

A RISING STAR IN ST. VINCENT'S TOURISM INDUSTRY

BY JERONNIE RICHARDSON



KAMISHA SAMUEL

Kamisha Samuel's journey to becoming the Human Resources Manager at Sandals Resort in St. Vincent and the Grenadines exemplifies the power of education, hard work, and opportunity. As HR Manager, she offers insights into how Sandals is shaping the future for young Vincentians, boosting employment, and transforming the island's tourism landscape.

Sandals' Impact: Tourism and Employee Benefits

Sandals has significantly transformed St. Vincent's tourism sector. However, Sandals would not have been possible without the International Airport. Now the tables have turned and Sandals is now driving activities at the airport. Samuel explains, "Sandals has heightened activity at our international airport." The resort attracts visitors who contribute to the local economy by supporting businesses, agriculture, culture, transportation services, etc. The resort maintains high occupancy rates, consistently above 90%, translating to around 600 guests daily, creating a significant economic boost.

Additionally, employees gain from tips linked to occupancy, which Samuel referred to as "a life-changing opportunity," tackling worries over the historically low wages in the tourism sector. Previously, St. Vincent did not have a five-star resort on the mainland, with luxury tourism primarily in the Grenadines. Now, the resort attracts visitors directly to the island, boosting the economy and offering locals thrilling new job prospects.

GOVERNMENT INVESTMENTS, POLICIES AND INITIATIVES



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TRANSFORMING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG VINCENTIANS

According to Samuel, Sandals, St. Vincent is one of the largest employers, providing roughly 800 jobs. Crucially, the resort prioritises training and development over prior experience. "We do not hire based on experience or education," Samuel stated. "We hire to train. Even if team members leave, they become more marketable and equipped with valuable skills." This approach opens doors for young people entering the workforce directly from school or without prior employment, offering stable jobs and clear paths for career advancement. This focus on training aligns perfectly with St. Vincent's "education revolution and Government's skills programs," which have equipped more Vincentians with the skills needed to thrive in the growing tourism sector. Improved access to education and training, coupled with Sandals' internal programs, further enhances the employability of local youth. Samuel noted that "the world is turning towards tourism," encouraging young people to explore the industry's diverse opportunities.

"Even entry-level positions can open doors to countless possibilities," she emphasised, particularly at Sandals, which "provides room for growth like no other." Samuel shared the story of a team member who rapidly progressed from Butler to Butler Manager, demonstrating immense growth potential. This represents a shift from traditional career aspirations in fields like law and medicine, as more Vincentians recognise the potential within the tourism sector.

EDUCATION: THE KEY TO ADVANCEMENT

Samuel credited the education revolution for enabling young professionals to secure managerial roles within the tourism industry. "At Sandals, we now have Vincentians in management roles where we once had to hire foreigners," she noted. "I myself am a testament to this—I was hired as the HR Manager because I had the education and capability to lead." Specific initiatives like "A-level College training courses" and government scholarships have been instrumental in equipping young Vincentians with the leadership skills needed to fill these positions. These initiatives reduce reliance on foreign hires, stimulate national economic growth, and create career paths that were previously out of reach for many locals.

KAMISHA'S FINAL THOUGHTS

Kamisha Samuel's own story is proof that hard work, education, and opportunity can lead to remarkable success. Her journey is a testament to the bright future that awaits young Vincentians in tourism. "Don't be afraid to join the team," she urges. "The future of tourism in St. Vincent is brighter than ever."