Immigration Card data must be the platform for our marketing decisions henceforth; and a formula must be found to restore year round promotions in our major national markets as well as in local markets overseen by our BTO’s.

6. Florida/Bahamas programs must come out of the closet and be executed fully.

7. The Ministry of Tourism needs to have a unit with the sole concern of finding ways to reduce costs in the tourism sector.

8. Cable Beach needs to be reinvigorated. The new brand at Our Lucaya in Grand Bahama needs to be supported along with bus transportation of incentive groups to Grand Bahama resorts.

9. Nassau International, as well as the airports in Exuma, Eleuthera and Abaco all need to be brought up to the international standards that we have requested for years. The current Airport Authority needs professional internationally
recognized support in order to accelerate the benefits that we seek.

10. The aims and goals of the Welcome Centre at Prince George Dock need to be supported with respect to broadening the coverage of management, integrating it into a broader Ports Authority entity, and sticking to its original plans for cruise passenger conversion. Grand Bahama Island needs a Welcome Centre (the International Bazaar?)

11. Publicity overseas needs to be augmented with the Minister’s vision. It has grown substantially through the years but that growth needs to be accelerated.

12. The Bahamian people need to hear the “Voice of the Visitor” at least weekly. In addition, we need to keep them abreast of all that we are doing and the ways in which they can help us succeed collectively.

OUR PROGRAMS (In order of priority under each heading)

Private Public Cooperation:
1. Formalize the collaborative process with the private sector to ensure mutual agreement on priority issues and programs. This has been accelerated under the current environment. We need to find ways to keep this going and institutionalize it for the long term.

Product/Service Improvements:
2. Recruit more talented Bahamians to the tourism sector and institutionalize immediately the tracking of knowledge transfer to all talented Bahamians in the sector.

3. Launch the sustainable national service improvement initiative and ensure that it has annual funding.

5. Ensure sustainability in all that we do. Create an eco-nation not only an eco-tourism industry.

6. Establish a time limit to qualify annually for BahamaHost for persons in customer contact positions, and revamp the focus of BahamaHost as a key contributor to the approved national tourism awareness programs.

7. Execute the original intent of the Welcome Centre on Prince George Dock and make this Centre known as the location for the best in Authentically Bahamian products.

8. Create a daily Heritage and Cultural experience in Nassau/Paradise Island and Grand Bahama that is financially self-sustaining.

9. We must be seen to have met and exceeded the minimum safety requirements at our cruise ports and airports in Nassau and Grand Bahama. An “incident” in an “ill-prepared” Bahamas could be devastating.

10. Make Arawak Cay the focus of cultural development for The Bahamas and identify similar locations throughout our islands.

11. Strengthen Cable Beach by relocating the road and the Straw Market, via the new Government road project, and creating an integrated resort with the current Wyndham and Radisson hotels.
12. Develop Ft. Charlotte, the Botanic Gardens and Ft. Fincastle attractions and identify similar historic sites in the Family Islands and Grand Bahama, and encourage their rehabilitation.

13. Improve our welcome at NAS and FPO using the voices of ordinary Bahamians and establish programs in our departure lounges to thank our visitors for coming.

14. Establish and promote a languages centre within the Ministry of Tourism to enable toll free assistance from anywhere within The Bahamas (emphasis on Spanish).

15. Create standardized directional and points of interest signage in multiple languages throughout The Bahamas.

16. Expand the development of the diving and bonefishing industries to the benefit of Bahamians.

17. Work with COB to establish educational vacations.

18. Arrange easier connections for visitors going to the Family Islands, light the three principal airports in the Family Islands, and provide the necessary navigational aids.


20. Establish Florida pre-clearance for visitors coming to The Bahamas by cruise and fast ferry.

21. Consolidate taxes and tolls on hotel bills to one or, at most, two line items.

22. Ensure that the departure tax is incorporated into the price of all airline tickets.
23. Get in place a single form for business licences to reduce the proliferation of unregulated and unlicensed contact with visitors. Do the same for musical groups coming to perform in The Bahamas.

24. Centralize Hotel Licensing Inspection once again.

25. Bring the People-to-People program into the 21st century.

26. Remove wrecked aircraft from along the runways at our principal airports and remove wrecked boats from all principal harbours.

27. Identify and attempt to placate dissatisfied Bahamas visitors either before or upon departure in order to reduce any potential word-of-mouth damage.

28. Make Bay Street a pedestrian mall on Tuesday and Saturday evenings and continue to promote Sunday shopping for the Bay Street area.

29. Establish the Visitor Help Line to increase visitor satisfaction and expenditure while in The Islands of The Bahamas.

30. Establish more quality children’s programmes in order to deliver on our promise as an exciting destination for families.

31. Get Bahamasair, all BTO’s, and all airports to play Bahamian music.

32. Establish a unit with the sole responsibility of finding ways to reduce the cost of doing business in The Bahamas.
Promotion:

33. Utilize the information from our Immigration cards to create more effective marketing programs.

34. Focus on the development of Bahamas.com and its other language versions and promote them vigorously using traditional media, online marketing and direct e-mail marketing. An appropriate up-to-date web site must appear in all our promotional materials.

35. Establish Destination Bahamas as an independent tour company to sell all of The Bahamas with initial focus on small hotels and small tourism businesses.

36. Establish a greater focus on religious marketing and sports marketing and provide those departments with the necessary support to ensure success.

37. Identify those annual events that will provide The Bahamas with the greatest benefits and incorporate them into our calendar.

38. Orchestrate the integration of the Isle of Capri Casino into Our Lucaya with the resultant sale of the entity as a single “Golf Resort & Casino.”

39. Develop a 30th anniversary marketing plan and initiate a review of the development of the “Bahamian celebrity” spot.

40. Establish a worldwide logo, look and feel for “The Islands of The Bahamas” especially now that we have the global presence of the Internet.

41. Broaden our source markets with emphasis on Europe while ensuring that we develop new markets in the United States.
42. Expand the development of domestic tourism utilizing ferry services and Bahamasair.

43. Encourage the add-on of The Bahamas for visitors intending to vacation in Florida and sell pre and post Bahamas trips to business travelers to Florida.

44. Intensify efforts to bring quality airlift to Grand Bahama Island and to the Family Islands at the lowest possible cost.

45. Create more tour packages that can be sold to visitors, especially cruise passengers, prior to and after arrival.

46. Promote the “new BahamaHost” and the “People-to-People” programs.

47. Keep the local press fully informed of our marketing plans.

48. Aggressively seek ways to eliminate the complacency that has set in throughout the tourism industry of The Bahamas.

49. “The Islands of The Bahamas” advertising must represent the Islands of The Bahamas. By limiting the properties shown to the same few, we are reinforcing the past.

50. Make even more effective use of our “co-op clearinghouse” in order to reduce the overlapping expenditures with tour operators between the Ministry of Tourism and the industry.

51. Make greater use of and attract more celebrities to the various destinations in The Islands of The Bahamas in order to piggy back on the natural publicity that they receive.

52. Establish The Islands of The Bahamas as the country with the best beaches in the world.
53. Support the establishment of standards and branding by the Small Hotels’ Unit in advance of their promotional programs.

General Management:

54. Emphasize the importance of people energy, enthusiasm, initiative and execution. Bury the dead heads. Reward not the rain predictors but the ark-builders.

55. Find our staff a permanent home.

56. Examine the possibility for establishing The Bahamas as a primary film production location if the necessary legislative changes were made.

57. Establish a formal mechanism for working closely with other government departments through the PS and Experience Czar.

58. Provide GBI with more talent to execute programs.

59. Post more senior managers to the principal Family Islands and challenge them to take on the “Director of Tourism” role for each island, especially for Abaco and Exuma.

60. There can be no unapproved expenditures. None.

61. Constantly seek ways to reduce all operating costs so that funds can be preserved for marketing and service improvement programs since we have the licence to make such budget changes.

62. Revive the weekly COE finance committee meetings for approvals and the monthly financial review committee meetings.
63. Continue the development of a fully operational travel department within the Ministry of Tourism.

64. Focus in Human Resources on improving our individual strengths instead of focusing on eliminating weaknesses. Contract out those critical functions that we cannot perform to standard even under these tight budget conditions.

65. Transform the BTO’s in North America to address and take advantage of today’s realities.

66. Continue to improve our forecasting abilities based on solid information instead of the guesswork that attended such forecasts several years ago.

Technology:
67. Measure, measure, measure. Provide the Research and Planning Unit with the tools required to keep us fully informed.

68. Bring bahamas.com into the forefront of tourism marketing.

69. Establish tourismbahamas.org as the place for Bahamians to go to get business development tips and information on tourism.

70. Develop appropriate e-mail marketing campaigns for our vertical markets and Family Islands.

71. Provide better internet connections for the Family Islands.

72. Continue to invest in those technologies and systems that clearly increase our effectiveness and our efficiencies.

73. Launch the new Immigration Card on July 1st.
74. Provide upgraded visitor information and welcome systems at all ports.

75. Put in place a fully functional electronic human resources management system.

76. Digitize the Ministry of Tourism as far as possible.

77. Create a single database for all our contacts.

78. Restore the computers that we lost as a result of the Straw Market fire.

79. Provide for individualized computer training for all staff as necessary.

**CONCLUSION & TARGETS**

The business of The Bahamas is tourism. No other business so affects our people, and is so affected by our people, as is the business of tourism. Tourism is clearly for the people, by the people and of the people of The Bahamas. When we pretend that the focus is elsewhere is when we lose our way.

That is why we are concerned by too much refocusing of our talent on promotional initiatives instead of product and service improvement initiatives. There is no question that we need to improve our store of talent in promotional areas but we believe that we must also recruit new Bahamians to shore up those efforts.

Many of the product and service improvement initiatives require much more brainpower than cash. But if we do not deploy the brainpower, the cash (both onshore and offshore) will have been wasted to a greater degree.
If we examine the jobs that we have to do, it is clear why we decided to engage marketing consultants instead of an “advertising agency” even though, as far as the external world is concerned, Fallon is an advertising agency. That is also why we decided to pay our agencies fees instead of commissions to cause them to focus on what has to be done to improve Bahamas tourism instead of which advertising to run in order to increase their commission income.

Despite the external shocks of September 11th, 2001 and the war in the Middle East, we continue to find that we are better off than we expected.

We can create brilliant promotional campaigns . . . but they will be copied. No one can easily copy the millions of improvements that go into making The Bahamas visitor experience the best in the region.

While we believe that numbers do not capture all of the important features of Bahamas tourism, we have the following targets:

Visitor Expenditure: Bahamas:
Nassau/ Paradise Island:
Grand Bahama Island:
Family Islands

Visitor Nights
Bahamas:
Nassau/ Paradise Island:
Grand Bahama Island:
Family Islands:

Stopover Visitors:
Bahamas:
Nassau/ Paradise Island:
Grand Bahama Island:
Family Islands
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Those areas that are not easily amenable to capture by numbers will receive monthly commentary.