

2016

# A Study of Large Hotel Occupancy Rates on the Island of St. Lucia.

Sean J. Matthew  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Sean Matthew

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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## Review Committee

Dr. Alen Badal, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Wilton Heyliger, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Patsy Kasen, University Reviewer, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer  
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University  
2016

Abstract

A Study of Large Hotel Occupancy Rates on the Island of St. Lucia

by

Sean J. Matthew

MBA, Heriot Watt University, UK 2004

MSc, University of Liverpool, UK 1995

BSc, University of the West Indies, 1991

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

June 2016

## Abstract

Over the past several years, some hotels in St. Lucia, Caribbean have experienced declining occupancy rates and revenues. The failure of general managers of large hotels on the island to increase and sustain occupancy levels may threaten the economic stability of the island. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore strategies that general managers from 3 large hotels on the island in St. Lucia have used to increase and sustain occupancy levels in their hotels. The general managers selected for each case had over 15 years of experience in managing large hotels in St. Lucia. The conceptual framework applied in this study was system theory. Data were collected from hotel general manager interviews, review of government gazettes, select social media sources, and personal hotel property observations. The results of the interviews were analyzed and coded. Review of documents and property observations provided supporting information that corroborated the findings of the interviews. Methodological triangulation and member checking were used to interpret and analyze the data. At the conclusion, the following 4 theme collations were identified: marketing, air transportation, guest experience, and product development. The conclusions yielded that increased occupancy rates were dependent on the alignment of the hotel operational model, the services provided, and meeting customer expectations. Implications for social change include the possible creation and sustaining of new jobs in the hotel sector as well as in other possible sectors, such as construction, financing, and material supplies.

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## Dedication

I must give a special dedication to my father, Joseph, and mother, Martha, who died unexpectedly in December 2011 and December 2014 respectively. They truly meant everything to me. We miss their love for their family and their care and respect for people. They were my mentors and could have been an excellent example for many young persons in the present era.

## Acknowledgments

I must acknowledge my wife, Donna, and my son, Jelani Sean, who put up with many hours and days when I was unavailable to spend quality time with them. Without this home structure and support, the time allocated to this doctoral study would not be possible. Ms. Eugene and Ms. Elliodore were instrumental in providing guidance and support to accomplishing the requirements. I must acknowledge the time and effort that they allocated to me. Additionally, I would like to thank my chairperson Dr. Alen Badal and the Walden family for their assistance and guidance in preparing this doctoral study.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Tourism is St. Lucia's main economic revenue generator (St. Lucia Economic and Social Review, 2011). Attracting guests to the island and into the hotels is an integral part of increasing tourism and economic benefit (Sinclair-Maragh & Gursoy, 2015). Additionally, attracting affordable air transportation is a critical part of the success of the tourism industry (Duval & Schiff, 2011). This study explored the major factors contributing to a successful tourism product, such as (a) air transportation, (b) hotel plant, (c) cruise tourism, and (d) customer service. The success of the tourist industry is dependent on the synergy between the core parts of this complex system (Ranjanthran & Mohammed, 2010).

### **Background of the Problem**

St. Lucia is a small island in the Eastern Caribbean, economically dependent on tourism (Crawford, 2012). Increasing tourism and the resultant economic impact require a review of the existing research information in the areas of (a) the food service industry, (b) the hotel industry, (c) airlines sector, (d) cruise tourism, (e) marketing, and (e) product development sectors (Halpern, 2011). A vital part of developing a sustainable strategy to improve the volume of visitors is the ability of the island to attract and sustain air transportation (Warnock-Smith & Morrell, 2011). The strategy concentrated on increased volume of visitors from the main source markets, such as the United Kingdom, North America, and the emerging markets of Central and South America. Other components attracting visitors to the island were the marketing strategies developed and

implemented, such as bundling of travel packages, and the quality of the tourist experience while at the destination (Cheraghalizadeh, 2014).

The islands of the Caribbean are highly competitive in the tourism industry. The island of St. Lucia competes for the global tourist market share with its closest competitors, Barbados and Antigua, but also with the other Caribbean Islands and Latin America. This study provides research information leading to the formulation of a strategy to assist in developing a robust and sustainable approach to guide large hotels in St. Lucia. These results may provide the government of St. Lucia with valuable information to create a strategy to increase hotel occupancy rates, thereby helping the tourism industry on the island.

### **Problem Statement**

The economy of the Caribbean Islands is dependent on tourism. According to Crawford (2012), hotels fail because of lack of revenue from tourists. The St. Lucia Economic and Social Review (2011) stated the tourism industry fuels approximately 70% of the private sector employment (Seetanah, 2011). The industries that make up the tourism sector in the Caribbean are essential to developing and implementing a successful tourism strategy (Torres-Delgado & Palomeque, 2012). Sustainable growth in the tourism industry challenges St. Lucia leaders (Angelkova, Jakovlev, Koteski & Mitrevska, 2012; St. Lucia Economic and Social Review, 2011). The approach included sustainable strategies to improve the hospitality amenities and increase air transportation and hotel occupancy to the Caribbean Islands, specifically St. Lucia (Warnock-Smith & Morrell,

2008). The general business problem is some large hotel managers in St. Lucia cannot sustain a profitable occupancy on a year-round basis. The specific business problem is that managers of large hotels may lack year-round strategies to increase hotel occupancy.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to identify strategies that may help large hotels in St. Lucia increase year-round hotel occupancy on the island of St. Lucia. The participants of this study were hotel general managers who have at least 15 years of experience in the hotel industry in St. Lucia. The study population included general managers of three large hotels in St. Lucia. One of the cases was of a successful hotel, and the two others were of hotels that are not operating at high levels of occupancies. Due to the high dependence of the island on tourism, any change in the performance of the industry directly affects the social and economic conditions of the island (St. Lucia Economic and Social Review, 2011). In this study, I explored strategies to improve the performance and sustainability of hotel occupancy on the island of St. Lucia. The increased volume of visitors derived from the strategies gleaned from the hotel general managers may result in increased occupancy of hotel rooms.

### **Nature of the Study**

Researchers use the quantitative method to test a theory or explanation or provide information on correlations or relationships of variables (Turner, 2010). The quantitative method was not the appropriate method for obtaining lived experiences from industry experts on tourism in the Caribbean Region. A mixed methods study represents an

organized collation of data incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data (Turner, 2010). As a result, the mixed-method was not suitable. A qualitative study allows researchers to explore the how and why within the context of a number of chosen cases, as opposed to obtaining numerical correlation provided through a quantitative study. A qualitative study allows for the exploration of experiences instead of measuring statistical correlations among variables. A quantitative analysis obtains information from a number of different data points quickly to cover a lot of ground as compared to the in-depth review of a number of cases often depicted by the in-depth understanding of a specific experience (Thomas & Magilvy 2011). I chose the qualitative method because of the difficulty to generate meaningful numerical data in a corporate environment for statistical analysis.

For this multiple case study, I used multiple evidence sources and converging data for triangulation. The intent of this study was to review contextual information using case study research. The methods followed were as stipulated by Yin (2014). Moreover, a case study design utilizes inquiry questions focused on better understanding the root underpinnings and meaning of themes. Optimal strategy for data collection and defining strategies to increase hotel occupancy was the strategy used.

### **Research Question**

The research question guiding this study was as follows: What strategies can general managers of large hotels on the island of St. Lucia utilize to increase hotel occupancy levels?

## Interview Questions

The following were the open-ended questions asked to each of the participants (see Appendix A).

1. What are the top three drivers of hotel management to increase visitor volume?
2. What is the major strength of your hotel in attracting visitors?
3. How is your hotel utilizing its strengths (name them) to capture more opportunities to help increase tourism?
4. In your opinion, what are the greatest challenges you have encountered in developing and sustaining visitor numbers to your hotel in St. Lucia?
5. What have the policy makers in the government of St. Lucia done to support the required growth of the hotel industry
6. What is the most difficult threat to the hotel industry on the island and why?
7. Has air transportation been a major area of concern? If so, please give possible threats and weaknesses the island should focus on and how.
8. How do the availability, quality, and cost of air transportation affect visitor volumes in St. Lucia?
9. How do the availability, quality and cost of hotel rooms impact tourism in St. Lucia?
10. How does the availability, quality and cost of tourist 'sites,' such as national heritage sites and beaches affect hotel occupancy rates in St. Lucia?

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework provided a structure allowing the connection of relationships between the existing literature and the conducted research. The selected conceptual framework for this study was systems theory. Systems theory is an essential tool for success to increase visitor arrivals (Seiler & Kowalsky, 2011). Russ and Uhl-Bien (2011) indicated successful leaders achieve positive change by the alignment of the objectives and strategies used in companies. Understanding how organizations function can assist the St. Lucia hotel industry in achieving these goals. Also, systems theory helped guide the understanding of the different functions and linkages within an organization (von Bertalanffy, 1972).

Von Bertalanffy (1972) introduced the concept of systems theory. Contrary to classical theorists, the emphasis on the isolation of individual parts of the system would not achieve successful change. A full understanding of the entire system's functioning is necessary (Paucar-Caceres & Harnden 2011; von Bertalanffy, 1972). Consequently, improving the efficiency of the system occurred by understanding and using systems theory (Zenko et al., 2013).

The complex system theory consists of dynamics within systems resulting from (a) competitive environment, (b) constant changes, (c) cultural environment, (d) unpredictability, and (e) nonlinearity of institutions (Cox, Webster, & Hammond, 2009). The nonlinear manners in which different organizational departments, functions, facilities, variables, and people interact along with the external environment create



intricate systems (Cox et al., 2009). The systems depend on people, and social systems provide additional complexities to the systems theory.

### **Definition of Terms**

Below are detailed definitions of concepts analyzed in Section 3 of this study. The terms included here are industry specific and may not be common vernacular. Definitions of other business terms and phrases as used in this study are as follows:

*Dehubbing*: Dehubbing is the airline process of bringing passengers to a final destination, where there are no further or non-legacy carrier flights, other than independent or local carriers (Airports Council International, 2011).

*Destination*: A destination in this study is a location, island, or country as a well-delimited geographical area to which people travel and in which they choose to stay (Bieger et al., 2009).

*Hotel occupancy rate*: The occupancy rate in the hotel environment is the relationship expressed as a percentage of the number of rooms occupied to the total number of room in the hotel (Al Saleem & Al-Juboori, 2013).

*Hubbing*: Hubbing is the airline process of bringing passenger flights to a major airport or hub and then directing them to the final destination to maintain high levels of aircraft utilization and economies of scale (Airports Council International, 2011).

*Large hotels*: Hotels that have 150 or more rooms (Petzer et al., 2009).

*Legacy carrier (LC)*: A legacy carrier is an airline or carrier that runs a hub operation. The operational cost because of salaries and administration is reflective of long

serving staff and inherent higher salaries than non-legacy carriers (Airports Council International, 2011).

*Load factor (LF)*: The load factor in the sense of aircraft loading is the percentage of seats occupied on an aircraft expressed as a percentage of the total seat capacity of a particular aircraft (Clarke & Vincent, 2012).

*Low cost carrier (LCC)*: A low cost carrier is an airline operating under a low cost strategy, often using a young workforce with little experience but using a well-researched low cost model. Often these carriers fly from point to point and have little connectivity or hub activity (Airports Council International, 2011).

*Minimum revenue guarantee (MRG)*: Minimum revenue guarantee is the risk mitigation event providing for payment to a potential partner, such as an airline, to guarantee profitability even if the entity operates at less than optimal efficiencies (Iverson-Long, 2012).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

In performing the research and relevant interviews, there was a requirement to ensure outlining of all assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. The meaning of these terms as utilized throughout this study, are in this section. The section outlined the correlation of the terms and provides explanations for specific applications where required.

#### **Assumptions**

The assumption was that a multiple case study was an appropriate design for this

study. I assumed that the participants were willing to participate and give honest responses to the questions. Another assumption was the conducted research was in a dynamic environment, and elements may change throughout the study. These factors included (a) political stability of source markets, (b) economic stability of source markets, (c) fluctuating fuel prices, and (d) other inputs assumed constant.

### **Limitations**

Limitations included potential weaknesses that could affect the study; no matter how well conducted, each study has limitations (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010). Limitations, as referred to in this study, included the constraints that arose in the interviews by potential participants' biases and their ability to recollect events. Participants may have experienced discomfort in disclosing information about the failure or success of their business, and this may have affected the authenticity of the responses. The outcomes and recommendations of this study may only be achievable through approvals above the level of the local hotel general managers. In some cases, local general managers of hotels may not have the autonomy to unilaterally approve the plans or allocate the required financing, which serves as a limitation. This can create significant limitations and must be an area that should be mitigated. In working closely with the participants, it was important to determine the transferability of the experiences to other business applications. Other limiting factors may have occurred in this study, which may arise from either of the main areas of research: air transportation, the hotel industry, hospitality industry, and product development.

Ample mitigating procedures were available to safeguard against data saturation becoming a limitation factor. For the purpose of this study, data saturation was the point where no new themes, findings, concepts or problems were evident in the data (Cardon et al., 2013). Qualitative samples were large enough to assure the uncovering of most, if not all, pertinent information (Shakenna & Williams, 2015). At the same time, it was important to ensure that the sample size was not so large as to cause excessive repetition (Shakenna & Williams, 2015).

The results of available research provided guidance on the interview sample size and determined by monitoring the attainment of data saturation (Cardon et al., 2013). However, there is no agreed and established method of determining attainment of data saturation (Cardon et al., 2013). Cardon et al. (2013) established a methodology that allowed for the establishment of a minimum sample size of interview participants. Cardon et al. then established a stop criterion of a predetermined number of additional interviews. This stop criterion had to coincide with the event where no new data topics came up. The result was that responses became repetitive and data saturation achieved.

The use of data saturation was an important concept to assist in validating the content of the interview data (Cardon et al., 2013). The issue of sample size was a critical issue because sample sizes larger than necessary creates ethical issues. For some researchers, it may diminish because of limited research funds and time (Cardon et al., 2013). Further, the use of sample sizes smaller than required is an ethical or scientific

issue and may cause non-transferability of data due to the ethical or scientific concerns (Cardon et al., 2013).

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are restrictions or limits imposed on the study (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010). St. Lucia is a small island (238 square miles) in the Eastern Caribbean. The island's economy is highly dependent on the success of the tourism industry. Any changes in terms of poor performance have a direct negative economic impact. This restriction must facilitate maximum growth to the island and help minimize the effect of tourism growth. Because the tourism industry is a dynamic industry, the study period to collect data was time-bound. In cases where there was little research for particular regions, the direct correlations to these islands may be difficult or limited.

### **Significance of the Study**

This section provides background and supporting information in three main areas of the study. The contribution to business practice and its significance to an economy was almost entirely dependent on the industry under review. The impact of social change led from the dependency on the tourism industry so that the growth of the industry would realize a positive impact to the social impact on the island.

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

Tourism is St. Lucia's main economic revenue generator and provides more than 70% of jobs on the island (St. Lucia Economic and Social Review, 2011). Any negative event, such as acute weather conditions or economic decline in source markets could be

devastating for the island. An important input to the business is air transportation (Duval & Schiff, 2011). The ease of air transportation to the island contributed positively to its ability to attract tourist. The absence of an appropriate approach to support the business could collapse the economy of the island with associated negative economic and social impacts. The air transportation segment in relation to the tourism industry is significant as the airlines use it as an advantage when negotiating risk mitigation mechanism with destinations. There are approximately 4,500 hotel rooms in St. Lucia, where the need for year-round service creates pressure on the tourism industry for effective solutions for airlift (Duval & Schiff, 2011; St. Lucia Economic and Social Review, 2011). The pricing of an airline contributes positively or negatively to the competitiveness of the destination and is a major concern to the tourism industry. Often hotels adjust their room rates to remain competitive as a destination; however, this may make the hotel lose profits and cause economic stress for the hotel operators (Saleem & Al-Juboori, 2013).

The research was specific to St. Lucia and provided limited information on other competing islands. Each destination in the immediate geographical area is similar. The destination of St. Lucia seemed to have a competitive advantage because of the ease of accessing the destination and price competitiveness of the air transportation to the destination. This information guides St. Lucia leadership in the development of complete strategies for all tourism industry on the island, in particular, the large hotel sector. Consequently, specific research on air transportation strategies will be valuable in the strategic decision-making process. The data from this study helped fill the gaps left by

the lack of specific research on tourism and hotel occupancy issues specific to St. Lucia.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The research required in this area benefited strategy formulation to assist the large hotels on the island. The approach in turn provided direction to enable the establishment of a sustainable tourism approach directed at increasing hotel occupancy in St. Lucia (Strambach & Surmeier, 2013). Establishing this plan leads to a more stable business and thus an improved economy (Liyanag & Jayawardena, 2013). A sound knowledge base of the inputs that assist in the growth of the tourism industry provide for strategic positioning (Liyanag & Jayawardena, 2013). As the island continues to develop the tourism industry, the continuous collation of research information allows for the structured growth of the occupancy rates in the large hotels (Strambach & Surmeier, 2013). The growth of the industry increases revenues and generates more tax revenues that support government services (Liyanag & Jayawardena, 2013).

### **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

Consistent with the requirements of Walden University the research information is peer reviewed, published within five years of the proposed completion date and relevant to the study. The predominant source of the research information was the Walden University Library. The Business and Management databases used included Business Source Complete, ABI/Inform Complete, Emerald Management Journals, Sage Premier, Pro Quest Central, and Hospitality and Tourism Complete. To obtain the most relevant information key source words such as conceptual framework, air transportation,

Caribbean Tourism, Hospitality, Cruise Tourism, Marketing, product development, Saturation, or specific topics relevant to the study. The publication dates were within the five-year limit.

The research was acquired by reviewing peer reviewed journals and articles referencing the key factors related to hotel occupancy in large hotels in tourism destinations. Also, peer reviewed information on the role of leaders and hotel executives in endorsing and implementing appropriate strategies and the effect that the resultant economic environment has on an industry such as tourism. In the case of small economies, whose main economic driver is tourism, the sensitivity to the strategy used in each strategic area was sensitive to the success or failure of the strategies used.

In performing the extensive research, some key research articles provided the required guidance in the different areas of the study. The conceptual framework obtained through research revealed a close alignment to systems theory and the hotel industry linkages and systems. The reviews on the air transportation outlined the areas of ticket prices, and seasonality (Garrigos-Simon & Gil-Pechuan, 2010), and market size (Halpern, 2011). Evangelinos, Stangl, and Obermeyer (2012) reviewed the effect of competition within markets, and Almeida (2011) looked at the operation and profitability of LCCs as per LC. Hospitality and product development revealed as key strategic areas and one of the ways to increase and sustain the volume of visitors to an island (Anuar, Ahmad, Jusoh, & Hussain, 2012). A review of indicators, including physical attributes and their effects on the quality of the destination, occurred and indicated these physical attributes



were significant to the decision of a visitor to choose a particular island (Akdag & Öter, 2011). This study supported looking at hotel chains and its impact on the volume of visitors (Brookes & Roper, 2011). In marketing and branding, the presentation of the product to the prospective client is important and is part of the overall goal of attracting visitors (Sinclair-Maragh & Gursoy, 2015). The dependency of these small island economies on tourism was also a significant issue that made it so critical to the viability of the local economy (Williams & Spencer, 2010). Cruise tourism is equally important to the tourism numbers and spin off business in small island economies (Sinclair-Maragh & Gursoy, 2015). The economic impact, environmental impacts, and social impact for cruise is a sensitive area, and the authors reviewed these three areas in-depth (Rodrigue & Notteboom, 2013). A review of these concepts and other supporting information, in the literature review, occurs below.

St. Lucia forms part of the island chain known as the Lesser Antilles of the Caribbean. The island measures 238 square miles and has a population of 167,000 (Central Statistics Office of St. Lucia, 2011). Like many other Caribbean Islands, St. Lucia's early economy was heavily agriculture-based with the export of bananas being the mainstay of the economy while tourism was secondary. Today, bananas remain the leading agricultural crop; however, erosion of the preferential trade agreements in the mid-1990s for banana export occasioned the need for economic diversification. Tourism became the natural fit as a replacement for the traditional agriculture-based economy given the island's natural beauty and limited options for other types of economic

development (Joseph, 2011).

Tourism is now St. Lucia's main economic engine with visitor expenditures accounting for 64% of national GDP and is the largest employer (St. Lucia Statistics Department, 2011). The island attracts a diverse market and has successfully branded itself as a honeymoon destination, rated as the number one honeymoon destination in the world seven times since 2001 (World Travel Awards, 2015). In 2012, *Cruise Insight Magazine* ranked St. Lucia as one of the top 25 cruise destinations (Cruise Insight Magazine, 2011). The island also welcomes passengers from all the major cruise lines accommodating over 30 different operators each year (St. Lucia Air and Sea Ports Authority [SLASPA], 2012).

Globally, tourism is the fastest growing business, the most significant source of employment, and GDP contributor for many developing countries (United Nations World Trade Organization [UNWTO], 2012). The most exciting growth category in the leisure market is the cruise segment, which has steady growth of 7.4% each year since 1990. In 2012, 20.3 million people took a cruise vacation with approximately 47.3% visiting the Caribbean (Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association [FCCA], 2013).

There is an important and significant relationship between tourism and air transportation in international markets (Duval & Schiff, 2011). Though air transportation is not the only dependent part, it is a major part of a successful tourism product. Islands such as St. Lucia do not serve as a hub to other destinations nor is there a national carrier to augment the air transportation. Tourists and visitors come to the island using available

airlift negotiated by the government. This study reviews the importance of the quantity and quality of hotels on the island as reflected by the available research literature. The research included the results of the airline used, the airports on the island, and airline ticket prices. High-ticket prices may price the destination out of the market or make it unprofitable for hotels to operate. A concentrated literature review provided below helps one better understand how the different components can affect the hotel industry in particular hotel occupancy in St. Lucia.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The majority of research takes the form of traditional literature reviews, which examine the results of a small part of the research evidence, and take the results from the author at face value (Hallinger, 2012). The main areas of a systematic review or systematic research synthesis are that:

- explicit and transparent methods are used
- it is a piece of research following a standard set of stages
- it is accountable, replicable and updateable
- there is a requirement of user involvement to ensure reports are relevant and useful (Hallinger, 2012).

The aim of systematic reviews is to obtain research relevant to the research question and to use a framework to determine conclusions from the body of the study. The aim is to obtain systematic rather than explicit methods of doing this to allow for the production of varied and reliable results (Hallinger, 2012). A review of research showed a structure

centered on a set of questions that guide the execution of the study. The questions that form the framework include the following:

1. What are the central topics of interest, guiding questions and goals?
2. What conceptual perspective guides the review's selection, evaluation and interpretation of the studies?
3. What are the sources and types of data employed for the review?
4. How are data evaluated, analyzed, and synthesized in the review?
5. What are the major results, limitations, and implications of the review?

The selected conceptual framework for this study was systems theory. Systems theory is an essential tool for success to increase visitor arrivals (Seiler & Kowalsky, 2011). Russ and Uhl-Bien (2011) indicated successful leaders achieve positive change by the alignment of the company's objectives and strategies. Understanding how the hotel industry functions can assist the St. Lucia industry in achieving its goals. Also, systems theory helped guide the understanding of the different functions and linkages within an organization (von Bertalanffy, 1972). Contrary to other theorists, the emphasis on the isolation of individual parts of the system would not achieve successful change. What is required is a full understanding of the entire systems functioning (Paucar-Caceres & Harnden 2011; von Bertalanffy, 1972). The efficiency of a system occurs by understanding and using systems theory (Zenko et al., 2013).

The complex system theory consists of dynamics within systems resulting from (a) competitive environment, (b) constant changes, (c) cultural environment, (d)

unpredictability, and (e) nonlinearity of institutions (Cox, Webster, & Hammond, 2009).

The non-linear manners in which different organizational departments, functions, facilities, variables, and people interact along with the external environment create intricate systems (Cox et al., 2009). The systems depend on people, and social systems provide additional complexities to the systems theory. All of these are tenants of the hotel industry and aligns with each of the main areas needing review.

### **Air Transportation**

Some air transportation factors considered in this study provided the relevance of the air transportation industry to the study. These included the effects of pricing structures, such as seasonality and price behavior of airlines (Garrigos-Simon et al., 2010). There was a need to review the development and changes in ticket prices, as well as the dependence on seasonality of the tourism industry. The study provided the research information explaining the way differing airlines participate in the industry and the parameters used in the development of their strategies. Examining the impact of external factors such as the operating costs of airports and the operating costs of the airlines themselves was a critical element for the study.

Understanding the market requirements for airports and destinations was pivotal to understanding the market size and the demographics. These inputs help to develop an understanding of the air transportation required to facilitate travel to a destination. The literature contains information outlining seasonality based on weather patterns of the source markets (Halpern, 2011). The information in this study outlined that the passenger

demand was dependent on the airport. Examining the seasonality of this market revealed that for this airport seasonality was not a significant factor. Airports servicing holiday destinations, such as those of St. Lucia, Barbados, and Antigua, showed a higher degree of seasonality concentration than those airports serving heterogeneous metropolitan areas, except at airports that serve year-round holiday areas (Halpern, 2011). Airport size had no effect on seasonal concentration (Halpern, 2011). Additionally, international and charter markets enhanced seasonal concentration, whereas domestic and scheduled carriers reduced the seasonality concentration. One exception to the latter findings was that scheduled low-cost markets enhanced seasonal concentration. These findings have implications for airport management decisions, particularly decisions relating to strategies for countering the effects of seasonality as well as special events that attract visitors to these events.

In contrast, it was evident that a number of factors counter the points outlined by Halpern (2011). Though the relevance of seasonality was the focus thus far, there were other parameters influencing the airport demand (Spencer, 2009). Spencer (2009) outlined that the number of airport stops and the number of flights on small airplanes were inhibitors of tourism-related air travel. The effects of airport stops and flights on small airplanes ascertained the effect on air travel to tourist destinations. Travelers, especially tourism related travelers prefer point-to-point travel and would prefer not having multiple stops or airplane transfers through hubs. Additionally the use of smaller commuter aircraft has proven to be a major inhibiting factor to travelers. Spencer used

data from telephone surveys conducted in the Dallas–Fort Worth, Texas area. Spencer asked participants about the effect of one or two airport stops or one airport stop followed by a flight on a small, propeller-powered airplane as a deterrent to flying to a destination 1,096 miles (1,764 km). The results showed a loss of approximately 50% of the target audience when there were more than two stops. This passenger loss can result in a similar percentage loss in the number of passengers that visit the island. The author revealed that those concerned about such flight schedules were more likely to have high incomes and used the Internet to obtain travel information (Spencer, 2009). All these findings used competitors of similar destinations in similar markets compared by air travel distance.

The issue of the effect of low cost airports, airlines, and the effect on tourism relates to the previous discussions. A number of countries possess many international airports. The differentiation factor lies within the pricing structure for the services offered to airlines and the traveling public (Almeida, 2011). Almeida (2011) studied the Faro Airport. Almeida found that areas with many airports needed a strategy to remain viable. One such strategy was the need to structure ticket prices. The airports respond promptly, considering the constantly changing markets and airline structures. These new structures are mainly LCC versus LC. Changes in the structure of air traffic resulted from the introduction of LCCs into the market. This addition was prevalent in various European airports, particularly those associated with operations dictated by seasonal charter flights to tourist destinations. The Faro Airport showed seasonal operations based on charter flights, with more than 80% of passengers. Almeida showed the entry of LCCs into this

market drove the rapid rise in demand from passengers and resulted in a dramatic change in the users of the airport. At present, about 75% of passengers handled in 2010 were by the low cost airlines. Almeida's research provided data demonstrating the changes in traffic structure and the implications on the operations. The information gleaned from the study helped develop the airport redesign strategy. The redesign now allowed for servicing of traffic up to eight million passengers in 2013.

Up to this point, it is evident that there are a number of factors under consideration, which can affect travelers' decisions to travel. These inputs to the decision making process of travelers includes:

1. Airport type, hub or point to point
2. Number of stops to the destination
3. Type of Aircraft, propeller versus jet aircraft
4. Low cost carrier versus legacy carrier

To move forward, more in-depth analysis some of these areas of the study is essential.

Castillo-Manzano, López-Valpuesta, and González-Laxe (2011) examined the effects of the use of LCCs and the impact. One conclusion from the study was that most of the tourism sector considers LCCs to be perfect substitutes for network carriers and even an improvement on network carriers in many cases (Castillo-Manzano et al., 2011). Travel agencies are of a differing view because the nature of the LCC operations often eliminated the need for the services.

A comparison of LCCs and LCs provided the necessary information of the



underlying costs of operation of these two models. The operating costs differences between LC and LCC on long-haul routes compare similarly as do cost benefits for short haul travel routes, with slight benefits to the LCCs (O'Connell & Williams, 2011). The simulation, using Boeing 767-300s as the design aircraft for both the low cost carrier and the legacy carrier, varied operating assumptions. The authors found that the low cost carriers had cost benefits and did not carry unnecessary overheads due to high administrative structures and high employee salaries (O'Connell & Williams, 2011). Each model often used the same if not similar aircraft. In addition, the issues of maintenance and consumables, such as fuel, were common variables as to costs. O'Connell and Williams (2011) stated the main difference is the administrative layers in the Legacy model and the operational model in terms of ticketing via e-commerce and airport check-in procedures and management of aircraft loads by limiting free baggage.

Ashiabor and Wei (2012) highlighted the impact and growth of LCCs. The development of secondary and smaller airports in California aided LCC development. Low cost carriers' business has become a growing initiative at some airports. These airports offer the LCCs reduced operating costs as well as providing adequate capacity to facilitate LCCs thus avoiding battling with incumbent airlines at the large hub airports for limited resources, such as gates. Within California, statistics from this study reflected LCCs have replaced the legacy airlines as the dominant air transport provider (Ashiabor & Wei, 2012). With the growing dominance, the LCCs became more attractive to the large hub airports, thus providing added connectivity, passenger capacity, and the

secondary airports faced increased competition to retain them. Secondary airports have an understanding of the operational model used by the LCC. However, the LCC requires a better understanding of how the airport authorities operate. The intention for both entities is to complement each operational models (Ashiabor & Wei 2012). Though the research is from the state of California, the conclusions are similar in the two areas of review, Spain and France. The introduction of LCCs into air transportation scenario provided a possible positive outcome for both serving as a hub to other destinations and point-to-point air transportation.

There is research on the need for a National Airline Carrier and the role they play in the success of air transportation for countries (Warnock-Smith & Morrell, 2011). However, in reviewing small economies such as that in St. Lucia, examining the practicality and affordability of this approach against offsetting alternatives is essential. The ability of small islands to have flag carriers and thus the ability to develop successful models for airline support is rare (Warnock-Smith & Morrell, 2011). The authors examined the impact within the Caribbean area by either financial or other support of flag carriers. It provided insight into islands that have been able to establish flag carriers, such as the Cayman Islands and Trinidad and Tobago. They also looked at the relative control the respective island had in determining ticket prices and creating competition in the market, suppressing price gouging or collusion in setting ticket prices. There has also been some success in attracting additional carriers within a stable market (Smyth, Christodoulou, Denni, Al-Azzaw, & Campbell, 2012). Airlift strategy success depends on

the ability to create a synergy between flag carriers, connectivity, competitive pricing structures and the ability to develop a tourism product to draw tourists to the destinations via the airlift provided (Warnock-Smith & Morrell, 2011). They showed the need for flag carriers, citing the ability to create a reasonable benchmark-pricing regime to compete with the international carriers such as American Airlines, Delta, and United Airlines. The key was for the destination to remain competitive to visitors. When a visitor is in the process of determining a vacation destination the cost of the entire travel becomes paramount (Smyth et al., 2012). The components of these costs are (a) airline ticket prices, (b) hotel pricing in relation to quality, and (c) foreign exchange implications as compared to similar competing destinations. The airlift-pricing component is critical. A high fare causes a downward pressure on hotel room rates and reduces profitability. The hotel managers must create additional revenue streams by vertical integration of services previously offered by other private sector partners. This integration affects the stability of the industry thus managing it to ensure no backlash to the tourist is significant.

One can use tourism economics to determine the trends and results of recent developments in the business. Song, Dwyer, Li, and Cao (2012) examined methodological innovations, emerging topics, research gaps, and directions for future research using current research data into differing sub-research in tourism economics and revealed uneven developments. Neoclassical economics provided the most insight to the development of tourism economics; alternative schools of thought in economics also emerged in advancing the understanding of tourism. Tourism research is, usually, multi-

and inter-disciplinary, integrating economics with other social science disciplines. The research adds to the knowledge base to allow for the development of knowledge in tourism research. As previously outlined, the growth of the tourism industry is interdisciplinary. Though many aspects contribute to growth or contraction of the industry, the emphasis on the four aspects of air transportation, hotel development, marketing initiatives, and hospitality (product) development provides information for the creation of appropriate strategies to guide St. Lucia in developing a robust tourism strategy (Song et al., 2012).

Beyond the effects of airline ticket prices with LCCs or LCs, the development of a competitive but sustainable strategy is a central focus. In strategy development, the analysis of the competition and the alignment of the competitive advantages in the immediate market are vital. Researchers examined the use of technology and innovation to develop competitive advantage strategies and became industry leaders (Wang et al., 2011).

Consistent with the use of technology and innovation is the study of the interface and use of the airport facilities. For example, whether airport type affects the volume of visitors to the destination. Dimitriou, Sartzetaki, Voskaki, and Athanasiadis (2011) developed models to examine the requirements of an aerodrome with tourists as the main market. During the modeling process, the researchers explored external factors that may not be obvious but may affect the overall delivery of the required product to support the industry (Dimitriou et al., 2011). The result of these studies is the inherent sensitivities of

ticket pricing to both the traveling public and the airlines.

Ticket prices influence the choice of a tourism destination. Hsueh, Douglas, and Robertson (2011) examined the factors affecting pricing of airline tickets and the derived premiums. The authors used negotiation strategies to secure airlift. Hsueh et al. reviewed the profitability of 20 carriers and the impact because of the introduction of a competitive environment. The introduction of non-stop service by Delta and Virgin Australia created this environment. A base sample of business and economy class fares as well as seven other factors to investigate the factors enabling airlines to dictate price premiums in the Sydney – Los Angeles market was the basis for their study (Hsueh et al., 2011). The service quality, space, connectivity, and alliance membership all have a positive impact on the prices in this market (Hsueh et al., 2011).

Bilokach and Polk (2011) discussed the theoretical and practical concepts as it referred to the marketing potential of airports as an application to airport regulation policy. The parameters of the study included the time and data constraints encountered in practice by the regulatory authorities and other involved parties. Their conclusion provided a road map for the bridging of the theoretic and practical applications (Bilokach & Polk, 2011). This research provided valuable research on airline ticket pricing, market structures, the cost of airline operations, and an understanding of price dispersion in the industry. Adapting these strategies to the St. Lucian marketplace provided alternative approaches to achieving the required profitability.

Bilokach et al., (2012) used price offer curves providing ticket prices for a range

of travel routes for 105 round trip itineraries for 50 busy U. S. routes for review. This study revealed that fares were higher along the entire price offer curve in less competitive markets than those on routes without low cost carriers present. The price changes were smoother on competitive routes with one or two competitors. The shape of the averaged price offer curve was flat up to about three weeks before the flight and rose rapidly afterward. The implication is that the LCCs created competition in the market and provided downward pressures on the price regimes used by airlines. Conversely, the absence of competition in the market may result in escalating prices (Bilotkach et al., 2012). The increased sales activity three weeks before the flight provides a purchasing signal information to customers. Consequently, the optimal time to purchase a ticket for the price conscious traveler is about three to four weeks before the departure date. This timeline is valuable information for the traveler and travel agent.

In collaboration, Bilotkach, Gaggero, and Piga (2012) posited the traditional theory that airline price fares increase, as fewer seats remain available on a flight. Airlines use dynamic pricing at times to maximize yield. This process provides for the constant monitoring of competitor prices in a particular route. Once a competitor seats are at seat capacity, and the carrier is the sole participant, then the prices increase to maximize profitability. The drops in fares offered over time are an indicator of an active yield management intervention by two main European LCCs during the period June 2002 and June 2003 (Bilotkach et al., 2012). The results of the study indicated yield management is effective in raising a flight load factor. The information from these studies

provided details on the dependence of ticket prices for success of airline travel and the result of dynamic pricing to maximize yield for airlines, but also to provide information to the traveling public as to the best time to purchase their tickets. In the case of St. Lucia, the question would be how to provide this information to possible visitors and by whom – airlines, travel agents, or tour operators? Evidently, the differing interests may not want this information available to the public who may use this to buy their tickets at the most appropriate time. This lack of information may affect the yield management objectives of the airlines and affect their ability to manage profitability.

The airline industry is constantly trying to maximize profitability therefore; vertical integration is another attempt toward revenue generation (Forbes & Lederman, 2010). The authors outlined the importance of vertical integration of the industry, pertaining to business agreements between regional sub-contractor airlines owned by major airline companies and those not owned by the parent company. This provided sound research information with analysis that was pertinent to the present day environment (Forbes & Lederman, 2010). The level of ownership of many subsidiary airline services and the result of key strategic alliances to the efficient operation of the airline are critical to improving profitability. The impact on the pricing regimes of airline tickets correlates to the integration and provides a better platform to allow price tickets more competitively (Forbes & Lederman, 2010). This method provided an alternative revenue generating mechanism for the airlines, allowing for the reduction or control of ticket prices to the customer base and maintenance of the target yield required by the

airline. This technique further assisted the destination in having competitive prices in areas where competition is prevalent.

The effect of competition on the operating efficiency and relative ability to attract business is a component for consideration with air transportation. Scotti, Malighetti, Martini, and Volta (2012) investigated the impact of the intensity of competition among airports on their technical efficiency, by computing airports' markets based on potential demand approach. The authors found that the intensity of competition in Italy had a negative impact on airports' efficiency during the period 2005 to 2008. The implication that airports belonging to a local air transportation system, where competition is strong, tend to exploit inputs less intensively than do airports with local monopoly power. Public airports are more efficient than private and mixed ones (Scotti et al., 2012). As a result, the authors concluded that the policy makers should provide incentives to implement airport specialization in local systems with high levels of competition and should monitor the inputs utilization rate even when involving private investors (Scotti et al., 2012). The leaders further accentuated the need to use the aerodrome in a manner maximizing the output of the facility both in economic terms and as an attraction of the target market.

Fröhlich and Niemeie (2011) studied the impact of the specific use of airports to attract airlift to destinations. The authors examined the specific catchment areas used for determining the traffic serviced by a particular airport. The research reflected the relevance of spatial effects on airport competition. Drawing concentric circles of travel distances around the airport facility was the most common way to define an airports



catchment area. The authors reviewed the main characteristics defined by the catchment area and available but also applicable substitutes and assessments of market power. The existence of spatial competition among airports lay within one market. Fröhlich and Niemeie used overlapping circles to examine the assumption that competition lay within these common areas. The economic models of spatial competition where no overlapping existed caused the authors to conclude overlooking stylized facts inferred from economic models of spatial competition occurred (Fröhlich & Niemeie, 2011). Therefore, it is necessary to sensitize all models to these spatial factors.

The research outlined above revealed factors affecting air transportation choices by travelers, but there are counter arguments that help bring these into perspective. The hospitality industry typically disagrees on the importance of airports in the tourism development and resultant growth patterns. Tony (2010) examined the technical efficiency of airports and the ability to service tourists. The stochastic frontier models assessed whether technical efficiency at Newark Liberty International, New York John F. Kennedy International, and New York LaGuardia airports improved from June to August 2008. Tony then compared this information with the summers of 2000 and 2007. The author suggested the efficiency of an airport affected the experience of the traveler. The efficiency of an airport determines if it can handle operations on time by minimizing overall demand and maximizing available airport capacity (Tony, 2010). Using Granger causality tests, Tony derived the factors determining the changes in the key components and indicators of airport performance. A comparison with the other airports under review,

JFK experienced the greatest improvement in technical efficiency. The Granger causality tests stressed the importance of airport operations and en-route factors in supporting efficiency.

The comparison of airports serving similar markets clearly demonstrates the issue of whether tourists make decisions on airport facility infrastructure. Beria and Scholz (2010) analyzed airport facilities as an investment project, using the new investments at Milan Malpensa Airport and Berlin Brandenburg International. The similarities in the business environments were the basis for choosing these two airports. The authors examined the history of the projects, objectives, demand forecasts, assessment methodologies, and strategies of the main carriers (Beria & Scholz, 2010). The criteria used to assess the investment in Berlin Brandenburg International mirrored the information from Milan-Malpensa. Travelers want proper processing times and functionality, but the more fundamental criterion was ensuring the passengers got through the airport facility as quickly as possible (Beria & Scholz, 2010). The use of the traveler as the one setting the benchmarks had proven useful in developing successful models.

It was also necessary to ascertain the overall profitability of tourist airports to the country economy (Dimitriou et al., 2011). The researchers used the methodology based on an input-output model that estimated the key categories of results from tourist airport operations. In general, the authors found the tourist airports were highly beneficial to the regional economy by bringing in much needed revenue from both the airline activity and the impact on spend on hotels, taxis, and restaurant usage (Dimitriou et al., 2011).

Additionally there are spin-off activities that benefit from the tourism created.

Evangelinos, Stangl, and Obermeyer (2012) realized that the advent of competition in profitable routes created the need for innovative ticket pricing methodologies by airlines. Competing airlines attempt to create barriers to entry for a specific route or cause excessive startup capital requirement as a deterrent to entry. The pricing of peak load traffic has become a strategic area of revenue generation and is responsible for the creation of a peak load-pricing regime (Evangelinos et al., 2012). Airlines subsidizing price reductions at off-peak times and introducing price increases during peak time on set routes encourage new competitors to enter the market at off-peak times (Evangelinos et al., 2012). Attracting airlift to the country and providing an incentivized period of operation, while minimizing risk to new airlines to enter the market, was a challenge for these countries. There is a fine line between keeping the existing airlines and attracting new airlines to allow for ticket price competition while allowing the consumer to benefit from such actions. It is also desirable that the airlines operate profitably to ensure that they remain in the market.

Redondi, Malighetti, and Paleari (2012) examined the concepts of 'hubbing' and 'dehubbing.' Redondi et al. (2012) conducted a study on the benefits of hubbing initiatives at aerodromes and the effect on the choice of travel routes by tourists. The reversal of a hub operation at an aerodrome has shown some long lasting economic declines that are difficult to recover from (Redondi et al., 2012). The authors examined dehubbing at facilities between the years 1997 to 2009. The authors then examined what

transpired after dehubbing by grouping the cases into homogenous groups that show, on average, airports experiencing dehubbing did not recover the original traffic within five years, and that dehubbing is likely to be irreversible. The introduction of low cost carriers in lieu of the hubbing showed that the respective airports, on average, recovered faster (Redondi et al., 2012). Dehubbing had a greater negative effect on destinations served than the seats offered by carriers.

As a destination, it was vital to understand how the length of travel from source to vacation area affected the ability to attract and sustain the volume of visitors to the destination. The information on this indicates that prospective tourists do have a level of sensitivity to the length of travel from their homes to the destination (Abooli & Mohamed, 2012). At times, this length of travel may not be real but perceived. Since travelers may use this in determining which destination to visit, it is a significant input to the decision-making process, as reflected in a phenomenon called psychological distance in tourism marketing (Abooli & Mohamed, 2012). Applying psychological distance in marketing research occurs and refers to the gap or differences individuals perceive between his/her home country and a foreign country. The authors aimed to investigate the use of psychological distance in the tourism context. The measuring mechanisms for psychological distance were from marketing-related studies. The initial consideration including specific location was relevant and valuable input, requiring proper management techniques (Abooli & Mohamed, 2012). This input parameter was necessary for attracting visitors to St. Lucia and must be part of a proper strategy.

There are other factors influencing visitor preferences when considering air travel. In examining the design and use of terminal facilities within aerodromes, it has become common to put emphasis on the terminal experience and the non-aeronautical revenues. Visitors do not travel strictly because of the airport experience, but the functionality and flows of the terminal process improves the trip (Fröhlich & Niemeie, 2011). The development of terminals into mini shopping malls to provide a shopping and dining experience adds value to visitor experiences and provides needed business revenue to the airport authorities and vendors (Fasone & Maggiore, 2012). In the present construct of airport business models, there is as much emphasis on non-aeronautical revenues as aeronautical revenues derived directly and indirectly from aerodromes and airport facilities. The airport industry is highly competitive and for airports to increase profit margins, airport managers have to look for previously untapped opportunities in their operations (Fasone & Maggiore, 2012). This information is useful in the development of robust strategies for the creation of synergies in the tourism industry, especially St. Lucia.

Many governments face the unenviable task of determining aviation policy. This policy should promote growth in air transportation and provide an environment to meet the needs of the traveling public. Offering a number of incentives encourages the launch of new air routes or sustain existing services, such as public service obligations and the Route Development Funds also known as minimum revenue guarantees (MRGs) (Smyth et al., 2012). Governments within the Caribbean create externalities in the market creating what economists call the imperfect market. Difficulty stems from the ability to

compete without the injection of capital into the market and the reduction of risk to the airlines through MRGs. Policy makers must face the challenges created by making robust policy intervention decisions in an uncertain environment. Smyth et al. (2012) suggested that route development funds had a positive impact on passenger flow, travel conditions for business and leisure passengers, and increased the gross value added impact to the wider Scottish economy.

Answering a number of questions must precede a desire to expand and improve the airlift to promote increased volume of visitors. How can governments incentivize the business to allow expansionary preferences of airlines? The development and growth of the global air transport sector required up to date information on the emergence of transnational companies and different forms of international expansion in the airline industry (Ramón-Rodríguez, Moreno-Izquierdo, & Perles-Ribes, 2010). This structure was the basis for a market analysis to understand why full-service airlines have adopted alliances and code sharing. The objective of the code sharing and alliance is to internationalize the business; however, low-cost carriers prefer more direct methods for entering new foreign markets (Ramón-Rodríguez et al., 2010).

It is essential to have a framework wherein the tourism industry and air transport collaborate to benefit each other. Starkiea (2011) examined the need for a framework within the European airports in light of the recent developments of the relationships between airlines and airports. Three factors underlie the changed relationship. These are the creation of a single European aviation market, development of airline business

models operating on a pan-European basis, and the growing use of the Internet. The latter reduced the costs of entry for airlines into local markets by eliminated startup cost of physical offices and overheads (Starkiea, 2011). The combination of these factors affected the dynamics of the airline industry. These dynamics increased the business risk faced by airports and highlighted the increased buyer power of the airlines. The result was a preference for the establishment of long-term relationships between airports and airlines (Starkiea, 2011). Starkiea argued that the contracts were also incentive-compatible from the passenger's point of view. In combination with the incentives, airports have to secure high-margin commercial sales to passengers. Direct airport competition merely provides incentives for contracts that satisfy the end users, which are the customers (Starkiea, 2011). The significant disadvantages and costs of sector-specific economic regulation counter any residual concerns regarding market dominance and potential abuse. This use in a Caribbean context is a challenge, where many islands do not have a national carrier or any hub activity. Examining the effect of these three parameters in the source market and developing an approach embracing and maximize usage is critical.

Current St. Lucia leadership lack required information to develop policy and provide strategic decision making to sustain the tourism industry. Kahneman, Lovallo, and Sibony (2011) provided a 10-point approach eliminating biases in leadership decision-making. Managers and leaders must be careful in their deliberations to prevent the inclusion of any bias. Managers must carefully avoid making decisions rooted in

biases from the management team or team leaders. Additionally, the strategic decision-making process and future use within the work is critical to success (Kahneman et al., 2011).

### **Hospitality and Product Development**

*Word of mouth advertising*, where the tourist provides positive information to prospective guests, was an integral part of growing and sustaining tourism in the country (Anuar, Ahmad, Jusoh, & Hussain, 2012). It is important to ensure a positive tourist experience thus minimizing any potential setbacks. Tourist friendly destinations have positive customer reviews (Anuar et al., 2012). The concept provided for tourist satisfaction through maximum utilization of the aspects of space, activities, and products without interference or problems, beginning from a tourist's place of origin through the desired tourism destination. Limited studies of such initiatives exist and most are sector based (Anuar et al., 2012). This fact leaves gaps in the research literature and knowledge base and misunderstanding of usage of tourist friendly destinations. The emphasis needs to be on identifying stakeholders and their roles in the formation of tourist friendly destination idea. Achieving the formation of tourist friendly destination concept requires synergy and commitment of the public sector, private sector, and the domestic tourist, which St. Lucia leadership can capitalize.

Researchers at the World Economic Forum's Centre for Global Competitiveness and Performance (2011) studied the economies of 139 member countries. The objective was to develop comprehensive strategic tools for measuring the factors and policies that



make it attractive to develop the travel and tourism (T & T) sector in different countries. This fact would be a fundamental question asked by St. Lucia leaders and the competing islands. The utilization of such a broad range of global countries provides the authenticity and thoroughness of the assessment. The results obtained allowed all stakeholders to work together to improve the competitiveness in their national economies. These results helped in contributing and improving national economic growth and prosperity. The information was pivotal to the development of strategies to address any gaps in the sector but allowed for sustained growth in the sector in St. Lucia.

According to Jacobs Consultancy Canada, Inc. (2010), it is evident that tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in the world. The reports and research substantiated the fact that international tourism growth is consistently outpacing global economic growth over the past 20 years. A major input component of tourism receipts is attributable to international passenger transportation, particularly those traveling by air.

Akdag and Öter (2011) studied the elements of physical geography, climate, distance, area, elements of human geography in relation to tourist arrivals, and revenues. Analyzed against this background and recommendations for marketing strategies, tourists to the top 10 global tourism destinations had differing interests (a) sun, sand, and beach, (b) historic sites, (c) diving sites, (d) ski sites, and (e) romantic venues (Akdag & Öter, 2011).

Repeat visitation to destinations is essential to the success of differing

destinations (Chen & Xiao, 2013). The likelihood of repeat visitors to a sun and sand destination is critical to continuing success. The authors considered the composition of the traveling group (Caric, 2011). Overall satisfaction was the biggest impact on the decision of visitors to revisit a destination while perceived image was the least important influence for the tourists. These influences varied when the composition of the traveling group changed. The issues were of vital importance in tourism management policies because they contribute to a better design and development of tourism promotion strategies.

Essential to the understanding of the tourism industry was the understanding of the economic impact of tourism on small island economies (Seetanah, 2011). Tourism remains the fastest growing and largest industry worldwide. The growth patterns were significant with increases from 25 million arrivals in 1950 to more than 825 million in 2007, which accounts for over one-third of the value all global service trade (Seetanah, 2011). While pertinent information from developed and developing countries may not be directly relevant to or comparable to island economies given the island's economic and institutional characteristics, Seetanah (2011) believed drawing comparisons were possible. This includes the issues of (a) size, (b) remoteness, (c) geographic dispersion, (d) vulnerability to natural disasters, (e) fragile eco-systems, (f) transport and communication constraints, and (g) particularly the vulnerability to exogenous shocks. The economic impact in developing countries is more significant than developed countries. Tourist expenditures in the destination visited provided positive economic

activity (Seetanah, 2011). The St. Lucia Economic Review (2011) reflected a dependency on tourism by citing that it is responsible for 70% of employment directly or indirectly on the island. The growth patterns in St. Lucia and the Caribbean are consistent with these findings. Reinforcing this point was a dynamic panel data framework and generalized methods of moments (GMM) to the dynamics of the tourism growth link (Seetanah, 2011).

The development of strategic positioning is dependent on the sustainability of the chosen design. The strategic design included the hotel plant, the sustaining of current quality standards, growing of the hotel room plant, and the correlation between branded or new hotel chains. One must investigate and define the best-suited hotels or chains for the market that the island is attempting to attract. St. Lucia presently has Sandals as a representation of chain hotels. Though not franchised, the founder, Butch Stewart, continues to own these *plural organizations* (Brookes & Roper, 2011). Brookes and Roper (2011) provided a level of insight into potential benefits of this form of expansionary strategy. Consistent with this theme, exploring the performance of these types of resorts against the other options will occur (e.g. franchised properties or boutique and other accommodation).

The target market for the island should align with the best-suited accommodations. This study included the amenities, operating structure, *all-inclusive*, or *open*, Brookes and Roper (2011) cited some strengths of the plural model including:

- Allows for fast growth of chains

- Control and maintenance of quality standards
- Collation and comparison of the information on client feedback, using similar areas and deciphered
- Induces competition and allows for internal vs. external benchmarking
- Allows for higher control, achieves greater efficiency, and balances chain growth with concept control
- Allows for a higher probability of economic stability and efficiency
- Provides for better relationship management
- Allows for innovation and better responsiveness to change

Articulating the downside is not easy since tourist from differing demographics and interest require different things. It becomes essential to perform surveys on the target market before making a determination of the hotel development strategy.

There are key factors to the success of the hotel. Shoval, McKercher, and Birenboim (2011) found the location of hotels relative to tour sites and attractions, such as beaches and historic areas, are critical for success. Shoval et al. investigated the importance of location or proximity of hotels, motels, guesthouses, and similar establishments to specific sites. The authors tracked day trip movements of tourists staying at one of the four hotels in different areas on the Hong Kong island of Kowloon. Specially designed devices carried by the sample set of tourists tracked movements. A total of 791 tourists participated in the data collection exercise. The tracking confirmed that the location of the hotel relative to places of interest was a significant factor

influencing consumption patterns and volume of visits. This fact would point to issues of product development and destination marketing (Shoval et al., 2011). The relative distance of hotels from key landmarks, as well as the tendencies of tourist movement around zonal areas, was a component of the success or failure of a hotel facility. They provided clear validity to the use of modern research methods for collating data for informed decision-making (Shoval et al., 2011). St. Lucia is fortunate to have an internationally renowned world heritage site, some of the best marinas, and many natural preserved areas. Are hotel developments close to these areas significant? Should this be information available to hotel developers as a means of influencing the decision for the placement of hotel facilities?

The placement of the hotel plant close to particular landmarks appealing to tourists is an overriding consideration for the building of new infrastructure. The application for St. Lucia was that the island has numerous excellent natural attractions. These include the drive-in volcano, Diamond Water Falls, and the coral reefs allowing for diving and snorkeling. Beaches are an attraction of the island. Torrent, Fluvia, Balleter, Salo, Ariza, and Espinet (2011) explored the importance of beaches and location related to hotel prices. Cleanliness of the environment, clarity of swimming waters, and public safety are key requirements for success in the hotel industry.

Torrent et al. (2011) based this analysis on the use of hedonic methods to estimate the implicit prices of the characteristics meeting the visitors' acceptance and approval. The comparison of beach and hotel location versus prices provides some strategic

guidance to hotel managers and policy makers. A large sample of coastal hotels in Catalonia increased hotel prices by an average of 13% to 17% (Torrent et al., 2011). The findings also reflected the width of the beach could negatively affect the pricing as well as the coarseness of the sand. With all things remaining constant, the authors found that hotels with beaches are at least 15% more expensive than their counterparts (Torrent et al., 2011).

In the review of the factors that may affect the ability to increase hotel occupancy in large hotels on the island of St. Lucia, a number of factors researched in order to obtain a better understanding of the strategies employed to positively affect the occupancy rates. The factors affecting hotel occupancy rates are evolving, and the most current research outlines a number of areas needing management by the destination and destination managers (Al Saleem & Al-Juboori, 2013). The research collated below will reflect the main areas researched in these areas. These included cost, type of air, sea transportation, revisiting or conversion of cruise to stay over, and loyalty programs. As pertinent is the country product development, cost of travel, holiday packaging schemes, and currency exchange benefits (Martin & Tomas, 2012). It is also important to note the research on the cost of hotel room nights, effect of inclusive and non-inclusive hotels as well as safety and competitive advantage from competitors offering similar product and pricing (Al Saleem & Al-Juboori, 2013; Martin & Tomas, 2012).

Sustaining tourism interest and business through the year is a difficult task for small island states. The summer months in North America and Europe pose a significant

threat to the volume of visits during these periods. Additional visitation by families with children further restricts holidays outside the summer holiday period. This point compounds the economic decline in activity throughout the world and the resultant reduction in peoples' traveling habits. The creation of international festivals reflecting the need of the target market or the creation of an interface to the social norms of the islands has become an integral part of the island product. The intention is to create an activity sold worldwide in the target markets during the time when the market least wants to travel – summer. This information assists in year round tourism activity on the island (Ferdinand & Williams, 2013). Enhancing the success of the business by the creation of these festivals also expands the experience and the volume of visits during the peak season from October to March. A typical example is Carnival in Trinidad and Tobago (Ferdinand & Williams, 2013). It is probable that the St. Lucia Jazz Festival, established over 20 years ago, had a similar effect on the St. Lucia tourism market.

Tourism is one of the main developmental strategies in small developing countries with the top 10 ranked destinations according to the contribution of tourism to GDP are all small island states (Schubert, Brida, & Risso, 2011; Sharpley & Ussi, 2014). The international tourism sector has a net positive effect on the economies of these small island economies by their contribution to the economy under the following headings (Schubert et al., 2011):

1. Tourism provides the needed foreign exchange that allows for the foreign inputs and balance of payments.

2. Tourism and the success of the business facilitate new investment into hotel plant, as well as providing competition within the islands to compete for the required services that this development creates.
3. Either tourism induces economic industries directly or indirectly to support ancillary services required.
4. Tourism contributes to the generation of employment and increases the income of the community.
5. Tourism encourages the positive exploitation of economies of scale by local companies.
6. Tourism has also provided for the accumulation of research information in a detailed way to allow for growth and strategic positioning.

Formerly, many of the islands relied on agriculture for economic survival. Mass tourism and spin off services such as construction now support the visitation and financial services to manage better the foreign exchange tourism creates. Tourism provides significant advantages to small islands by providing a significant source of foreign exchange. Although there are limited barriers to entry, encouraging competition benefits all industries and services through this process. The industry through the foreign exchange, competition, and the provision of scales contributes positively to the standard of living for members of the population (Schubert et al., 2011). The authors provided an analysis using dynamic modeling reflecting a small island economy where tourism is the main economic sector. The economic framework allows for the equilibrium of the model



as the growth rate of tourism increases (Schubert et al., 2011).

Perceptions of visitors “word of mouth” determined the decision of prospective visitors to travel to an island or destination (Akdag & Öter, 2011). In making a decision about what destination to choose, tourists have to sort through a wide range of tourism products in the destinations that they are considering. It is important to understand what makes a salient, memorable, and successful visit for the tourist. Akdag & Öter (2010) outlined the need to improve the tourism product design. Responses to the study included four main components of service (a) hospitality, (b) involvement, (c) freedom of choice, and (d) physical plant. Each component had differing levels of value in different markets. Akdag & Öter (2011) showed little consensus on the value of anyone of the components, and that differing persons had their priorities. Additionally, the components of freedom of choice and physical plant represented an innovative way to appeal to the market that one is trying to attract. Further, some French destinations did not fare as well as related to the attractions perceived by these visitors. Defining the value of the industry by the use of theoretical modeling using regression analysis as well as economic data on the economic impact of the industry derived from the destination management organization was needed (Pastana et al., 2011). The results reflected a heavy reliance on sea, sun, and strategy based on the availability of beaches. Also, the development of museums, national parks, ski resorts, and monuments were leading drivers in the industry.

In line with this study, researching the development of tourism destinations in an integrated multilevel perspective was necessary. Destinations are a complex system of

static and dynamic parts essential to attracting guests and ensure an excellent experience (Haugland, Ness, Gronseth, & Aarstad, 2011). These researchers attempted to develop a theoretical model of the variables faced in the industry. Additionally, the scholars examined the resources of the destinations and developed propositions. Further, destinations examine the assets and the attributes they had and developed the best possible system and combination of these attributes to make up a robust and responsive design.

### **Marketing, Branding, and Advertising**

The previous section provided information on perception and transference of experiences by visitors. The key strategic reasons for the establishment of hotels and the determining factors that customers use for the selection of hotels as well as the destination examined. The emphasis was on hospitality and product development. Equally important is the way the destination decides to create and distribute its image worldwide. Branding and advertising form the main tools used to provide the world with the image of the destination. In this section, research information provided here assist St. Lucia in determining the best-suited approach. After World War II, many countries turned to international tourism as the major form of their economy and foreign exchange generation (Sinclair-Maragh & Gursoy, 2015). This point accounted for approximately 10% of world GDP, employment, exports, and new capital formation (Sinclair-Maragh & Gursoy, 2015). During the same period a shift of the focus of the Caribbean Islands from the colonial staples like sugar, bananas, and copra to tourism, banking services, and

manufacturing occurred. The Caribbean region is a leading competitor in the tourism market due to its proximity to North America and Europe and the favorable climate conditions experienced on these islands (CTA Policy Brief, 2012). The Caribbean Islands became the most visited destination outside North America and Europe; tourism now accounts for 15% of GDP and taxes, 22% and 19% of capital investment and exports respectively, and 12% of total employment (CTA Policy Brief, 2012).

Sinclair-Maragh and Gursoy (2010) refined the characteristics of small island tourism economies (SITE) by differentiating the Caribbean Islands from the Pacific and Indian Ocean competitors. The authors further outlined the structures and behavior of successful SITEs. A Tourism Penetration Index (TPI) defined high, intermediate, and low profiles. The last methodology used is a regression analysis to provide an in-depth analysis of the determinant factors of SITE success.

A compilation and review of the information of this study examined 39 small islands with less than three million in population. The three main models included Migration, Remittances, Aid and Bureaucracy (MIRAB), People (immigration), natural resources, overseas diplomacy, finance and transport (PROFIT), and Small Island Tourism Economies (SITE). All of these have a similar study base and assess related parameters in the tourism product. The results provided a comparison between the more developed Caribbean countries and the lesser penetrated Pacific/Indian islands. The importance of infrastructure, modernization, and proximity to major tourism markets was significant. The TPI study ranked the islands from most to least tourism penetrated and

grouped islands into three stages of development. The regression analysis attempted to provide information on confirmed suggestions from the SITE and grouped them into five variables. Of these, the significant variables were geographical proximity, dependent political status, and uncrowded island ambiance. Modernization and infrastructure were not significant. In summary, the most affluent SITE islands are not only close to the main source markets but maintain strong ties politically and economically.

The island of Jamaica ranks as one of the leading tourism destinations in the Caribbean. Williams and Spencer (2010) studied the effects of the present day economic decline in the populations of the source markets to the volume of visitors to the island and the subsequent economic impact on the island. Williams and Spencer used the theory of responsiveness to measure the success of converting specific target marketing tourist visitation. The theory of responsiveness provided an indication of the success of target marketing and examines key areas such as brand loyalty, advertising effectiveness, macro-economic variables, such as disposable income, and the economies of the target markets under study. Jamaica is a small open economy relying heavily on tourism for survival (Williams & Spencer, 2010).

The attempts to obtain a clear relationship between expenditure on advertising resulting in tourist arrivals proved difficult to establish using the regression analysis (Williams & Spencer, 2010). The most significant relationship to arrivals from the study was the favorable exchange rate of the local currency compared to the foreign currency. The study reflected the most crucial factor for tourist was price. The indication that one

could obtain a good quality vacation in Jamaica at a cost more favorable than the competition was the greatest driving factor. They showed that placing some emphasis on strategies assisting in reducing the cost of a holiday to the island is significant. Further, awareness through advertising did not drive the numbers of visitors upward (Williams & Spencer, 2010). The utilization of information is important for the development of an overall strategy to increase hotel occupancy in St. Lucia including all lessons learned in any formulated strategy.

It is possible to monitor controllable and uncontrollable information about the destination as two independent constructs. Alvarez and Campo (2011) showed that for a country, such as Turkey, promotional material improved the image of the destination and its influence on the volume of visitors. However, there was no significant effect from daily articles in the area (Alvarez & Campo, 2011). When compared to other areas in Africa, Central Africa sub-region has development funding as well as governmental support for tourism initiatives, influencing of tourism growth patterns. Because of a lack of both of these factors, a drop off on the expected performance of the sector occurred (Kimbu, 2011). In another study, the effect of cost of travel confirms that the cost of travel and the hotel experience continues to be a major determinant in deciding upon the destination and growth of the industry (Coles & Fenclova, 2011). The effect of social and corporate responsibility programs of the respective airlines expands this concept to the tourism market and increases traveler's interest once known (Coles & Fenclova, 2011). Lee and Arcodi (2011) indicated that many of the Caribbean islands attempted to

introduce specific events predominantly in the offseason to attract new tourism business. These initiatives are growing exponentially, and there is a fear of saturation of these events in specific regions. The authors believed additional research in the areas of branding of food festivals for the specific island or regions is necessary (Lee & Arcodia, 2011).

Marketing has been in the center of the development of tourist destinations and in developing the tourism destination image (TDI). An empirical examination of TDI employed structured or unstructured modalities. The research focused on images with highest ratings in a structured approach. Alternatively, the use of frequently used words in an unstructured approach helped. Destination marketing organizations (DMO) traditionally studied TDI under three specific headings: segmentation, competitive analysis, and analysis of image components. The studies provided information on the understanding of the consumer awareness and brand knowledge of the destination helps in the formulation of product development and destination promotion strategies as well as assessing the effectiveness of the marketing undertaken by the state (Pan & Li, 2011). Pan and Li (2011) set out to examine the linguistic structure of TDI as well as explore the utility of TDI phrases in online marketing.

Pan and Li (2011) found that at least 70% of the sample traveled outside of the United States, and at least 64% had a leisure vacation outside the United States. This fact showed substantial market to tap into as first-time visitors as well as the ability to seek repeat business. The results of the study reflected that the target audience knew

keywords, such as Americans reviewing China as a destination and how this followed the power law distribution (Pan & Li, 2011). Of critical importance to both TDI and search, engine marketing are the linkages made from the destination search link. The authors showed that images remain a strong tool for online marketing in the mass market for destinations but advise that understanding and exploring the TDI in as many niches as practical. This assists in a more streamlined and focused marketing campaign leading to a higher return on visitation to the destination (Pan & Li, 2011). The extent of the competitiveness of a destination determines the success of individual tourism products and ventures. The job of a DMO is increasingly difficult with the competitive nature of mature markets holding a leadership market position and emerging destinations with lower production costs (Pike & Page, 2014).

It has become necessary for DMOs to alter their approach to the development of destinations. Targeted research clients were more knowledgeable about tourism industry and were looking for the differentiating factors that may influence the decisions. An understanding of the decision-making process supporting this aspect as well as relating to the part financing and DMOs play in managing the constantly changing market and size of the destination managed is necessary (Pike & Page, 2014).

In determining the marketing strategy for a specific destination, it is necessary to separate the micro and macro factors addressed. One of the major factors remains the movement patterns at the macro level and attempt to define and understand those (Xia et al., 2010). In many marketing studies, market segregation occurs by grouping the sectors

based on geographical origin. Xia et al. (2010) looked at developing a methodology that would identify tourist characteristics traveling in dominant movement patterns. Tailoring development of the marketing material to the specific characteristics to allow for a higher probability of success in terms of visitor arrivals is possible. The methodology identified the dominant movement patterns using log-linear models, followed by the development of expectation maximization (EM) algorithm in different models that would determine the characteristics of the tourist who travel within the dominant travel pattern. Finally, developing the socio-demographic information occurred. The case study used Phillip Island, located at the mouth of Westernport Bay in Melbourne Australia. Against a population of 7,000 citizens, estimates of annual volume of visitors are 1.5 million.

The authors justified the use of this new methodology of dominant travel patterns as well as demographics using the log-linear models and the EM algorithm (Xia et al., 2010). Though the spending patterns were not part of this particular research, there was evidence to warrant the need for further work on spending characteristics of the dominant travel pattern visitors. Reviewing travel patterns helps to define a higher level of detail on the segment.

It is important to note that there is a requirement to examine the effects of advertising and media as it relates to tourism development and increased volume of visitors. Pan, Tsai, and Lee (2011) examined this relationship using New Zealand as a case study. An analysis of the TV-tourism commercials (TVCs) ascertained narrative and video content as well as the structures used and then indexed information. Using differing



software applications, such as ATLAS.ti, the editing software identified consistency and changes in framing the images derived from New Zealand. Of the TVCs reviewed, there was an indication of consistency in the content for nature, adventure, sports activities, and, to a lesser extent, culture. The authors also showed the portrayal of the lifestyle of the locals and the adventure tours are salient areas of content (Pan et al., 2011). Proper research is a prerequisite to the advertising campaign to avoid the probability of failing to reach target markets (Pan et al., 2011). This study provides strategic information that suggests that analysis of the content and target audiences are essential in being successful in reaching the target market (Pan et al., 2011). Destination branding is one aspect of marketing used to differentiate destinations and attract visitors for reasons associated with the brand. A vital aspect of destination marketing practice and is a central feature of the decision-making process that can affect tourists' overall attitudes toward a specific destination (Veasna, Wu, & Huang, 2013).

It is common for the team and multi-stakeholder involvement to determine destination branding of the decision-making process (Hall, 2010). The relevance of power and the use either of power to influence branding decisions singly or through coalition of stakeholders were of high value. Power plays a major role in influencing decisions for destination branding where the most powerful stakeholders try to impose their interests on the destination branding process, making use of different ways of persuasion and authority (Garcia, Gomez, & Molina, 2012). Occasionally overlooking, areas such as power and multiple stakeholders can affect the success of the branding

initiatives developed. This research provides insight into inputs considered when formulating branding strategy and will be helpful in assisting the one for St. Lucia.

The Internet has become an important marketing tool that allows the prospective travelers to research and compare many different travel packages for a single or multiple destinations. Additionally, the Internet provides key feedback information to the destination managers to understand what visitors are seeking. The practice of *bundling* allows clients to create a particular package for a vacation (including air transportation, hotel, and tours amongst other things) and obtain the cost online. This approach allows for perceived satisfaction in the cost versus benefit to the visitor. It also provides a high level of convenience (Baloglu, Erdem, & Tanford, 2012). Baloglu et al. (2012) proposed four main hypotheses and tested them using 276 adults who purchased travel tickets within the last 12 months. The first examined respondents' choice of transparent packaging over non-transparent ones. The second examined respondents' choice of non-transparent packaging over transparent ones. The third examined respondents choosing lower priced transparent packaging than the alternative. The final examined respondents' choice of packages with a higher discount when itemizing savings.

In reviewing the results derived from the research, there was evidence that people preferred choices, reducing uncertainty, simplified decision-making and highlighted benefits and discounts (Baloglu et al., 2012). When not listing savings, subjects preferred nontransparent pricing. Further partial transparency was not an effective methodology. The uncertainty hypothesis was the preferred options package, which was the same price

transparent on actual savings and listed (Baloglu et al., 2012).

### **Cruise Tourism**

Cruising as a major segment of the travel and tourism industry is still relatively new. While the industry is at the center of public debate, only limited academic research exists compared to other categories of travel and tourism (Sinclair-Maragh & Gursoy, 2015). The body of research reviewed focused on the sector as it related to its impacts both globally and within the Caribbean region. This section examines the factors affecting the cruise sector in St. Lucia and focuses on three main areas: economic, social, and environmental factors.

Tourism industry stakeholders policy should pay special attention to the cruise activity as it provides an opportunity to establish long-term relationships and encourage visitors to return to the destination as a land-based vacation (Brida, Pulina, Riano & Zapata-Aguire, 2012). Tourists who enjoy better than expected experiences and are satisfied with the product offering are more likely to return and recommend the destination to their friends and relatives (Andriotis & Agiomirgianakis, 2010).

### **Economic Factors**

The cruise industry has undergone substantial consolidation in recent years, and a few players and a few markets now control the majority of the industry. Markets and operational considerations influence vessel deployment, which highly affect the economic impact on the destinations. Cruise lines, therefore, tend to focus on the sale of itineraries and not destinations (Rodrigue & Notteboom, 2013).

Passengers see cruise vacations as cost efficient. The single vacation payment typically covers all expenses, with the added opportunity to visit multiple destinations during this single vacation. Cruise lines, however, have seen the economic benefit of remaining between destinations or *a day at sea*. In this regard, the lines can avoid costs associated with calling into a port, such as port charges, while creating greater opportunities for onboard spending (Nelson, 2012).

Though few researchers studied the economic impact of cruise tourism in comparison to other categories, tourism expenditure generated by cruise visits is of interest (Larsen, Ogaard, Brun, & Marnburg, 2011). It is necessary that destinations can measure the economic impact of cruise tourism to determine the economic viability. This measurement should include both passenger and cruise spending in the destination, passenger fees, vessel provisioning, and other vessel-related expenditure in the destination (Brida et al., 2011).

Cruise tourism may appear to present significant economic benefits to destinations, and local policy makers tend to develop this idea. However, like other industries cruise tourism brings both positive and negative impacts. Related to the economic impact, consideration of the cost of hosting cruise ships and passengers compared to the returns is critical. Only select clusters feel the direct impact, such as tourism transportation, tour operators, attraction owners, and shop operators, in particular those located in proximity to the cruise port. There is a direct economic impact from cruise lines berthing at a port. These benefits derive from port charges, such as navigation

and berthing charges, pilotage charges, towage charges, and bunkering. In addition generation of revenues from the supply of food and water, services such as waste disposal, and passenger related expenditures, such as security and baggage handling occurs (Klein, 2011).

This effect has an impact outside the Caribbean region. Research conducted on the economic impact of cruise visitors in Norway during the summer of 2010 concluded that cruise passengers leave approximately the same amount per capita as campers and guests at low-end facilities (Brun et al., 2010; Larsen et al., 2011). Dierich (2010) raised an interesting point regarding the impact of the volume of visitors of cruise passengers on stay over tourist citing that many stay over tourists choose to avoid sites of attractions crowded by cruise ship passengers, thereby affecting the overall impact of tourism in general. The contrasting problem is the capital expenditures of visitors at mutually exclusive venues. It provides information that disposable income of the differing sectors of tourism may not reduce the ability of the differing sectors to participate in a different holiday experience due to disposable income.

The St. Lucian government is supportive of the tourism industry and views it as a means to economic growth (Feighery, 2011). In 2011, St. Lucia hosted 670,043 cruise ship passengers; the economic impact of that many persons visiting the island for a day is powerful (Feighery, 2011). However, exploiting this impact is not possible due to leakages and inadequate economic linkage to other sectors, such as agriculture and manufacturing (Joseph, 2011). In addition to leakages, various economic factors affect

the local cruise sectors; these include seasonality, limited skills within the local labor market, and access to formal education and training. While these factors also affect larger destinations, the impact is greater on a small island by the nature of developing states (Baum, 2012; Croes, Lee, & Olson, 2013).

The growing trend where cruise lines opt to purchase private islands also affects the economic sustainability of the sector on destinations. The current scenario is the five major cruise lines with deployment in the Caribbean acquired their island or part thereof. Such islands located in the Bahamas and Hispaniola are a featured port of call on a typical Caribbean itinerary. This fact enables the line to maintain total control of the quality of the destination. St. Lucia is not close to such private islands and can be at a disadvantage as there is limited opportunity to combine with a call to a private island. The result is the island receives fewer calls from lines with a preference for private islands.

Geography also plays a significant role in the economic benefits from the sector. Destinations closest to Miami tend to receive a high number of visits while destinations further south such as St. Lucia receive fewer cruise visits (Nelson, 2012). Therefore, cruise lines package and sell cruises in geographic categories such as Eastern, Western, and Southern Caribbean cruise with the Western cruises attracting a significantly higher market share. Collaboration between the destination and the creation of additional hubs such as Barbados would solve this problem (Nelson, 2012).

To improve the overall economic contribution of tourism, employing specific

strategies to increase the number of visitors, the daily spend, and to reduce leakage are critical. Such strategies should drive the desired outcome and clearly articulated by tourism leaders (Nicely & Palakurthi, 2012). Related to St. Lucia and the wider Caribbean, there is a need for collaboration between the island nations; however, given the complexity of this process, it is in St. Lucia's best interest to examine the strategies employed and controlled within the island governance (Beritelli, 2011).

### **Environmental Factors**

Tourism has become a significant economic contribution in particular to small developing countries such as St. Lucia. However, the environmental impact of tourism in general is a source of concern due to negative impacts, for many developing countries (Eckardt et al., 2013; Friegherly, 2011; Vargus-Sanchez & Plaza-Mejia, 2011). Friegherly (2011) cited that tourism could potentially cause irreversible devastation to the natural environment. Such devastation to the environment is of particular concern for St. Lucia, home to a world heritage site and a fragile ecosystem (Marsh, 2012).

Compared to the enclave resorts in Mexico that host numerous overnight visitors, cruise tourism, due to movement of large numbers of guests, is termed mass tourism, Cruise ship companies design their operations similar to fast food chains with prepackaged vacations. This tourism is not sustainable due to the volume of persons visiting natural and cultural sites of attractions. Discussion in St. Lucia and the wider Caribbean centers on carrying capacities; mass tourism such as cruise vessels does not promote the concept of carrying capacities, which is necessary for sustainable

development of tourism (Diedrich, 2010).

Furthermore, the actions of cruise passengers and the presence of cruise vessels negatively affect the destinations in the following ways. First, they are a threat to fragile marine ecosystems; secondly, there have been charges for illegal dumping of pollutants. There are also major concerns relating to dredging and buildings associated with the construction of cruise ports (Caric, 2011; Cashman, Cumberbatch, & Moore, 2012; Diedrich, 2010).

Cruise ship emissions or air pollutions are also an area of concern and span outside of the Caribbean region. A study on the Arctic region revealed that the cruise ships have a substantial impact on the pollutant concentrations in this region (Eckhardt et al., 2013). This fact is also a concern to destinations such as St. Lucia where the ocean is a source of economic activity because of the fishing industry and recreational activities.

The Central American country of Belize has a long association with ecotourism and until recently focused on an exclusive market of the ecotourism enthusiast (Brida et al., 2011). Since the late 1990s, Belize experienced significant growth in cruise tourism arrivals leading to an ongoing debate of the impact on mass tourism on Belize's market position as an ecotourism destination and impact on the environment in general. Other islands such as the Cayman Islands, the Bahamas, and Mexico's Yucatan have these concerns (Vargus-Sanchez & Plaza-Mejia, 2011). Similar to Belize, St. Lucia experienced substantial growth since the 1990s (Hurst & Niehm, 2012). This growth was in terms of vessel calls and passengers. Consequently, the environmental implication of



this growth is also a major concern for local policy makers.

Diedrich (2010) studied the environmental impact of cruise tourism compared to stay over in Belize. Cruise tourists have less interest in conserving the marine environment than overnight tourists. Also, cruise companies seem to care less about environmental protection than hotel owners do. Findings also suggested that some cruise companies bypass regulations intended to minimize environmental impacts. This factor creates little motivation for environmental conservation among the local populations. St. Lucia, like Belize, has a significant “stay over” tourism business; there have been many discussions about the seemingly non-level playing field in terms of both the economic and environmental impact. As relates to Belize, Diedrich referenced the fear of many local tourism policymakers that increased cruise tourism will result in the decline of Belize’s success as a tourism destination. Diedrich advised that developing a cruise tourism policy that clearly articulated the management of the impact on the marine environment is the first step. The scholar also highlighted the need to enforce guidelines within such policies applicable to both business and individuals operating in the cruise and stay over sectors. In addition, he advocated the separation of cruise and stay over markets to continue to maintain a successful ecotourism market. Vargus-Sanchez & Plaza-Mejia (2011) addressed the issue of capacities wherein they acknowledge that it is not realistic to expect local governments to set limitations of numbers; it is essential to reach a balance between achieving economic returns and environmental conservation.

## **Social Impact**

In terms of the number of passengers, cruise tourism is on the rise. Destinations face both positive and negative impacts that include controlling and managing these impacts for sustainable development. Many researchers outlined concerns as to the social impacts of cruise tourism (Feighery, 2011; Nicely & Palakurthi, 2012). Brida et al. (2011) referred to the limited social interaction of cruise visitors with locals compared to other categories of tourist. They inferred that stay over tourism may have a greater impact on local communities due to their longer stay and increased opportunities to visit remote locations. Evidence of this point in St. Lucia is the popularity of many package tours that focus on the main sites of attractions while smaller groups enjoy tours that are more intimate.

There is also a feeling that cruise tourism limits social advantages. There is an indication of negative impacts on the host community such as traffic congestion and over-saturation of the community's services (Brida et al., 2011). Feighery (2011) noted that tourism might cause alienation of local communities and disturbance to social bonds. There is even a concern related to the disparity in the shopping experience of residents compared to visitors. Retailers of tourism products provided inadequate attention and poor customer service to members of the host community (Hurst & Niehm, 2012). While St. Lucia is not a shopping destination, there has been an increase in shopping facilities and vendors within this market segment (Hurst & Niehm, 2012). Such establishments are highly seasonal as there is a perception among residents that products and services cater

exclusively to tourists. A study by Brida et al. (2011) on the perceptions of the impact of cruise tourism on the local community indicated that residents conclude that there is a positive balance between the advantages of tourism in comparison to the cost of hosting visitors. Employment opportunities appear to be the main reason cited for this perception.

Belize, like several other Caribbean Islands, suffers from safety issues and perceptions, such as attacks on tourists and aggressive sales persons especially on the beaches. This is because tourists are perceived to be wealthy and locals at times, try to exploit this perception. In a study by Diedrich (2010), tourists indicated they felt unsafe and harassed whenever they left the compounds of the tourism village within the city of Belize. This perception affected the destination's reputation among cruise visitors as well as stay over tourists. Efforts at the Mexican cruise port of Majahau to revitalize the city, increase the attractiveness, and reduce the perception of being unsafe are underway; the results are widespread benefits to the local community (Papathanassis & Beckmann, 2011).

Brida et al. (2011) also performed a factor analysis on the South American destination of Cartagena de Indias in Colombia. The authors identified the following factors as critical to the development of successful community-based cruise tourism: (a) the inclusion of persons associated with the cruise sector, (b) the perception of the agreement with statements about changes in the lifestyle, (c) the perception of the agreement with statements about changes in public places, (d) the inclusion of persons associated with the cruise sector and with a high educational level, and (e) the inclusion

of persons who live in small households and who have positive attitudes towards tourism.

Nelson (2012) supported the following three recommendations to host destinations. First, construction of welcome centers in proximity to cruise piers provides opportunities to assist in financing community development of the host countries. Second, develop a variety of shore excursions focusing on visits to homes and communities. Third, facilitate a system to allow a higher portion of the revenue from shore excursions becomes due for the development of local communities.

Consistent with the research information on the cruise industry, there is a need to formulate a strategy building on the positive elements of the cruise industry and minimizing the possible downside effect. This effort requires careful development along with a stay over piece of the industry to advise a strategic position that will guide the future of the industry on the island. Embracing this strategy and implementing it by all industries is a task for the government of St. Lucia. The information collated here, though not exhaustive, provides sufficient information to allow for a well-researched and informed approach.

### **Transition and Summary**

Section 1 of this study outlined the purpose and the problem statement. Supporting the proposed doctoral topic is a comprehensive literature review outlining the main areas of the development of the tourism industry on the island of St. Lucia. The section enumerates the dependency of the island on tourism and provides the geographical location of the island. The intention was to increase occupancy levels in

large hotels on the island of St. Lucia. To provide research information that can help in the formulation of strategies to increase the occupancy levels in large hotels in St. Lucia, a review of the existing research information occurred in the areas of the food service industry, the hotel sector, the airline sector, marketing, and product development sectors.

Section 2 lists the problem and design in some detail. In addition, the section highlights the research methodology, the role of the researcher, the nature of the research, and the data collection methodology. The targeted research participants, the analysis techniques, the data collection methodologies, and the issues of reliability of the data collected and validity of the process are in this section.

## Section 2: The Project

The island of St. Lucia relies heavily on tourism for foreign exchange, job creation, and economic stability (St. Lucia Economic and Social Review, 2011). The intent of this study was to conduct in-depth interviews of respondents, soliciting for feedback relating to improving the occupancy levels of large hotels in St. Lucia. The basis for developing the questions was to assist in obtaining independent industry expert information from hotel general managers on the island. Through this study, I solicited feedback from experienced professionals representing the hotel industries.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to identify strategies that may help large hotels in St. Lucia increase hotel occupancy on the island of St. Lucia. The participants of this study were hotel general managers that had at least 15 years of experience in the hotel industry in St. Lucia. The study population included general managers of three large hotels in St. Lucia. One of the cases was of a successful hotel, and the two others were of hotels that are not operating at high levels of occupancies. Due to the high dependence of the island on tourism, any change in the performance of the industry directly affects the social and economic conditions of the island (St. Lucia Economic and Social Review, 2011). The study identified strategies to improve the performance and sustainability of hotel occupancy on the island of St. Lucia. The increased volume of visitors derived from the strategies gleaned from the hotel general managers may result in increased occupancy of hotel rooms.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I had the responsibility to collect data, conduct the interviews and note the responses. Specifically, I gathered unbiased data by way of conducting in-depth interviews. My role included the administration of all aspects of the interview to ensure saturation. This was accomplished by ensuring that all interviews allowed for full exploration of the subject and recognizing when no further new information was obtained. Additionally, I was vigilant to recognize bias and to mitigate against it where possible. It is important not to bring personal biases into the research, due to the level of exposure and experience that there may be in the area of the review. Also, occasional biases from the interview participants due to their experience required mitigation against these biases. In qualitative research, methodical triangulation is one way to mitigate against biases (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012). Integral to the process of mitigating biases is the issue of member checking as well as the process of selection of prospective candidates (Harper & Cole, 2012). The research on the issue of trustworthiness and mitigation of biases outline some recommended ways of avoiding traps when conducting qualitative research (Kim, Kim, Han, & Chin, 2015).

I achieved reliability in the research by adapting the guidelines for conducting research with human beings based on the Belmont Report. The guidelines aligned with the consent form that indicated that I respect the participants (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). Based on the protocol, participants understand the methods

for confidentiality and withdrawing from the study (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979).

Qualitative researchers employ a variety of techniques to increase the trustworthiness of the research. The trustworthiness of the research explored a number of main areas such as authenticity, goodness, plausibility, and credibility. A review of the created instruments and interpretive analysis was important. This showed that the entire research process was worthy. The processes often used to ensure trustworthiness include audit trails, reflexivity, thick and rich description, triangulation, and member checking (Harper & Cole, 2012).

Audit trails require keeping a detail and structured record of all aspects of the study (Harper & Cole, 2012). It is consistent with the work of an external auditor and includes keeping records of field observations, interview notes, journals, records, calendars, and drafts of interpretation of data. Maintaining the audiotapes, videotapes, and photographs for a period often between 3 to 5 years to in assist the audit program (Harper & Cole, 2012).

Reflexivity refers to mitigating the personal biases of the researcher and their influence on the interpretation of data (Harper & Cole, 2012). The main mitigating action is for the researcher explicitly to disclose their biases, assumptions, and parts of their background that could influence the inferences that they may make. The full disclosure allows researchers to be aware and sensitive to possible biases that they may cause at any stage of the research (Harper & Cole, 2012).



Thick and rich description involves the investigation of the uniqueness of persons, groups, and phenomenon. The requirement for corroboration of information is only possible if there is an in-depth understanding of the common areas that may exist. I also provided detailed reports on the interview environment, the participants, data collection, and the analysis procedure used. This fact added to the creditability of the research (Harper & Cole, 2012).

Methodological triangulation in the context of qualitative analysis requires the collection and analysis of data in more than one way (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012). Some of the ways cited was the sharing of data sets between researchers or the conducting of the research by individual researchers and then comparing the findings. Both have resulted in a higher level of trustworthiness of the research process (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012).

Member checking provides for the review and interpretation of the collated data by the participants. Researchers using this process check or approve specific aspects of the interpretation of the provided data. Often the data is specific to data that contributed to providing interview information and the related interpretation. This method, as well as the other methodologies, provides the base for mitigating biases (Harper & Cole, 2012).

In conducting qualitative research, it is important to note the effective ways of conducting in-depth, qualitative interviews, sometimes called the Interview protocol. Interviews used three main protocols: (a) informal, conversational interview, (b) general interview guide approach and (c) standardized open-ended interview (Turner, 2010). The

informal interview option is a spontaneous generation of questions through natural interaction with the participants. It is often a component of an ongoing observational fieldwork. The general interview guide approach allows a structured but informal approach. Using this protocol allowed for much flexibility and lacks consistency (Turner, 2010). The third and preferred protocol used is the standardized open-ended interviews. This option uses an extremely structured design as it refers to the wording of the questions. The participants answered the same questions, but I allowed open-ended responses. The open-ended nature allowed the participants to participate by providing as much information as they had. The main setback for this protocol was the possible coding of the data. This protocol is the more common and is the preferred approach to this study (Turner, 2010).

Triangulation in qualitative studies was the method used to check and validate the research. The data from three different sources, interviews, observation, and documentation along with independent reviews of data all provided convergent information that pointed to similar findings. The underpinning requirement was the convergence of information from multiple sources (Yin, 2014). There are a number of methodologies used to achieve this and included: (a) Data triangulation involves using differing sources of data. Each group or type of stakeholder categorized for program evaluated, (b) investigation triangulation involves the use of differing evaluators in an evaluation of a project. Each evaluator independently evaluating the project using the same tools, (c) investigator triangulation involves the use of multiple professional

perspectives to interpret a single set of data, and (d) methodological triangulation involves the use of multiple qualitative methods to study the program. In each of the four options above, once the independent results provided similar outcomes or converge, and then the results pass the test of validity (Yin, 2014).

As articulated by Petty (2012), the goal of a qualitative study is to explore, comprehend, and learn from lived human experiences. Understanding the experiences by the interaction between the parties is necessary. The research requirement was to use my expertise and training to explain the perspective of the interviewees through a written research report (Cunliffe, 2011). The role of the qualitative researcher differs from that of a quantitative researcher (Cunliffe, 2011). I used seven stages of qualitative research including (a) determining, (b) designing, (c) interviewing, (d) transcribing, (e) analyzing, (f) verifying, and (g) reporting in this qualitative research (Cunliffe, 2011).

I had to manage the process and establish a clear understanding of the problem statement followed by the purpose statement as well as the intended outcomes. Often researchers believe the responsibility for solving particular problems instead of adding value to the body of knowledge on the chosen problem statement inherently rests with them (Cunliffe, 2011). If the scholarly research provides benefit and insight to the global research on the issue, accomplishing the intended purpose of the doctoral study ensues.

I had the responsibility of managing all aspects of the project from the selection of the problem statement to the development of the questionnaire, design methodology, and selection of worldview. The study was a qualitative multiple case study using both

successful and unsuccessful large hotels in St. Lucia. An important part of this process was to ensure the environment of the interviews was similar and conducive to a relaxed, unfettered environment yielding unbiased and authentic results.

### **Participants**

The eligibility criteria for the study participants required that each had experience as a general manager of large hotels in St. Lucia for at least 15 years, and be proficient in English language. They also had to have experienced and led the decision making process for increasing and obtaining optimum occupancy rates in their respective hotels. Expert sampling is a type of purposive sampling technique used in this study. The purposive technique represents the technique used when the research needs to glean knowledge from individuals that have particular expertise (Molina, 2015; Radwan et al., 2012). Three participants participated in interviews, to represent each of three cases in the multiple case study research. The interviewees had to be distinguished from the reviewers of results in the investigator triangulation process. The first activity performed in regards to the reviewers was the selection of the proposed reviewers, who were not the participants used for the interviews. It was important to obtain reviewers of differing educational backgrounds and experience. In doing this, the responses obtained came from individuals with different educational and occupational backgrounds. I accomplished this by obtaining the following reviewers. Reviewer A was an air and seaports executive with more than 30 years' experience, reviewer B was a businessperson with more the 15 years' experience, reviewer C is a Civil Engineer with over 20 years' experience in his

field, reviewer D is an investment offshore banker with 15 years' experience, and reviewer E is a legal high court administrator with 20 years' experience.

To obtain access to the participants I obtained a list of the general managers of large hotels from the Ministry of Tourism and the St. Lucia Hotel and Tourism association. Following this I spoke to the prospective interviewee on the telephone and obtained verification from the ministry of tourism via telephone conversations of the length of tenure at the specific hotels cited. Having spoken to the participants, I sent them e-mails indicating the process that would be followed and the requirements of the University. On receiving the approval of the participants the approved documents were sent to them for execution.

A working relationship was established with each participant through e-mails and, phone calls. In addition a discussion with them on their specific career paths and intended future outlook at the industry in St. Lucia and competing markets helped them provide a view of the industry from their individual perspective. Follow-up interviews were also required for the review of transcripts and result information.

Particular attention was given to ensure that each of the interview participants had the prerequisite background that aligned with the overarching research question. The research question previously stated as; what strategies can general managers of large hotels on the island of St. Lucia utilize to increase hotel occupancy levels? This provides support for the issues of reliability and validity of the information gathered.

I enquired about the rating of hotels on island and the required of educational

standards for general managers of hotels on the island. The Minister of Tourism, who has the responsibility for the hotels that unlike North America and Europe there was not a prescribed methodology of providing a rating for the hotels or their general managers. Additionally the hiring of general managers relied on the private sector (owners) requirement for their hotel facility. To date, the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) is developing the standards for rating the hotels and standards but this is in the infancy stages. In the interim, the Ministry of Tourism performs reviews of hotels with the assistance of the Bureau of standards of St. Lucia. The hotels in the region have no requirement to seek operational excellence and hotel ratings, such as the “Star” system used in North America and Europe as reported in Forbes Travel Guide. Select hotels may do so to appeal to the international clientele.

### **Research Method and Design**

This section provides comparative information on the method chosen. The selected design of this study was qualitative multiple case study design. An in-depth review of the qualitative method, as well as the design chosen, follows.

#### **Method**

A qualitative case study methodology involves the study of a case (also referred to as the individual) is the primary unit of the analysis. The use of several case studies (individuals) within this study constituted a multiple case study. The intent of the study was to use the general managers of three sample large hotels on the island of St. Lucia and conduct case study analysis using open ended questions in interviews and probing

questions to obtain learned information about the case under review. I avoided long-winded questions or long interviews to reduce straying by the participants. The design of the questionnaire was open-ended.

The focus of this study was to explore the experience of large hotel general managers on the island of St. Lucia. A quantitative method of research neglects important aspects of human behavior and day-to-day life experiences (Turner, 2010). A quantitative method would not measure the emotional results of implementing strategies in the tourism industry. Qualitative research allows for the detailed review of human behavior and the experiences of the industry experts and the world in which they live (Rowley, 2012).

The strength of qualitative methodology compared to quantitative methodology for a study can contain specific descriptions of personal experiences; the interviewer can ask deep, meaningful questions to gain responses (Rowley, 2012). Through a qualitative research method of study, Barnham (2010) outlined the method as a way to explore the different perspectives of individuals and to develop a shared meaning. This method allows for the creation of a narrative of the information, and descriptions providing added insight to the research problem.

Qualitative researchers recognize behavior patterns, interview people, and record what they observe in a reality setting. A qualitative method of research allows for greater flexibility in data collection as compared to the quantitative method, ultimately allowing the research to be in-depth interviews of lived experiences (Rowley, 2012). Information

collected from the different methodologies assist in the final determination of the best-suited research approach.

A qualitative researcher understands human behavior and the experiences of the consumer; interpreted within the world they live (Rowley, 2012). The qualitative approach required me to observe, collect, and think about the phenomena. Barnham (2010) described four types of qualitative data collection tools, including (a) observation, (b) interviewing, (c) participation, and (d) ethnography. Obtaining data occurs by asking open-ended, semistructured interview questions administered to obtain random, unbiased qualitative information. Such methods result in significant success and an understanding of the environment under review. The study provides efficient and measurable survey results (Kahlke, 2014).

### **Research Design**

The selected research was a qualitative multiple case study design. This design provided flexibility to examine the problem statement under review (Phillips-Pula, Strunk, & Pickler, 2011). Petty (2012) noted that qualitative research design can be susceptible to some researcher bias if the researcher allows their personal feelings influence any component of the research. It is essential to mitigate the level of bias that may be acceptable by other researchers (Petty, 2012). The goal was to collect authentic information from industry leaders relating to sustainable growth strategies to increase the tourism industry in St. Lucia for large hotels.

Although the use of other research methods was possible, it was evident that a



multiple case study design allowed for authentic information. To ascertain the strategies showing the best probability of success, cases were subject to analysis and compared. Case studies allow for an empirical inquiry that allowed the investigation of cases within a real life setting (Yin, 2014). The qualitative method allows the researcher to obtain in-depth data that may be otherwise difficult to collect. Previous researchers use the qualitative approach to review and assess readiness, knowledge, skills, and abilities of various professionals. Additionally, the case study design provided an avenue to enhance the understanding of the specific problem under review (Lee et al., 2012; Morrow et al., 2012).

Case study was one option of qualitative research for this study. Case study research is an investigation and analysis of a single or collective case. The intent is to capture the complexity of the main object of the research study (Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). Case study research draws from a number of research methods including ethnographic, holistic, phenomenological, biographic, and naturalistic. As a study design, case studies main interest is in individual cases rather than specific methods of inquiry (Hyett et al., 2014). Against this background, the choice of this type of qualitative analysis was the more appropriate design to be able to collate data that assisted in providing pertinent information to develop strategies to increase occupancy levels in large hotels in St. Lucia.

For this study, I used data collection techniques, such as in-depth, face-to-face interviews, observations of the hotel industry, and a review of the documentation

available. The in-depth, face-to-face interviews allowed me to observe and explore the participants, understand their mindsets, behaviors, perception of readiness and life events that I had not had the opportunity to experience, prior. The advantage of the face-to-face interaction allowed for the observation of the participant expressions that facilitated learning about their uniqueness, experience, and knowledge. A multiple case study allowed me to collect data in a real-life setting. Multiple case studies provide a platform to understand the function of each case represented in the population under review (Stake, 2006). The main objective of multiple case studies is to gather as much relevant data as possible, but at the same time not to compromise the unique benefits of a case study design. Consistent with Merriam (2014), I collected and analyzed data from the selected cases and shared commonalities and relationships of the study. Multiple case studies are particularly adept at exposing many details allowing the better understanding of complex issues, augment external validity, and help protect against observer biases (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015).

It is essential to obtain quality qualitative research by the use of saturation techniques. Available research for qualitative studies outlines the need to use saturation as a guide for determining the quality and authenticity of the research sampling (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). Qualitative analysis predominantly uses this concept, and one has to be careful in using universal strategies to facilitate saturation. Unlike quantitative analysis, the objective is not to obtain a quantity of results but to obtain a more in-depth understanding of the research topic. This is facilitated by ensuring that the selection of

the participants follow criteria that will allow for this in-depth insight into the research subject under review (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). Though many qualitative studies are determined using saturation, the measure of this saturation is not the quantity of interviews completed. Data saturation is relevant because of the absence of the attainment of new information (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Tasked with collecting, coding, and monitoring the contents of the interviews, I was able to recognize the saturation point. These considerations provided a high probability of validation but were not the stand-alone criteria. The other issues of number and experience of selected participants also added to this (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Additionally, I completed a full analysis of the categories under review. I also provided explanations for any variability between the categories tested, while validating the relationships between them until a consequent theory emerged.

In qualitative research, transparency is a marker of quality, which means that the research should outline enough detail as to how data collection occurred (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). As previously outlined, the sufficiency of the sample used is dependent on the depth of data rather than frequency. There was a requirement to ensure that the participants had the required experience in the subject matter under review (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). Having the criteria was important for the participant selection process as a means for providing the details and strategies based on the experience of the research topic. The responses from these participants provided for the saturation requirements by ensuring the questions allowed for in-depth responses (Cardon et al., 2013). The intent,

per Cardon et al., (2013) and O'Reilly along with Parker (2012) was to obtain in-depth discussions through the interviews of the chosen participants. The achievement of data saturation was when there was no new data, no new themes, and the replication of the study was possible (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012).

### **Population and Sampling**

St. Lucia is a small island in the Eastern Caribbean, 238 square miles in area, with a population of approximately 160,000 people (St. Lucia Economic Review, 2011). The overnight visitors, on an annual basis, total approximately 400,000; cruise passenger arrivals represent approximately 600,000 people. The challenges faced by hotel managers on the island is growing the number of hotel guests and converting cruise visitors to stay over business to complement and grow the hotel performance.

The purpose of the study was to identify strategies that may help large hotels in St. Lucia increase hotel occupancy on the island. Interviews with General Managers of the selected case hotels in St. Lucia assisted in providing valuable information. The hotel size determined the chosen hotel experts to interview. The large hotels selected for this study are located in Appendix B. There are approximately 4,500 rooms available within the hotels in St. Lucia (St. Lucia Economic and Social Review, 2011). This count represents branded hotels, boutique hotels and small bed and breakfast-style facilities. In academia, there is often an acceptable sample size of research. Due to the acceptable sample size, some researchers indicate that the more cases included in a study, the more convincing the interpretation may be (Merriam, 2009).

### **Ethical Research**

Participants obtained advice on the ethical standards for recording and storage of information. Each person received an explanation of the ability of the participant to withdraw and the procedure for withdrawal without penalty. Each participant received, reviewed and signed a consent form for the protection of both the candidate and I. Part of my role was to provide all explanation and clarification to the participants to ensure that they fully understood the consent form prior to signing it. The consent form provided an overview of the study and a brief introduction of me. The consent form also explained that the study is strictly voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time.

Communication to the participants in writing informed them that the paper may become a published document on completion. It assured them of the confidentiality of their names and identities. The data collected in this study remains confidential. Storage of all electronic data and voice recordings is via a secure hard drive with an alphanumeric password of at least seven characters.

Participants who voluntarily participated in the interview received a copy of the results. Participants did not receive any form of incentives for participation in this study. I obtained written permission to conduct the interviews from all participants prior to commencing the interview. The Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the proposed study, as per IRB reference # 06-23-15-0328341. This process protected the University and the student from a possible violation of personal human rights. Securely storing the collated data for at least 5 years was the established standard

for adoption. After that time, shredding of all paper forms and field notes and permanent erasure of all electronic documents will happen. The intent of these protocols is to create a level of trust with the participants.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection and the method used by the author was an important part of the research process. An explanation of the instrument used in the process of data collection occurred here. Also explained in the following section is the data organization and grouping techniques (Barratt, Choi, & Li, 2011).

### **Instruments**

I was the primary data collection instrument and used 10 open-ended questions to guide the semistructured interviews with general managers of three large hotels in St. Lucia. The data collection was via personal, in-depth interviews. All questions were semistructured and open-ended. Petty, Thomson and Stew (2012) recommended replicating the setting of the interviews, making a record about the interview process and seeking to capture a full representation of the interview situation. As outlined by Santiago et al. (2016), a record of information of nonverbal details of the interview, such as tone of voice and voice pitch is essential. Often, the tone of voice and voice pitch can provide an indication of biases by either the interviewer or participant and as such, monitoring and managing voice pitch and tone was necessary.

As a means of organizing the interviews for this study, I used an interview guide that included the list of questions. I suggested keyword reminders to the interviewees for

follow-up on pertinent topics when needed. The interview ensured the exclusion of opinion and feelings of the participants, per recommendation of Turner (2010). The interviews of the experienced hotel general managers provided greater insight and clarity. In so doing, there was further clarity on the many issues that concern the industry (Driscoll, 2011; Talmy, 2010).

### **Data Collection Instruments**

I was the primary data collection instrument in the data collection process. The data collected originated from the participant interviews, documentation notes and observation notes. The participant-observation process was especially well suited to this project: Yin (2003) described the role of the participant-observer as being able to participate in a variety of roles within the case study situation and may actually participate in the events being studied.

Face-to-face interviews provided the primary source of data using semistructured interviews; secondary data were collected from collated documents and observation. The following describes the procedure used for collecting data from each source: With reference to interviews, I received permission to meet each participant, in a private location with the participant's organization. I reviewed with each participant the intent form and the purpose of the study. With the participants' permission, all interviews were audiotaped. At the conclusion of the interview, I advised the participants that they would get an opportunity to review the transcript from the interview. As it pertains to documentation, I obtained information on hotel occupancy from the St. Lucia Hotel and

tourism association and the Ministry of Tourism in St. Lucia, (Appendix B). In addition, the participants provided additional information on specific performance of the hotel. Under observations, I spent adequate time on the different hotel sites and took notes on property condition. I also noted the property layout and operational models. Interaction with guest also provided an indication of the origin of the clientele as well as the preferences.

There are a number of data collection sources, such as documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts. Documentary information is relevant to every case study topic (Balog, 2013). The documents considered can be a number of different types, such as letters, minutes of meetings, formal studies, news clips personal documentation as well as news clippings. Archival records include information such as Census data files, public use files, services records organizational records and survey data. The archival records used with other sources of information provide important information in producing a case study (Balog, 2013). Interviews provide the platform to obtain answers to questions specifically related to the case study under review to obtain responses relevant to the case from suitably qualified and experienced candidates. Direct observations allows a researcher to view the case in operation and to view, verify or corroborate information from other data collection sources (Pedrosa, Naslund, Jasmond, 2011). Participant observation is a special mode of observation in which the participant is not just a mere passive observer. In fact, roles in the field as well as the researcher participation in the action is the preferred way



(Pedrosa et al., 2011). A sixth source are physical or cultural artifacts (Pedrosa et al., 2011). A tool or instrument a technological device or other evidence may qualify as artifacts relevant to the case study. For the purpose of this study documentary information, observations, and interviews provided the source of evidence.

Four principles of data collection help provide the basis for meeting reliability and validity. The first guideline requires that multiple sources of evidence to collect data (Balog, 2013). This approach allows for the development of converging lines of inquiry. The creation of case database, that allows for an evidentiary base or a researchers report. This includes field notes, case study documents, tabular information or new narrative compilations (Pedrosa et al., 2011). Reliability relies on maintaining a chain of evidence similar to the application of a forensic investigation (Balog, 2013). This allows a reader to follow the collected data, the results, observations and conclusions derived from the process. The forth principle is exercising due care when using electronic sources since they can be tainted by opinion and bias (Pedrosa et al., 2011). This source can also overwhelm you since there may be substantial information that may be difficult to authenticate.

In following the guidelines for investigator triangulation, I used independent persons to review the data collated and to advise on the findings. The specific use and collation of data are important for the purposes of proving validity and reliability (Barratt, Choi, & Li, 2011). The literature reviewed outlined a number of data collection mechanisms such as documentation review, direct observation, participant observation,

interviews, physical artifacts, and archival records (Yin, 2014). Against the specific case study review, a number of issues may hinder the ability to use some of the above listed sources of evidence and information (Barratt, Choi, & Li, 2011). The use of multiple sources of data provided a more robust and thorough test for validity and reliability (Barratt et al., 2011). While conducting research, the convergence of information from multiple sources allowed for the achievement of the validity and reliability requirements under the requirements of triangulation. For this study, the use of documentation, observations, and interviews were the preferred methods. I triangulated three sources of data to achieve triangulation and validity within the study. In addition, member checking and investigation triangulation were the methods used to mitigate against biases, to provide validity and reliability.

The questions came from key findings of the literature reviewed. The structure of the open-ended interview questions allowed respondents to provide for in-depth responses about the major areas of interest in the hotel industry. This structure of the interview questions consistent with recent developments in qualitative research (Driscoll, 2011; Talmy, 2010).

### **Data Organization Technique**

Qualitative studies allow for data collection using observations, interviews, and document discovery (Rowley, 2012). For this project, I utilized the collection of data through the interviewing of general managers of hotels on the island of St. Lucia. Electronic storage of all completed interview responses was the storage protocol.

Grouping the data collected reflected areas of similar themes. In addition, data collected from the review of the documents such as St. Lucia Gazette, minutes from meetings of the St. Lucia Tourist Board, trip advisor and, observations of the hotel operations provided data from three sources to allow for triangulation.

The data resulted from the interviews conducted with select subjects in the hotel industry in St. Lucia, who have tourism expertise gained through years of service in the industry. The information reflected the experiences of experts that understand the tourism industry and the potential implications to the island of St. Lucia. The interviews, using open-ended semistructured interviews occurred via face-to-face meetings or telephone interviews. Both the participants and I agreed on the location for conducting the interviews. Conducting the interviews in an identical manner, as the face-to-face meetings with time agreed by both parties helped to provide the validity.

I collated and categorized the data obtained from the interviews of the industry participants in accordance with Merriam (2009). The data collected by transcription of digital recordings, organization of notes, pairing notes with digital recording, protecting the data, and then storage in accordance with Walden requirements. The next step was the identification of patterns and common themes. This information presented in a narrative form to allow for visualization of patterns. The comparison of findings and interpretation of collected data, followed by recommendations and conclusions formed the preferred framework.

Only I had access to consent documents and participant identification. With

written consent, the participants may receive their results; access to the data remains restricted to me. The data was stored in a secured place in a safety deposit box to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. I am the only one who has access to this file and will keep the information safe for a minimum of 5 years. Afterward, destruction of the data from the interview results will occur.

In addition to interviews conducted, the derivation of data came from two other sources: documentation and observation. As it pertains to documentation, I obtained information on hotel occupancy from the St. Lucia Hotel and tourism association, the Ministry of Tourism in St. Lucia and the statistical department of the Ministry of Finance, (see appendix B). In addition, the participants provided additional information on the specific performance of the hotel. Under observations, I spent adequate time on the different hotel sites and took notes on property condition. I also noted the property layout and operational models. Interaction with guest also provided an indication of the origin of the clientele as well as the preferences.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

Data analysis was a critical part of the research process. It was essential to sort and organize the responses from the participants to develop themes. The collation of similarities and patterns and organization as themes happened (Draper & Swift, 2011). Qualitative data coding is a three-step process that includes noticing, collecting, and thinking (Draper & Swift, 2011). Mehta (2011) suggested this process of data collection. Mehta (2011) proposed a strategy for breaking down data into smaller sections and

analyzing it into manageable parts. The interview questions were the main source of gathering data from industry experts, they concentrated on the following areas: (a) the effect of air transportation on the volume of visitors to St. Lucia, (b) the effect of hotel development, (c) the effect of marketing initiatives and hospitality development and, (d) the management and marketing of attractions. In addition, I collected documentation and data from associated government ministries and created a table from the information compiled. This information was grouped and compared to the findings from the interviews. In a similar manner, notes from the observations that were compiled allowed for cross referencing and validation of some previously compiled information, such as guest experience, safety, over cost of stay as well as operation method used, (all inclusive, breakfast only or any others used).

Analysis of data required the following of a specific format or sequence. In some case studies, the use of computer-assisted tool, such as specific software packages to analyze case study data is preferred. As an alternative, the use of an analytic strategy may be used. There are a number of options to analyze case study data (Barrat, Choi & Li, 2011). This may include pattern matching that reviews the data collated and recognizes specific patterns (Barrat, Choi & Li, 2011). The convergence of results based on pattern analysis will go a long way in meeting the validity requirements. Explanation building is an analytical tool that is a specific type of pattern matching (Barrat, Choi & Li, 2011). This method builds explanations about a specific case. The use of time series tools and analysis to determine intricate patterns in the collected data is a commonly used tool. The

fourth technique is logic models. This method stipulates and operationalizes complex chains of occurrences or events over extended periods (Barrat, Choi & Li, 2011). The results are in the form of specific cause and effect relationships. For multiple case studies, cross case synthesis allows for the comparison and synthesis of the different cases under study (Balog, 2013). It also allows comparison and contrasting of patterns from each case study. For this study, the recognition of patterns as well as cross case synthesis was the preferred analytical analysis techniques used.

Logical and sequential data analysis addressed all research questions. The data collected from each participant allowed for the grouping of the data under specific headings per question then tabulated for ease of review. Grouping similarities and differences occurred, commonality explained, and cross-referenced to supporting literature. Of the data obtained from documentation and observations, a similar sequential methodology allowed me to formulate groups and then I compared and contrasted the results with the findings of the interviews.

The analysis within the study used three sources of data. I tabulated the differing sources of data obtained through observation, documentation, and interviews. For each of the cases under review, the use of recognizing pattern recognition allowed for grouping of the common patterns. This allowed for the ease of ascertaining the issues of convergence of the collated information. Separate folders held the information obtained from each data collection process. Each document during its review was color coded to allow for ease of recognizing areas that were of similar themes. A review of common

themes from each data source provided the comparisons of the information collected.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability and validity were integral parts of the study. Tailoring methods to the research design was critical for the headings in a qualitative study. Expanding on the review of creditability, transferability, conformity, and dependability occurred in this section of the study.

#### **Reliability**

Reliability refers to the consistency of a measure. In case study research the maintenance of the chain of evidence is essential. It is important to ensure that the reader can make consistent linkages to each section of data collection, review and conclusion (Yin 2014).

The quality and reliability of the data is a critical component of this research project. Santiago et al., (2010) argued that verifying reliability is intuitive for the researcher throughout the research process. Trochim (2006) suggested that using rich, thick description when validating research is effective. Guba and Lincoln (1985) developed four criteria to judge qualitative research including (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) conformability. The research outlines that these criteria are a better fit to validate qualitative research due to the assumptions involved in conducting such research (Trochim, 2006). To ensure that the research is thorough it is essential to perform continuous research. This includes reading of peer-reviewed journal articles, and periodical publications is vital. This approach allows for an in-depth

understanding of the subject matter under review. In this study, I ensured the flow of information of from data collected, to analysis, to results and then to logical conclusions. In addition, the use of triangulation methods, showed convergence of pattern and information derived from the results of the three data sources that allowed for the qualification of each of the following requirements; reliability, validity, dependability, transferability, and conformity.

### **Validity**

There is always a need to ensure the validity and reliability of the data collection by ensuring that adequate reviews of the processes occur. The ability to ensure that the qualitative research was robust and accepted as scholarly work by a number of authors was a critical factor. The terminology often used is *qualitative rigor*, and it refers to the quality of the research information and the process (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Four areas of trustworthiness are relevant to qualitative research. These include credibility (truth-value), transferability (applicability), dependability (consistency), and conformability (neutrality). Credibility is analogous to internal validity in a quantitative research study. This method allows others to be able to assess the experiences of the participants. A qualitative study is successful and credible if the information presented is an accurate interpretation of the human experience. Transferability refers to the ability to use the information to explain similar areas of work from a different context.

Dependability is similar to reliability in quantitative terms. Achieving a dependable qualitative research occurs when another researcher can follow the decision



trail used by the researcher. The last major heading determining qualitative rigor is confirmability. It is similar to objectivity in a quantitative study. Achieving research occurs when all of the components of creditability, transferability, and dependability happen (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

The key is safeguard the data collected from bias and error. This could taint the results and inferences, and render the research sub-standard. In a qualitative analysis, a number of validation methods can ensure the reliability and validity. Achieving conformability helps mitigate bias that may occur in the data collection process.

Some strategies can ensure the validity. Among these strategies is a presumption of credibility, multiple and intensive data collection and concrete data collection (Caldwell, 2013). Achieving validity occurs through repeated experimentation or replication (Porte & Richards, 2012). The interviews conducted were in the same order to maintain consistency in the research to increase the soundness of the validity.

A qualitative study is successful and credible if the information presented is an accurate interpretation of the human experience. Internal validity threats are the procedures or the experiences of the research participants who may threaten my ability to obtain valid conclusions from the participant's data (Porte, 2013). This point may be due to the inability for the interviewee to separate the responses from his opinion on aspects as well as the recreation of a suitable setting for the interview. In proceeding with the interviews and data collection process, the monitoring of data saturation occurred by ensuring that I was vigilant in recognizing when the responses become repetitive and no

longer add new topics or themes. In case study research, especially when interviews are used the need to achieve saturation is essential. In this study, the interviewer had the responsibility of recognizing saturation by early detection of repetition and by ensuring the adherence to the originally allocated time. Though the more passionate interviewees sought to extend the conversation on certain topics of high sensitivity to them, I was able to move the conversation forward. I monitored any cases of repetition carefully to ensure data saturation while at the same time no interviewee caused the requirement to extend the allocated time.

### **Transition and Summary**

Section 2 provided the methodology and design of the research, multiple case study qualitative research. Additionally, the section provided relevant information and procedures for data collection, research methodology, defining of participants and the relevant questions. Within this section is information on obtaining and managing unbiased information. At the same time, the section outlines validity and reliability of the information provided.

The next section, Section 3, provides the findings as well as the application to professional practice and implications for social change. In addition, within Section 3 are the recommendations for action and further study. A summary and conclusion follows to include the key insights to the study in the form of the summary.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Within this section is a discussion on the findings of this study. Included in this section is the outlines of the interviews conducted using the prescribed questions, which are located in Appendix A. Also, consent procedures, which are located in Appendices A and C, as approved by the Internal Review Board of Walden with an approval reference # 06-23-15-0328341.

Analyzing the coded data stemming from interviews helped identify common themes. The themes developed from the codes and analysis performed for the hotels under review provided a summary of the information obtained from the interview process. This process allowed for the development of the conclusions and recommendations for further research.

#### **Overview of Study**

The purpose of the study was to identify strategies that may help large hotels in St. Lucia increase hotel occupancy on the island of St. Lucia. I conducted a series of interviews with General Managers of three large hotel properties on the island of St. Lucia. In addition, a review of the available documentation and observation of the hotel facilities formed the additional data sources. The findings from each data source provided the bases to develop the main codes and themes for the study. The results from each data source showed convergence on a number of key issues. The themes included marketing,

guest experience, air transportation, and product development. Data from three data sources using methodological triangulation provided the base for meeting reliability and validity requirements of the study. Consistent with the systems theory formerly described in this study, the hotel and tourism industry is a volatile and constantly changing industry that needs a system that can withstand such changes as changes in visitor needs and demographics. It is important to note the cultural, social stability, and environment within which a hotel operates may affect the ability for the hotel to provide good customer service. The management of these factors is critical.

The study results reflected the need for the interface with management, marketing, networking, and face-to-face information dissemination. In addition, the need to work together to ensure that budgets can be developed to meet the unique needs of the hotel industry is crucial to the success of the hotel and increasing the volume of tourists staying in hotels. The hotel sector has a number of inter-related systems with linkages with dependency on one another. Since the hotel industry is very dynamic, any change in one system may require adjustment and change in other systems. Understanding the needs of visitors while ensuring that it is in line with the customer service and amenities of the hotel is a key linkage. At the same time, hoteliers have to manage and marry the visitor expectations with all the aspects of the industry. The creation of a system that looks at the air transportation to allow visitors get to the hotel destination is essential. The air transportation must be easy and economical to the visitor as compared to the competition in the market. Ensuring that there are ample tours and excursions to keep

visitors engaged is a vital input to the overall system. Providing a safe and secure environment within the hotel and on the island is also an important requirement. Consistent with the systems theory formerly described in this study the hotel industry is a volatile and constantly changing industry that needs a system that can handle such changes, linkages and inter-dependencies of the all these constantly changing areas (Cox, Webster, & Hammond, 2009). It is important to note the cultural and social stability and environment within which a hotel operates. The established environment impacts the ability to provide the customer service and to meet expectations and this too must be managed in the context of the multiple systems that require management simultaneously. As formerly cited, the complex system theory consisted of dynamics within systems, systems theory, resulting from (a) competitive environment, (b) constant changes, (c) cultural environment, (d) unpredictability, and (e) non-linearity of institutions (Cox, Webster, & Hammond, 2009). The conceptual framework provided a structure that allowed the connection of relationships between the existing literature and the conducted research. Understanding how each component of the hotel industry and related industries functioned, assisted in development of the main themes that would allow for improved hotel occupancy rates. The conceptual framework helped guide the understanding of the different functions and linkages within the industry. All of these align with the tenants reviewed in the research and, thus provides the conceptual framework for its review.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The overarching research question was as follows: What strategies can general

managers of large hotels on the island of St. Lucia utilize to increase hotel occupancy levels? The findings of the data collected revealed the themes of marketing, air transportation, product development, and guest experience. The codes found provided the main areas that the interviewers discussed during their interviews. The interaction with the government minister provided the perspective of the government as it referred to activities deemed by the hotels as dependent on the government.

In each interview, the interviewee provided permission to use their offices to conduct the interview. Each interviewee responded to the questions posed by the interviewer. The interviewees provided free and open responses to all the questions. Each of the respondents was confident and clear of their responses. None of them showed any discomfort in participation; all were supportive. The participants indicated a need for there to be a common thrust to sustain the tourism industry on the island. The summarized data from the transcripts aids with forming the information within the codes below. Also, the data collected, codes, and themes help with forming the inputs to allow for the reflection of the areas that outline strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the destination. The codes developed were, marketing, training, crime, environment, guest experience, travel agents, airlift, types of hotel, government and development. A summary of the responses from the interviewees grouped contained under each of the codes as outlined above. This summary provides a representation of the information provided by each participant under these specific headings.

## **Marketing**

GM A indicated that the owner, has created critical partners in the industry over the years, and spearheads the marketing (implementation of aggressive marketing plans) for the hotel chains. He explained that the chairperson of this facility, over the last three years, developed a strong relationship with the travel agents in North America and Europe; and most of our business comes through travel agents. Further, the hotel managers and an aggressive marketing team accentuate the marketing drive. However, Anuar, Ahmad, Jusoh, and Hussain (2012) indicated that word of mouth was a strong tool to assist increasing visitors to the island. The GM A also outlined that well-funded marketing budgets ensure the required market penetration. This facility was able to leverage economies of scales (due to multiple properties) in other areas of their business to reduce cost in these areas. This practice allowed the surpluses to provide higher budgets for marketing.

GM B indicated that the implementation of a marketing plan and the merging with a master marketing plan for the island was critical. GM B lamented about the lack of a suitable budget for marketing, and it was a critical factor. In fact, established research indicated that there is little evidence that points to marketing being influential (William & Spencer, 2010). GM B also advised that they had a good visitor market share from Martinique and Trinidad. These two markets were cited as the two major markets within the region where more development is possible. The Caribbean market is a developing market, and strategic development of it would be required. This lead to the alignment of

the hotel product to market demands as indicated by Brookes and Roper (2011).

GM C indicated that the emphasis is the marketing done in Europe and North America. He stated that the hotel is doing very good marketing in London, and all of Europe. He further outlined that his facility had developed marketing strategies for the Caricom countries and that they have experienced growth in visits from the French communities of Guadeloupe, St. Marteen, and from Martinique. Due to the dependence on these markets, the success of the industry depends on the effectiveness of this marketing to drive visitors to the island and the respective properties. The travel agents remain an important part of the trade and part of integrated marketing plans, but they too have challenges in convincing the visitors to choose specific destinations (Pike & Page, 2014). GM C reflected that success is heavily dependent on the interface with travel agents. Additionally, the Caribbean market is a key market for the three star all-inclusive hotels.

The GOSL saw its role as the marketing of the destination and outlined that they spend approximately EC\$40 Million on marketing annually as stated by the Minister of Tourism in the Government of St. Lucia. The government still believes that there should be no cuts in this budget because tourism is the main economic driver on the island. Through the Ministry of Tourism (MOT) and the St. Lucia Tourist Board (SLTB), they successfully market the destination in key source markets such as North America and Europe. The government officials indicated that this marketing thrust and spend is essential for growth and sustaining the tourism product. Again critical to the success is



the knowledge that the price and cost of the destination to the guests have proven to be the most important drive (Williams & Spencer, 2010).

### **Training**

GM A believes that the staff is the most important aspect of the service delivery chain. The philosophy of the hotel is to train and re-train all employees. The property has developed its institution, Corporate University to facilitate this training philosophy. At the institution, employees gain direct training and the avenues to complete their secondary and tertiary education. He also stated that the company foster relationships with some selected training institutions that concentrate on hospitality and hotel management. This drive is essential, due to the lack of suitable training facilities that concentrate in hospitality and hotel management on the island. Hotel A seeks to fill the void or the gap in the area of training.

GM B outlined that the hotel does not have any training facilities and as such, this void in such an institution creates a significant lack of an on island source of potential trained. He stated that he believed that St Lucia required a training institution exclusively for the hospitality sector. He further qualified this by indicating that the island does not have adequate training for the diverse skill sets required in the industry and is a significant concern to the industry. GM B indicated that training is a key element for the hotel, but it is important that there is a need to establish a base to build upon. Dhar (2015) outlined the importance of training while supporting the findings of the research information learned.

GM C sees training as being one of the biggest challenges the island faces and outlined the lack of suitable training institutions for staff and hotel trade. GM C outlined that training was required in all aspects of hotel operations. The participant did however, indicate that St. Lucians are willing to try to learn the trade. GM C has not seen sufficient effort of the government to understand these needs.

The GOSL representative recognized the need for training though their emphasis is in different areas than the hotels would like the concentration. They cite police, customs, and taxi drivers as the focus. This GOSL explained that a lot of training is undertaken, in collaboration with the SLHTA in particular; and the Ministry and SLHTA collaborate in lots of instances in ensuring that there is training at different levels, Culinary, Service to Management and taxi drivers. The hotels are looking for institutions that can become the source of possible candidates for the hotel employee recruitment. This practice seems divergent to what the government is concentrating on and has created a gap that needs rectifying. In furtherance of the research, it is apparent that service levels in hotels improve once there is training available (Dhar, 2015).

#### 1. Crime

GM A stated that crime and security are the major challenge to the industry and the hotel alike. He expressed concern that if crime is not properly managed it could result in a collapse of the hotel industry. GM A further indicated that trip advisor and social media are avenues for guests to post their comments, likes, and dislikes instantaneously. Hotel A's leadership ensures that managers review trip advisor daily to obtain updated

reports on the destination and property to devise ways to augment and manage the impact. As far as this GM was concerned, any crime at all can negatively affect the destination, brand, and occupancy rates and as such, it is a serious issue. The security of the beaches continues to be a challenge. Lorde and Jackman (2013) looked at the effect of crime on a neighboring island of Barbados and determined that it created a negative impact on volume of visitors and the economic benefit to the island.

GM B outlined that he found crime levels quite low on the island and hoped this can be maintained in the long-term. This point was contrary to the views of GM A. GM B indicated that the level of crime was low as compared to other Caribbean islands. GM A advised that any crime whatsoever, was unacceptable and could negatively affect the number of visitors to the island. It was interesting that they have taken differing perspectives on the issue of crime. In both cases, both general managers eluded to the management of the crime reports. With social media, it is challenging to control the truth as well as the misinformation. The managers felt that there is not enough done by the government to stamp out at least the issues of harassment on the beaches and the streets.

GM C sees crime and security as major issues that create major hurdles for the hotel. He indicated that he thought that the most significant threat to the industry was security and crime. He lamented that security firms were not reliable and the police presence though apparent is not effective in delivering the service. The beaches and the Gros Islet Street jam continue to pose major challenges. The issue of crime has become more and more apparent in recent times and can affect the ability to attract guests and

consequently occupancy rates. In performing this review, it became evident that the location of the hotel may contribute to the crime due to accessibility. Hotel C is in the heart of the main tourist street on the island with all major restaurants and night.

The GOSL representative has concerns about crime and security but stated single isolated incidents do not adversely affect the destination. This minister compared the crime activity in St. Lucia with that of some competing destination such as Jamaica, Mexico and Honduras. He noted that crime in these competing destinations were significantly greater than St. Lucia, but these destinations were able to sustain and grow the tourism numbers. They do cite a number of initiatives to manage and control such crime events, but the success in so doing is questionable. The Minister indicated that sporadic events of crime are less likely to affect the long-term impact on the tourism industry. Research literature found supported the findings of the impact of crime on the industry, but it is evident that there is a need for a better understanding by the government and hotels (Lorde & Jackman, 2013).

## 2. Environment and excursions

GM A outlined that the environment and excursions are an integral part of the product, and increasingly the guests are looking for additional benefit in determining what destination to choose. In response to the question on the importance of excursions and tour sites GM A responded by saying that excursions have a very significant impact, since visitors choose a destination, based partially on the presence of choice and quality of interactive excursions. GM A indicated that the previous thinking that sun and sea

were the only factors taken into consideration in making a decision to visit a destination was no longer the case.

St. Lucia has several natural sites and famous heritage locations. Many of these are well kept and visited by the guests. This forms part of the product and provides a positive impact. This executive has established a high importance level of sites and tours, and this is consistent with the research literature on the issue. Well documented is the impact of excursions and sites while indicating a negative impact can arise for the guests and locals if not adequately managed (Brida et al., 2011)

GM B cited tours and heritage sites as critical to attracting guests. GM B further outlined that the clientele no longer want to see only the sun and sea as the main pull, but request other attractions to make their decision to visit the island. The development and upkeep of these sites, the pricing for visitors, and are key factors in guests making the decision to come to St. Lucia. The responses were consistent with GM A and followed the literature on the issue.

Consistent with GM A and GM B, GM C reflected that there is not enough emphasis on the upkeep of national sites and treasures. He noted that the guest seemed to look for the most popular but safe venues. Additionally, obtaining the correct price points for the venue could either lure or chase away prospective visitors.

The GOSL is aware of the importance of the historical sites and recognizes the need to keep the sites safe and in good condition. However, some privately owned sites pose challenges to enforcement of standards and are difficult to control in the absence of

the required legislation. However, the GOSL representative did have some divergent views to the hotels on pricing of tickets for tours. He outlined that the price of excursion tickets were relatively low as compared with some other international tours. He believed that the quality, reliability and quality of service were the more significant factors as outlined in the following quotation from the GOSL:

I do not think that cost is a factor when it comes to the sites relative to other attractions found around the world. I believe the prices are actually extremely low. What is more significant is the quality of the service, the variety and reliability of the service. The GOSL, however, did reinforce the knowledge that excursions are one of the main strengths of the island. Feighery (2011) supported the findings here by noting that the management of the sites is a critical aspect of customer experience and local acceptance.

### 3. Guests

Guest satisfaction is of highest priority to Hotel A and its respective GM A. They try to ensure that the experience at the hotel and any venue visited by the guests is a positive one. Hotel A has a high return clientele, approximately 30% to 35%, and much of this achieved by word of mouth from guest to guest. Monitoring and the use of social media is a key tool with Hotel A, and they have seen some success using it. This facility tries to ensure that the focus of all the employees, no matter the level of the staff is towards serving the guests and ensuring a pleasant stay on the property as well as on the island. Tourism friendly destinations have positive customer reviews (Anuar et al., 2012).

This comment highlights the importance of ensuring a positive tourist experience, minimizing any potential setbacks.

Meeting the expectations of the guests is one of the most important aspects of the guest interface as dictated by GM B. The interviewee did not have firsthand information on upkeep of the different venues and sites that independent parties manage. GM B did acknowledge the locations he visited have been in acceptable condition. The interviewee did not provide much concentrated information of guest experience but outlined that the price point for the rooms and destination were important.

Guest satisfaction is critical according to GM C, but there are hindrances for regional guests in air transportation and cost of this travel. Additionally, for the North American and European trade landing at Hewanorra Airport is a concern. The distance from the hotel (about 2 hours' drive) and the road transfers are long and windy, and guests complain about it continuously.

As it refers to the guests experience, the government (GOSL) has recognized the niche markets that can be beneficial to the growth of the industry and supports many programs emphasize weddings, health and wellness, diving and a number of key areas. The minister indicated that St. Lucia is a renowned honeymoon destination and this helps in providing better occupancy year-round. Further understanding the needs of the guests is a continuous process, and the government ministry, as well as its statutory authority, continue to understudy the needs of guests, and try to tailor the marketing thrust to respond to these needs. The GOSL have also cited some areas of failure in being able to

set and monitor standards. They noted that though they had been slow in establishing standards, the issue was the implementation and enforcement. This was the responsibility of another government ministry and was not controlled by the tourism ministry. This point is a concern since it is difficult to ensure guests satisfaction without being able to set and monitor Hotel standards. The minimization of negative guest experience is a critical aspect of the growth of the industry and increase in occupancy for hotels, this along with ensuring positive experiences go a long way in spreading positive news on the destination (Anuar et al., 2012).

#### 4. Travel agents

GM A believes the travel agents are the main tool for marketing their product and hotels worldwide. Hotel A ensured the highest possible relationships with the agents and ensures that all the major travel agents visit the properties/hotels through familiarization trips. The leaders have devised an incentivized annual reward and recognition program for the travel agents. The GM A placed special emphasis on paying commissions that are better than the competitors are and doing so on a timely basis. The travel agents and destination management organizational leaders were well-established individuals and have become an integral part of the travel and tourism trade (Pike & Page, 2014).

According to GM B travel agents are an integral part of the industry and a requirement to assist in filling hotel rooms. Tour operators are considered as the main drivers in the hotel industry. However, he advised that more properties still try to reduce



exposure and expense by trying to drive guests to the hotel without them. This property suffered from insufficient funds to cover operating costs and thus marketing suffered.

GM C indicated that the use of travel agents is the key to the success and higher occupancy rates on the island. In that regard he indicated that they work very close with the travel agents. He felt that the formation of relationships to serve all source markets was critical to the success of the destination hotel. His experience in another hotel branding has supported this approach. The use of travel agents is the most effective way to get the message out to prospective guests.

The GOSL recognizes the importance of the travel agents and the government participates in many travel agent awards worldwide. The travel agents obtain awards at specially designed events and are an integral part of the tourism trade. The minister acknowledges full participation by the Ministry of Tourism and the SLTB in special events and interfaces. The island takes part in many familiarization events as well as sponsoring some key ones. The attendance at strategic travel agent events worldwide is an important aspect of the role of the government. The tourism industry is a dynamic one that changes continuously, travel agents assist in keeping the sectors up to date and providing the correct messages (Pike & Page, 2014).

## 5. Airlift

GM A acknowledged the importance of air transportation. He advised that since his arrival on the island in 2001 there has been significant improvements in the airlift out of the USA and Europe. Notwithstanding he indicated that there can be further

improvement and growth in air transportation and that it must remain as a critical factor for consideration. However, GM A believed that there is a need for competitive pricing for the airline tickets on the main routes from North America and Europe. The participant outlined that the high-ticket prices can affect the rates that one can provide to the market and negatively affect the profitability of the hotel as well as the occupancy rates that one can achieve. The airlift in St. Lucia does not follow the typically advised tents as outlined by Almeida (2011). There is no local carrier, LCC, nor hubs in St. Lucia.

Consistent with GM A, GM B reflected on an improved airlift regime over the years that seemed to match the room stock on the island. GM B cited the challenge as the pricing of the tickets and the effect it can have on the profitability of the hotel. GM B indicated that to reduce the combined price to the guests, a reduced room rate was required to offset a high-ticket price. It can also make the destination as a whole an expensive one. GM B also indicated that the type of airlift is good, and there is the variety of seat types offered at a competitive price.

There seemed to have been consensus here as GM C noted that the availability of airlift to North America and Europe improved immensely and supported the trade adequately. However, he is divergent from the other hotel managers in that the participant believed that the airlift reliability, cost, and equipment type for regional travel was poor and needs much attention. GM C noted that the airline prices are prohibitive and negatively affect regional travel. GM C believed that sea transfers would help the industry.

The government through the SLTB and SLASPA spearheaded an airlift strategy over the years and saw the stabilization of the airlift in the main source markets of North America and Europe. The GOSL representative outlined that it was a major concern. He acknowledged that the air transportation is at its highest than it has ever been, but the issue is that it cannot expand any further unless new additional more hotel rooms become available. The representative admitted that St. Lucia has done well over the years, but the short-term vision does not look good if there is not a comparative development plan and strategy. The interface with airlines and the mutual understanding of the needs resulted in appropriate aircraft reconfiguration. There is limited competition on routes that result in high airfares, but strategically the government realizes that increased room stock is required to facilitate competition and for the airlines to remain profitable. Consequently, the approach of the government is one of trying to develop the additional room stock along with competition in airlift. At times, incentives such as minimum revenue guarantees are required. The governmental leaders have been willing to support the industry in the past and have indicated the willingness to continue to do so. St. Lucia does not benefit from airline competition, and LCCs are not part of the travel options experienced in St. Lucia. The island has not developed the air transportation and hotel industry sufficient to attract the required competition (Ashiabor & Wei, 2013).

## 6. Types of Hotel

GM A believed that it was important to know and understand the needs of the clientele that the hotel is seeking to attract. In fact, he stated that the market demands it

and statistics show that the all-inclusive resorts are the most successful. The information and research performed by Hotel A revealed that the luxury all-inclusive brand is a well sought after product for persons seeking to go on holiday specifically in the Caribbean. The ability of the hotel to keep such impressive occupancy numbers is because of catering to the needs and demands of the specific market. GM A noted that criticism stems from not supporting other private sectors such as restaurants. However, contrary to this thinking, in this competitive economic environment, the participant indicated that one must first get the guest to the market by understanding them and providing them with what they want. If not, you run the risk of them not coming to the island at all. Once tourists are at the property, there is a need for the interested sectors to engage, the hotel to determine how there can be programs to benefit all. Getting the hotel type correct for the target market is an important component in growing and sustaining occupancy in hotel chains (Kim, Cho, & Brymer, 2013).

GM B explained the various hotel types and advised on the differences stemming from the dining and drinking packages offered. There are a number of hotel types European pricing (EP) that provide breakfast, American pricing (AP), Middle American pricing (MAP), and all-inclusive. Hotel B is an EP facility type believed to be appropriate for the market segment.

GM C explained the availability of a diverse type of hotel on the island from three to five stars is a positive attribute. He stated that, he believed that the strength of his hotel was the fact that it is an all-inclusive, three-star hotel that offers very good rates. The

participant indicated that the hotel provided for the variety of experiences and price points for the guests considering St. Lucia. GM C acknowledged that the all-inclusive operating option is what the majority of the guests request. Additionally, Hotel C provides this option.

The government acknowledged that there is a variety of hotel types but recognized the need for all the different operating structures. The GOSL outlined that St Lucia over the later part of the last decade had become widely known as a luxury market, due primarily to weddings, honeymoons, and romance. The participant, however, did not indicate the preferred type of hotel in terms of operation. Rather, he advised that the origin of the visitors determined the success of the hotels. There is a level of concern about the lack of development in new room stock, but the GOSL acknowledged that the present stock is of a high quality. A number of small bed and breakfast properties suffered since the 2007 Cricket World Cup. The GOSL believed that these need some special attention and could affect the way the destination envisioned. The research literature on hotel types confirmed that the hotel type does have an effect on customer satisfaction and on the decision to visit a destination (Kim et al., 2013). The research supported the findings of this section and provided evidence of the alignment of the research.

## 7. Government

GM A acknowledged that the government tried to provide incentives to support refurbishment and a level of redevelopment of hotels. The participant further agreed that

the government became more active in marketing the destination. GM A noted that the hotel business changes quickly and the private sector timelines often, do not match that of the government. GM A also believes that the GOSL has been tardy in getting to understand the importance of the industry and the multiplier effect to the economy.

Government through SLTB, SLASPA, and the government Ministry improved the contribution to the development of the tourism industry considerably. Achievement of this point occurred by providing incentives for refurbishment and development of hotels. GM B made this statement recognizing the efforts of the government.

GM C indicated that government incentives are available. Further, the participant felt that there was not enough done to ensure safety on the island and that crime was a major concern. The participant also advised that the government should establish a national tourism master plan. The latter two hotels did agree with hotel A on the incentives and marketing done by the government but did not expound on them.

GOSL indicated that they continue to support the sector through the provision of incentive packages that support the existing and prospective new hotel interests. The Minister indicated that a number of pieces of legislation supporting development and providing incentives exists. The Minister did lament that he believed that the hotels are not taking full advantage of the available incentives. The responses on the role of government in assisting in the growth and sustaining the occupancy numbers revolved around legal framework to provide tax relief for development of new and existing properties. The supporting literature outlines that there is a strategic and important role

for governments in developing and sustain tourism, especially in states where the government is responsible for tourism planning and promotion (Bhuiyan, Siwar, Ismail, & Islam, 2011). This point is consistent with the findings but there is evidence of divergent thinking in the specifics role of the government.

#### 8. Development

GM A outlined that Hotel A prides itself in revamping their facilities periodically and wanted to ensure that returning visitors see an improvement every time they visit the specific property. The participant indicated that maintaining the hotel standards are critical to the brand and the guest experience. Their structure and size allowed them to improve and revamp at affordable and economical prices. The participant further explained this point and reflected that they started with one resort and at present have about twenty resort-style hotels. The use of economy of scales has benefitted Hotel A in procurement for development and rates for construction. Rogerson (2012) indicated the importance of hotel development and improvement to hotel facilities.

GM B lamented that Hotel B went through years of lack of upgrades and lack of funds to repair and upkeep the property. Consequently, the availability of rooms suffered. Further, GM B indicated that this affected the revenue position of the hotel due to a reduced room stock. The hotel managers saw business returns dwindle and could not provide the level of services required. A major issue cited by GM B was the need to truck water to the property that further exacerbated the financial position (EC\$900,000.00 per

annum). The tax and value added taxes of the island created pressure on the cost structures and hampered the ability to renovate rooms.

GM C stated that improvement of the plant to enhance the experience of the guest is an important component of the overall plans of the hotel. Additionally, the participant advised that the government had provided support in the form of legislated incentives. However, the ability to take advantage of such incentives depended on the cash position of the hotel.

GOSL noted that there is one major refurbishment underway on the island, but acknowledged that the government recognized the need for new development and new room stock. The minister stated that over the last few years, they had not been successful in getting any major new hotel developments started. As per quotes highlighted previously, they do believe that the incentives available through legislation provide a suitable basis to attract the required investor.

The collated information shows that there are many similarities in the hotel responses for the representatives. However, there are some key misunderstandings with the government and some of the government thinking. This concept started to provide a better understanding of what is required to help develop ways to improve and maintain high occupancy levels. The improvement of hotel plants and a planned revamp of the hotel facilities are key ingredients to hotel guest experience and return visitors (Rogerson, 2012). Improving hotel plants is a factor realized by the hotel managers interviewed and their submissions reflect this point.



Reviewing the codes and the information from each participant, the following themes are prominent, pertinent, and essential to the industry and the sustaining of tourism numbers and occupancy rates; marketing, air transportation, guest experience, and product development. The section below expands on these main themes. The information contained here along with the coding information forms the base information to derive the pertinent information in the form of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

***Marketing.*** All respondents indicated the ability to market was one of the major factors in attracting guests to the island and specifically to the resort. There were some common factors in the use of travel agents. The use of travel agents seemed to be one of the most successful and more impactful ways of driving guests to the island. Resources and effort concentrated on travel agents by all the hotels as well as the government. Furthermore, one cannot discount the word of mouth, the strategic pricing of the rooms, and the cost of living in the destination.

Hotel managers relied on return guests, and there was a particular emphasis on the development of the island and quality of the hotel plant. One recognized the attraction for guests exceeded the beaches and the sun, but included excursions, the development of the sites, and infrastructure that allow for an upsell for the destination. It is often the budgetary allocation and the specific plan that targets the appropriate market segments. Many resorts do not have the resources to provide for sustainable occupancy rates and revert to a lesser impactful mechanism to try to attract guests. At times, per Hotel C, hotel

leaders rely on the reduction in room rate to become competitive and the use of social media to advertise the bargains.

Hotel managers in St. Lucia market the destination successfully as a wedding venue. This technique brings about year round business for the hotels on the island. Special shows and festivals augment this by increasing the volume of visitors in areas where visitation is historically lower than required. However, it is important to note that the overall price of the visit and the meeting of customer expectations are critical to the success of the marketing drive (Williams & Spencer, 2010).

*Air transportation.* Air transportation to the island over the years developed in line with the requirement of hotel rooms. There seems to be adequate airlift from the main source markets of North America and Europe (UK). The airlift at this stage provided adequacy in seats for the hotel rooms on the island. However, the research brought out the need to increase the room stock requiring increased airlift. Also, there is little competition within travel sectors and the tourism stay is dependent on the price structures of the airlines. If for any reason the price of the airlift becomes non-competitive, the hotel sector only has the option to reduce their room rates to keep the business or lose the business to the competitor. As a result, air transportation is an extremely sensitive area that is dynamic and monitoring it closely allows for a suitable response to market changes. The government advised that support for minimum revenue guarantees was previously in place, and they are willing to support it again if required.

St. Lucia is a high priced tourism offering and with that, the airline leaders worked with the destination by providing aircrafts with the required number of first class seats. The challenge used to be ensuring that the first class cabin is full on each journey. This strategy maximized the returns to the airlines and assisted in keeping the seat prices throughout the rest of the aircraft competitive. The airports in St. Lucia do not have some of the typical components, such as LCC's and competition in routes; this is a critical factor in growing airlift and sustaining competitive ticket prices (Almeida, 2011). It would be advisable for the government to look at a development airlift strategy to include these as a medium to long-term initiative.

***Guest experience.*** All the hotel participants highlighted the guest experience as a major reason guests return to the island or give the island a positive rating to their friends and associates. In considering this, the cost of activities, as well as goods and services, are important considerations for the guests. The expectation is that there is value for money and a favorable exchange rate assists in that regard. St. Lucia has a range of categories of hotels from three to five star properties and can provide a diverse quality and price package to possible guests.

One of the strongest areas provided for positive feedback from guests was the hospitality of the staff and people of St. Lucia per GM A. GM A indicated the St. Lucian people had the basic required qualities and training resulting in great employees for the industry. The issue of the destination being in a hurricane belt is also important. It is often difficult if not impossible to design around the hurricane season and to keep the guest

experience positive if indeed a hurricane or major storm occurred. To compound this northern part of the island, where most of the hotel plants are suffers from acute water shortages during the dry season. One hotel has seen water bills of approximately \$900,000.00 (usual consumption from municipal should not exceed \$300,000.00 annually) affecting profitability and the ability of the hotel managers to market or perform the required maintenance or improvement. It cannot be understated that the minimization of the negative guest experience is a critical aspect to the growth of the industry and increase in occupancy for hotels (Anuar et al., 2012).

***Product development.*** The development of the hotel property and the destination are both important and essential (Rogerson, 2012). At times, neither hotel ownership nor the government can afford to develop the hotel facility or the destination respectively. The issue of adequacy of budgets and free cash flows are areas that can hinder such development. As a destination, it is essential to control crime and ensure security on the island. This study showed the different levels of importance placed on crime by the hotel sector versus the government. Seemingly, the hotels deem any criminal activity whatsoever to be significant and can change the occupancy and volume of visitors since social media provided a medium to get this type of information to a world audience in real time. The government leaders, though, acknowledging crime is important, also looks at crime relative to the competition in the market that would reveal that St. Lucia is not as crime ridden as some of the leading tourism based destinations.

The development of the roads and infrastructure, as well as proper upkeep of the Heritage sites and tour locations is key to providing a suitable environment for the tourism industry (Andergassen, Candela, & Figini, 2013). St. Lucia is making significant positive strides in these areas and has resulted in a destination with high recognition. The government worked closely with the hotel sectors through the St. Lucia Tourist Board (SLTB), St. Lucia Air and Sea Ports Authority (SLASPA), and St. Lucia Hotel Association (SLHTA). The leaders of those entities provided incentive programs through the passage of the Tourism Incentive Act, and other development legislation that reduces the tax requirement once hotels upgrade and improve their properties. Many of the hotels used and continue to use these incentives to remain competitive in their respective markets.

All the hoteliers cited hospitality and training in the sector as a major area of concern. GM A, B, and C all highlighted that the training in the hotel fields of hospitality, hotel management, cooking, and other sectors were nonexistent on the island. In fact, one hotel, Hotel A, established a Hospitality University on the property to fill the gap caused by the absence of the service on the island. Conversely, the government leaders believed that they provided adequate avenues for training but it was evident that the training provided through the government is for government personnel that interfaced with tourist at the first line of contact. Resolution of this significant divergence is critical since the Hotels all cited this as a major area of need.

The need to develop the product is an issue that is worthy of exploration by some researchers. Making the determination of whether to develop the natural resources or invest in the island culture are issues that require review (Andergassen et al., 2013). Further, as shown, the issue of controlling the cost to the consumer is also a critical aspect of any tourism destination (Andergassen et al., 2013).

The reviewers chosen were professionals with at least 15 years' experience in a related field other than hotel management. In addition, they had to be of good standing in the community and had to have at least a first degree in their chosen area of expertise. All reviewers obtained a written brief, which outlined the extent of the review that they were to perform. Additionally, each reviewer obtained information on triangulation and specifically investigator triangulation. I explained to the reviewers the importance of their role and the relevance to the study in providing validity. The brief instructed them to review the transcripts and compare the contents to collated data provided as well as the codes and the themes derived.

The use of member checking by ensuring that the participants in data review ensured longevity of service and experience in the specific hotel management under review. The findings in each case in the methodological triangulation reflected convergence of the findings that supported the interview findings. The intent was to ensure trustworthiness, reliability, and validity of the research findings. Important here is that with independent reviews of data by reviewers and interviewers along with observations of the hotel plant, social media sources, and the available documents on

occupancy rates showed consistency and convergence to the main themes and codes derived in the findings.

The reviewers obtained the detailed transcripts, derived codes, and themes. The team reviewed the data and provided their independent responses. Reviewer A advised that he found that the findings reflect an accurate summary of the interview transcripts. Reviewer B outlined that these were the few things that stood out, but believed that a good job was done in grouping and coding as well as capturing the salient points made by the interviewees. Reviewer C indicated that after reading the transcripts of the 3 Hoteliers and the Government Official, he was of the view that the collated results in Section 3 accurately represent the findings of the interviews. Reviewer D responded that he wholly agreed with the representation of the results submitted by the researcher accurately reflects the views of the interviewees. The parallels in the recurring themes were highlighted and grouped, accordingly. Reviewer E stated that he thought the information summarized in the document was consistent with the information provided in the interview transcripts.

The additional data sources for this study were documentation and observations. Prior to and after the interviews were conducted, there was opportunity to walk through the facilities and look at the condition of rooms and the facility, generally. In one particular instance, the continued deterioration of one of the hotels under review had brought it to a point wherein “word of mouth” and government reviews reduced the registered profile of the hotel. Inspections of the hotel facility by the Ministry of Tourism

determined the reduced profile. Eventually the hotel went into receivership and the new owner decided to demolish the entire facility and rebuild to present day standards. Alternatively, inspections of the rooms for another hotel showed evidence of recent refurbishment. Coincidentally, this hotel seemed to have been able to conduct significant marketing plans in key source markets as well as in expanding markets. The reach of the marketing worldwide or in specific source markets revealed was remarkable. For one particular hotel chain on the island the advertising was observed in the UK, USA tristate, Chicago, Florida, Dallas, Atlanta, and California that represented the main hubs in US and the ability to route visitors from anywhere in the US to the Caribbean. The use of hubs was an important aspect to getting prospective passengers to the island.

Interface with random persons who had visited St. Lucia and their indication of the beauty of the island along with the hospitality of the people redounded well for the destination of St. Lucia. Though it is important to be careful when reviewing social media tools, it is one of the main tools used in the industry to obtain visitor feedback and to outline visitor experience. All the hotel leaders that I interviewed and through an independent review of the available social media tools revealed, that St. Lucia has been able to keep a positive profile in the respective markets. The predominant social media platforms reviewed were Facebook, Twitter, Trip Advisor, and Instagram. These were the platforms cited by the hotels and government officials as the ones most used for customer feedback. The findings here were consistent with the interview findings and reflected a strong interest in the destination with sporadic incidents of bad experiences. The



destination had a high recommendation as a great place to visit with a diverse interest in the type of hotel to visit, such as all-inclusive, European package or American package. The information on these sites are up to date and constantly updated by visitors. The information obtained can be complementary at times but can also be damaging to the hotel reputations. Consequently, it is important that these sites be monitored and interim action taken to mitigate against any negative comments that can cause lasting reputational damage to the hotel facility.

All the reviewers indicated that the results, codes, and themes were consistent with the transcripts. Reviewer C noted that he was in full agreement with the information derived from the transcripts and advised that he noted some disturbing trends with a highlighter. Further, he noted that the divergent views of some of the hotels and the government. Consistent with Yin (2014), in triangulation, if the independent reviewers of the data concur with the findings or show convergence of the information, then the team achieved validity. In this case, it is clear that there was convergence from the reviewers and as such, we have achieved the validity criteria. Additionally, the information from the observations and documentation revealed similar convergent results that further strengthened the achievement of the validity criteria.

Trip Advisor is a social media tool used by both visitors and hotel general managers alike. The information obtained from this site provides reviews by guests not only of the hotel generally but about the main areas of service offered at the hotel. These areas include restaurants on the property, pool experience, quality of room, excursions as

well as the other areas of interest. The site had over 115,000 reviews for St. Lucia hotels and over 5000 for hotel A. The rating for the various areas range from terrible to excellent with poor, average and very good being the ratings between the lower and upper limits. For each parameter, the site allows an interactive interface that shows the number of reviews in each category and further provides the number of different types of guests, such as couples, businesspersons, families or solo. Included on the site is the date and the average length of stay. The hotel industry is seasonal and mirrors the winter and summer seasons of North America and Europe. Expedia, which is another website, provides similar information but it seemed that Trip Advisor is the one predominantly used by the hotels and visitors for reviews. A review of each heading for the successful hotel showed high reviews for guest experience, tours and excursions and marketing knowledge. In addition, the room condition and, value for the money paid, met a very high or excellent review for hotel A. In general, for the successful hotel A the overall rating of very good or excellent was approximately 90 % of the review with 5% average and the remainder poor or terrible. The areas of poor and terrible were due to experiences of approaches on the beach, robbery and unsolicited approaches by the locals. In comparison, the other hotels under review had reviews as follows: hotel B, 68% excellent and very 10% average and 22% poor or terrible. Hotel C, 62% excellent and very 6 % average and 32% poor or terrible.

The information obtained from the government ministries of St. Lucia and the St. Lucia tourist board (SLTB), contained information on the name, number and relative

sizes of the hotels on the island. In addition, it provided information through the published monthly gazette on newly passed legislation for the hotel sector. The information from the St. Lucia tourist board provided an insight into the occupancy levels and this was cross-referenced against the payment of special occupancy taxes that each hotel was expected to remit. This provided the input the table on name size and occupancy rates of large hotels in St. Lucia for the last five years.

The minutes of the St. Lucia Tourist Board meetings revealed the creation of special sub-committees to monitor the performance of hotels, air transportation and guest experience. There was a special task force of the Ministry of Tourism, SLTB and the police force to monitor and advise on crime and suggested remedies. The hotels performance sub-committee revealed that over the period under review there were three proposals for new hotels or hotel expansion of which only one had materialized in the form of room improvements and marginal increase in the actual number of rooms on the island. The other two interested groups had refused to move forward due to the inability of the companies to negotiate waivers of all import duties, taxes and value added tax (VAT). In addition, the committee did express concern about one of the hotels on the island going into receivership due to poor performance and concerns about the guest experience from this particular property. The information also revealed that the more successful hotels had all used the incentives from government to keep their properties update through improvement of the respective properties. The mandate of this sub-

committee also extended to the monitoring of the social media reviews and highlighting in a timely fashion issues that showed poor or negative guest experiences.

The airlift committee reviewed the aircraft load factors, price of tickets between the main routes and, were actively involved in the negotiation of new airlift as well as the formation of minimum revenue guarantees for airlines. This input was required to monitor the performance of the hotels as the ticket prices fluctuated. This allowed this sub-committee to interface with the government and stakeholders to be able to respond to any severe negative impacts of airline ticket prices.

The crime and guest experience sub-committees worked closely to determine the causes of any negative feedback and to assist in managing any negative reports that may be circulating on any medium. The task force had been able to make one major accomplishment during the period, by establishing a new police station in the main hotel area in the capital of the island. The committee also outlined a number of incidents on the beaches in terms of unwanted solicitation by locals. The reviews by the government ministry and SLTB revealed that the major inputs and concerns for the hotel sector and the success of improving occupancy rates depended upon, guest experience, air transportation, marketing and product development.

The minutes of meetings of the St. Lucia Tourist Board along with documented written papers during the period 2011 to 2014 revealed as well as open forum advertising showed the need to assist the hotels in marketing both the destination and the hotels themselves. The GOSL cited repeatedly that Marketing was one of the most important

components to increase hotel occupancy of hotels on the island. To support that more than 60% of the countries tourism budget has been assigned to joint tourism marketing. Additionally, the airlift committee of the country and the St. Lucia Tourist board realized the need for affordable travel in air transportation in order to make the hotels and the islands competitive in the market. The mandate of the sub-committee was to ensure that there was air transportation that was competitive but meet the requirement of the visitors that the hotels attract. This would allow the best probability to increase the hotel occupancy. The issue of competing airlines for specific routes was also a strategic goal, but was a difficult prospect due to the limited number of new hotels rooms. In fact, during the period 2011 to 2014 there were no new hotel rooms forecasted in St. Lucia. Information from open debates by the political parties obtained consensus on the support of the hotel industry as well as the need for cheaper air transportation and frequency. The findings from social media sites and much of the documentation revealed that the successful hotel had very high level of satisfaction in guest experience, product development and marketing penetration. In addition, air transportation remained a concern in both cost of travel as well as time to and from the destination island.

The physical walk through of the hotels under review revealed some very interesting outcomes. Hotel A recently refurbished their facilities even though the last refurbishment occurred only two year prior. The rooms had also been redesigned and new furniture installed. A major observation with this hotel was the amount and the penetration of the marketing material that included flyers and TV advertisements in all

the main markets including Europe and North America. In addition, Hotel A provided packages that included air transportation and negotiated airline seat prices directly with the airlines. Of particular note was the emphasis placed on aesthetics of the entrance and the lobby areas which, in this case of the highest standard. In comparison to the other two hotels the market penetration was poor, the hotel facilities outdated, and in some cases rooms were in a condition that rendered them not fit for use. Maintenance personnel noted the lack of resources to fulfill maintenance requirements. The rooms had old furniture and in some cases unpleasant odors emanated. In Hotel C, the condition of sewage system was evident. Hotel C could not afford the major repair required and as such tried to run the hotel with a faulty sewage system. In addition, Hotel C went through two changes of ownership. They were awaiting another buy out at the time of the walk through. The importance of guest experience, marketing, product development and air transportation still came out as the main areas that could affect the occupancy levels in the hotels. Consistent with the requirements of methodological triangulation, all of the data sources provided information that converged on the main themes of marketing, product development, guest experience and air transportation. This convergence provides the basis for meeting reliability and validity requirements.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

Cost is a key determinant in the choice of a vacation getaway. Vacationers seek to minimize expenses while maximizing perceived value. The pricing of airline tickets is a highly complicated process that differs between airlines, as is the structuring of hotel and

restaurant prices. The use of yield analyzes in determining airline ticket prices, hotel rates is a weakness of the pricing system, and can lead to varying cost criteria. The research undertaken provides information on strategies to market the vacation and getaway opportunities on the island of St. Lucia to all levels of tourists. Making this information easily available may lead to the opening up of the pricing regime to allow for more transparency and making it easier to quantify.

Marketing strategies as well as having adequate budgets to allow for the required impact is essential. The development of all direct and indirect opportunities will help in the understanding of the linkages between all of the population (Ajake, 2015). The establishment of local standards and the enforcement of these standards can go a long way in ensuring that the hotel plants remain up to standard.

The findings of this study is consistent with the finding of Shan & Marn (2013) where he outlined some of the factors that affect the economic success of hotels in small island states. Additionally, Cansea, Bogan and Varvaruc (2014) outlined the effect of a well-structured marketing plan. In their writing, they indicated that meeting customers' expectation and making marketing information easily available to visitors were essential to the success of the hotel industry. The achievement of this was through successful marketing plans that would include word of mouth (Abdullah & Hamdan 2012; Cansea et al., 2013). Shan and Marn (2013) cited that product development, control of quality standards, tours, attractions, relationship management, and guest experience make up some of the most important aspects that contribute positively to hotel occupancy and

success. A comparison of the findings of the study and the available literature on the main issues shows a direct and consistent correlation of the two sources.

### **Implications for Social Change**

An important part of the doctoral research outcome is an indication of the impact or implication to social change. Often one can look at the impact as one that adds value to the existing body of work on a particular subject. Much of the data collected provided evidence that cost may affect the volume of visit to the island of St. Lucia. The social implications of the results of the study maybe as outlined below:

1. Tourism is the leading economic driver in St. Lucia; a strategy that increases the number of tourists will also increase the opportunity for increased occupancy in the hotel plant, providing increased job security in the hotel sector. The creation of an attractive investment environment, (economic and tax incentives as well as ease of doing business on the island) may assist in getting the interest of possible hotel developers.
2. The new hotel development outlined above may provide an immediate and direct impact by providing a number of employment opportunities. The social impact may also extend to the profitability for suppliers to provide materials, goods and services to supply hotel development.
3. At present the airlift to the island is based on the current hotel capacities. An increase in the number of hotels may be the catalyst and driver to justify for additional airlift and even competition between specific routes. This will



provide a higher volume of visitors. The need for additional services, such as taxi transfers, tours, and hotel staff maybe a direct result of increased visitor arrivals and increased airline frequencies.

4. The tourism industry may flourish by increased volume of visits from new source markets, more competitive air fares, and a larger market to attract to the island. The growth of hotel capacity is critical to the increased volume of visitors and direct economic benefits to the industry. It may provide a more reliable source of employment for all persons who depend on the industry for a living.
5. In the source market, a variety of options to travel to a destination may provide price competition and may drive the inherent cost of travel to the destination downward and thus increasing the volume of visitors.

The formation of a strategy that allows for the increased visitor arrivals and hotel occupancy will provide a positive economic impact and possibly stability. It can provide the platform for expansion of hotels and associated businesses in the industry. All these activities create additional positive economic activity that may provide for additional jobs. It is important that the island works towards providing an environment that allow easy entry, establishment of new hotels. The environment would include tax-free considerations, an efficient process for development approvals, and the creation of a supportive environment by private and public sectors as well as the general populous.

It is essential to note that the tourism sector provided both direct and indirect social impacts. These impacts include direct work within the hotel as well as supporting industries such as security, engineering and contracting, food suppliers, transportation, and heritage sites. At times, it is difficult to get the required recognition and understanding of the government and the public, of the importance and the relative linkages. Managing, protecting, and educating the population and policy makers is important to reducing any negative impact that may occur due to these deficiencies.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Consistent with the themes derived from the study, there is a need for the General Managers of the Hotels as well as the Government through the respective Ministry, to create specific strategies in the areas of marketing, product development, air transportation and guest experience. The study revealed that there is a need to eliminate the areas of divergence between the hotel plants and the government. The formation of a tourism master plan for the sector through a consultative process can produce some key strategies to benefit the sector. The reduction of divergent views on training and the establishment of a hospitality institution that looks at all aspects of the industry are essential to the growth and sustainability of the industry. The growth of the industry is not possible without new hotel rooms and corresponding new airlift. The government must provide the basis for developers to choose St. Lucia over other competing destinations to establish new hotels. In addition, providing for additional airlift and competition on air travel will become areas to develop and influence. The master tourism

plan outlined above should seek to expand on the themes, taking advantage of the areas of success and elimination of the areas of divergent views on key topics. The strategies developed should have an implementation strategy that provides information through a central web site hosted by the Hotel Association and the government of St. Lucia. In addition, interactive seminars that provide verbal presentations and written literature can ensure that the attendants, (hoteliers and government officials) have firsthand and most up to date information.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

Due to the high dependency by the hotels and population alike on the volume of visitors that come to the island, it is essential to be current with any changes that may occur in the market. The source markets and destinations can change continuously. A recommendation is to establish a mechanism to continuously monitor, compare, recommend the specific change in marketing activity, and destination improvements. This would be essential to the success and the sustainability of the industry. There are a number of boutique hotels on the island and one may need to research these smaller boutique hotels and compare the drivers that may assist in the strategic development of them.

Once the recommendations of this study are implemented, collection , review and analysis of the data should be a priority. This is the first step at eliminating the limitations previously stated earlier in this study. This study delimited to hotel general managers because they may not have the required autonomy and control to effect the required

changes. However, the review of the outcomes and formulation of action plans are critical to the success of any plan. The creation of written reviews and data collection is not enough. It is important that an implementation strategy and plan provide the required changes, to positively affect the industry. This process must be a continuous one performed at least annually. The recommendations in this study are aimed at improving hotel occupancy levels in large hotels. Furthermore, they are only achievable if the general managers have the ability and autonomy to implement them. To heed the possible challenges, such as securing the financial support needed, it is recommended that other researchers consider studying the outcomes of this study with a focus on the involvement of stakeholders higher than general managers. It maybe some recommendations may require approval from corporate.

### **Reflections**

I worked in related industries to tourism such as airports and seaports in St. Lucia for more than 28 years. I served as a director on the St. Lucia Tourist Board (SLTB), Director of the Eastern Caribbean Civil Aviation Association, and as Chairman of the St. Lucia Tourist Board (SLTB) Airlift Committee. The interaction with the airlines industry allowed for insight into airline strategies for maximizing their returns. I currently serve as the president of an international business development company. The heavy reliance on a single economic driver is an area that has always been a concern. In my review of small island states, such as St. Lucia, the impact of weather conditions or crime can cause an immediate decline or loss of business that may take a long time to recover. The

development of other sectors will be critical to the island sustainability. There is a need for research in these areas.

### **Summary and Study Conclusions**

The interviews with the participants revealed a number of practices within the industry in St. Lucia that could affect the occupancy rates positively or negatively. The divergent views on training of hotel staff held by the government as compared to the hotels showed a need for immediate action to reduce this gap. It is apparent that the focus on education of the public and policy makers are important issues that need resolution. The importance of the marketing plan and the ability to sustain and grow markets with corresponding airlift is essential. The control and management of crime and security and having plans in place to manage the fallout due to sporadic crime is essential for sustainability. The strategy would be to develop the target marketing in the sources markets and to identify new markets. The island has great beaches and weather, along with a high number of excursions sites and world-renowned heritage sites. The research showed that the ability to market the hotel and the destination was the main differentiating factors affecting the different hotels. Additionally, the type of hotel matched to the target market was also important. The hotels such as Hotel A that used an all-inclusive package saw consistently high occupancy levels. It was no coincident that this hotel was also the one that was able to upgrade their property regularly and keep the hotel looking new and fresh. In conclusion, the implementation of strategies that ensure the areas of marketing, product development, air transport and guest experience are well

established, implemented and constantly reviewed. They are critical to the future success of large hotels on the island.

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### **Appendix A: Interview Questions**

The following were the open-ended, open ended questions discussed with each of the participants.

1. What are the top three drivers of hotel management to increase visitor volume?
2. What is the major strength of your hotel in attracting visitors. ??
3. How is your hotel utilizing its strengths (name them) to capture more opportunities to help increase tourism?
4. What are the greatest challenges you have encountered in developing and sustaining visitor numbers to your hotel in St. Lucia?
5. What have the policy makers in the government of St. Lucia done to support the required growth of the hotel industry
6. What is the most difficult threat to the hotel industry on the island and why?
7. Has air transportation been a major area of concern? If so, please give possible threats and weaknesses the island should focus on and how.
8. How do the availability, quality and cost of air transportation impact visitor volumes in St. Lucia?
9. How do the availability, quality and cost of hotel rooms impact tourism in St. Lucia?
10. How does the availability, quality, and cost of tourist 'sites,' such as national heritage sites and beaches impact hotel occupancy rates in St. Lucia?

**Appendix B: Hotel occupancy data of St. Lucia (2010-2014)**

	<b>All Inclusive</b>	<b>All Inclusive Luxury</b>	<b>Large</b>	<b>Luxury</b>	<b>Small Hotels</b>
<b>2010</b>					
Qtr. 1	63%	93%	60%	56%	80%
Qtr2	80%	89%	49%	52%	76%
Qtr3	81%	86%	41%	42%	66%
Qtr4	65%	87%	41%	41%	29%
Average	72%	89%	48%	48%	63%
<b>2011</b>					
Qtr1	78%	91%	57%	59%	92%
Qtr2	71%	83%	45%	58%	72%
Qtr3		87%	43%	41%	47%
Qtr4	76%	86%	44%	76%	
Average	75%	87%	47%	59%	70%
<b>2012</b>					
Qtr1	72%	90%	67%	60%	55%
Qtr2	64%	86%	50%	51%	26%
Qtr3	69%	81%	52%	43%	
Qtr4	65%	86%	52%	58%	
Average	68%	86%	55%	53%	41%
<b>2013</b>					
Qtr1	84%	89%	65%	66%	
Qtr2	72%	87%	56%	64%	
Qtr3	64%	83%	51%	63%	
Qtr4	70%	84%	56%	71%	
Average	73%	86%	57%	66%	
<b>2014</b>					
Qtr1	84%	87%	70%	84%	
Qtr2	76%	87%			