

The Gleaner

HospitalityJamaica

KEEPING YOU CONNECTED TO THE BUSINESS OF TOURISM

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THE BUSINESS OF TOURISM

Europe vs the Caribbean

Comparing the tourism product offerings

David Jessop
Contributor

IN MOST sectors, but in tourism in particular, it is necessary to compare the products and services provided by others, not least because this provides a much clearer idea of the competition, reveals new developments, and provides examples of what the visitor may expect in relation to what they are spending.

Some recent travel in Europe provided a small opportunity to observe at first-hand, an alternative, albeit snapshot, travel experience in a number of cities and compare this to the ways in which, in general, the Caribbean treats its visitors.

My first comparative observation was that air services and the level of ticket taxes and additional charges made by the airlines, especially out of the United Kingdom, are just as bad as in the Caribbean. The price of my ticket which, as the carrier put it, included a security and insurance surcharge and a carrier-imposed charge per sector.

What this meant was that the average

add-on to the basic ticket price was in the region of 20 per cent, which is roughly equivalent to, or in the case of the Eastern Caribbean, slightly less than what is added by governments, airlines, airports and others to equally short journeys.

Second, the general airport experience was about equivalent to the Caribbean. However, unlike the Caribbean, immigration queues where they existed – travel is passport free between most European Union countries – was fast-moving, despite this being the start of the vacation season.

Third, and unlike in the Caribbean, there was the option to travel by train, which in Italy and Switzerland, but not in Britain, was an extraordinary low-cost and efficient bargain providing tax-free and fast city centre to city centre travel.

And fourth, the cost of taxis varied dramatically for no clear reason, with the

most expensive being Switzerland; although even in that high-cost economy, the rates in relation to distance were roughly equivalent to those in many Caribbean islands. That said, the big difference was that almost all taxi drivers were helpful, understood the importance of tourism, and spoke one or more languages in addition to their own.

But where there really was a striking difference was when it came to the well-maintained hotels, their trained staff, the high levels of service in relation to cost, the quality cuisine on offer, and the low level of the tax charged.

LOWER ROOM RATES

Even with their high standards and having to operate in a high-cost European environment, the hotel room rates were equivalent to, or significantly lower than, Caribbean hotels that for the most part can only aspire to similar levels of service and quality.

Moreover, the hotel taxes were significantly lower than in much of the Caribbean. In Switzerland, Geneva for example, levied a city tax of just Sfr4 or

about US\$3.70 per night; while in Italy there was an occupancy tax of €5 per night or about US\$7.

To put this into perspective and the importance Europe now places on competitiveness when it comes to tourism, one only has to read the recent budget debate in France on government's decision to increase hotel occupancy taxes by 500 per cent. At present, the charge is between the equivalent of 25 cents US and US\$2 per night. The plan was to increase this to €8 (US\$11) for four and five star hotels with an additional charge of €2 per night for hotels in Paris.

As France's socialist government discovered, however, there was an immediate public outcry, the measure was opposed by the country's own foreign minister, and the subsequent anger of legislators and the industry was so great that France's National Assembly refused to agree on the basis that such a steep rise would deal a blow to the country's vital tourism industry.

In comments that might make many in the industry in the Caribbean smile, Bernard Debre, an opposition lawmaker, welcomed the hotel tax laws defeat, noting that it was "unthinkable" to make "tourists pay for our country's debt, when they are already spending money in our country, helping our economy and providing employment".

The Caribbean is not Europe, but there are some interesting messages here.



JESSOP



From left: Royalton's Kerry Ann Quallo-Casserly; Alexander Arias; Hospitality Jamaica's Janet Silvera; André Hudson, and Stacye Ingram at The Gleaner booth at Reggae Sumfest Dancehall Night in Catherine Hall, St James.

Let there be light!

Tourism workers along Elegant Corridor to benefit from multimillion-dollar lighting project

Barrington Flemming

Hospitality Jamaica Writer

TOURISM INTERESTS have welcomed the signing of a multimillion-dollar contract to install street lamps along the 27.1 kilometre Elegant Corridor in Montego Bay, a long overdue development.

The Elegant Corridor extends from the roundabout at the Sangster International Airport to the Iberostar Hotel and Suites at Rose Hall, St James.

A \$248 million contract was inked between the Tourism Enhancement Fund (TEF) (representing the Government) and YP Seaton and Associates at the Montego Bay Convention Centre last Friday to install the lights over an eight-month period.

Chairman of the Montego Bay Resort Board, Evatt Bloomfield, said the lights are necessary to give greater visibility at nights for those traversing this heavily trafficked area.

“The reality is that it has been long overdue. We have been working on this issue for the last five years, and it is really unfortunate that it took so long, but we are not complaining about a good thing finally developing.

I certainly want us to push to see that it is rolled out sequentially so we don't wait for the entire thing to be done, but we must get commitments so that as soon as areas are completed, the lights are turned on so we can feel the positive impact right away,” Bloomfield said.

SAFETY BOOST

Omar Robinson, president of the Montego Bay chapter of the Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association, welcomed the move, describing it as “exciting; the whole aesthetics of the elegant corridor will be improved in addition to the safety it will offer.”

He added: “It is timely in light of the recent death of a guest and staff along the corridor; we have lost a number of staff along that corridor”.

Earl Patterson, senior director, project implementation at the National Works Agency, said that while the project had a duration of eight months, it was expected that lights would be switched on in stages as soon as they are completed, which means that some lights could be on for the December 15 start of the winter tourist season.

“I am sure that the contractor will support bringing on various phases at a time, like Christmas lights. Certainly, one would expect that come December 15, that some of the lights would have been turned on,” he told **Hospitality Jamaica**.

Patterson indicated that while the



Minister of Tourism and Entertainment Dr Wykeham McNeill (second left, seated), and Minister of Transport, Works and Housing, Dr Omar Davies (second right, seated), sign as witnesses to the contract for the ‘Elegant Corridor’ lighting project as director of Y.P. Seaton & Associates Calvert Mundle (left), and executive director of the Tourism Enhancement Fund (TEF), Clyde Harrison (right, seated), look on. The contract signing was held on Friday, July 18 at the Montego Bay Convention Centre.

Government was unable to secure any proposal for solar energy, the country expects to earn savings of up to 50 per cent on electricity bills from the LED bulbs which will be put in as opposed to the old sodium high-pressure vapour lamps, which were previously used.

In the meantime, minister of tourism and entertainment, Dr Wykeham McNeill, has underscored that many of the projects being undertaken by the TEF, whether the cultural centre or the lighting of the Elegant Corridor, were projects for Jamaicans.

“They benefit us first – and our visitors who come will also benefit from them.”

He added: “It is important that we understand that tourism generates the funds, through the TEF, to undertake these projects which benefit us as Jamaicans.”

SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC ZONE

According to McNeill, it was imperative that the project be implemented at this time as the corridor forms part of what is arguably Jamaica's largest development zone after the logistics hub.

“This strip is a significant economic zone based on the infrastructure that is here. Putting in this lighting project enhances the area, but what it also does is also twofold.

First, it allows those in the area and the entire corridor to actually charge better rates, while Government can seek more investment in the area because it becomes more attractive.”

His colleague minister, Dr Omar Davies, the man in charge of transport and works, indicated that the project was a necessity as it would improve safety of all travelling along the roadway.

“Over time, this stretch of road has become a safety concern for pedestrians and motorists alike due to speeding and the absence of street lights. This will serve to improve nighttime visibility.”

Work should commence within 23 days.

Private jet-ski ban lifted



PHOTO BY KARRIE WILLIAMS
A jet ski on Negril beach.

Dynamic duo to take Sugar Mill to another level

HALF MOON is pleased to announce the promotions of Solomon Gardener to restaurant brand manager and Robert Chambers as restaurant manager to the iconic Sugar Mill Restaurant.

Gardener, keeper of the Mill for 50 amazing years, will supervise the in-house guest service management functions, as well as coordinate and develop external marketing initiatives. He will also assist with heightened brand awareness of the restaurant with neighbouring properties and local businesses.

Chambers has been with the restaurant for the past 17 years and will continue the legacy left by Gardener, having overall responsibility for organising the wait staff, welcoming guests, assigning tables and ensuring the comfort and positive dining experience of visitors.

"We are extremely proud of Solomon and Robert, and with their collective 67 years of professional know-how, we are confident that they will take the Sugar Mill Restaurant to even greater heights", said Half Moon's general manager, Aram Zerunian.



Sugar Mill Restaurant brand manager, Solomon Gardener



Restaurant manager Robert Chambers

LAST FRIDAY, July 18, the operation of private personal water crafts (PWCs) reopened across the island for licensed PWC users.

This after an islandwide ban was imposed in February to allow for the regularisation of the commercial operations, and for steps to be taken by the Maritime Authority of Jamaica (MAJ) to register all PWCs or jet skis in the island.

The general ban was among a raft of measures announced to streamline both private and commercial PWC operations. The measures were applied in the wake of three accidents involving PWCs between August 2013 and January 2014. In announcing the ban in Parliament in February, Minister of Tourism and Entertainment Dr Wykeham McNeill had indicated that the suspension of the operations will be lifted in each area as the relevant measures and regulations are implemented and persons become compliant.

Over the last few months, the MAJ has spearheaded a process to register all PWCs islandwide. To date, 90 private and 29 commercial vessels have been registered.

A task force was established as one of the measures to bring PWC activity under stronger management and enforcement. The PWC Task Force is being guided by the MAJ and the Tourism Product Development Company (TPDCo), with enforcement by the Marine Police Division.

The announcement to reopen the operation of private PWCs was made following a recent meeting of the task force. The move follows the recent reopening of the operation of commercial PWCs at the UDC beach in Ocho

Rios Bay, St Ann on June 2. However, the ban on the importation of PWCs will remain in place until further notice.

McNeill said: "Guided by the recommendation of the task force, it was determined that the suspension of private PWC operations for licensed PWC users should now be lifted, as adequate measures and regulations have been put in place." He added that, "the owners and operators of private and commercial launch sites will be required to inform the MAJ of these sites to facilitate the effective monitoring of the activities across the island."

LAUNCH SITE

A launch site refers to an area on the foreshore (a channel between 20 and 40 metres wide) through which PWCs are permitted to leave and return. PWCs will be launched from such sites in accordance with specific guidelines and recommendations which include the existence of a ramp or other suitable area for the safe launching of the PWC and erection of prescribed signage.

Launch sites will not be established in close proximity to high-risk areas such as places where members of the public customarily swim. These include the Blue Lagoon (Portland), licensed beaches, public bathing beaches including in Negril, Montego Bay and Hellshire Beach, where PWC operations will be prohibited.

The minister explained that "private PWC operation will also be allowed at Lime Cay and Maiden Cay, where temporary measures will be put in place to facilitate PWC activity, while some remaining concerns including issues related to launch sites are addressed."

Upon registration, PWC operators are issued with registration certificates and decals which have been provided in two colour codes, to differentiate between private and commercial crafts.

Private PWC use will be allowed under the following conditions:

- PWCs must be registered and have the appropriate decals affixed. PWCs not possessing private decals will be liable for detention by the authorities.
- PWCs that are registered for private use cannot be utilised commercially.
- All operators of PWCs must have received training in the operation of the vessel from the MAJ.
- PWCs must be issued with valid small vessel safety certificates which will reflect the following:
 - PWCs are permitted to operate in daylight hours only and shall not be operable between sunset and sunrise.
 - PWCs should enter and leave the shore at a slow speed of three knots.
 - Occupants of PWCs must wear life vests at all times and the area of operation is at least 200 metres from the shore.
- PWCs must not be refuelled at sea.
- PWCs must observe the collision (at sea) regulations.

McNeill also indicated that steps are being taken to facilitate the reopening of PWC operations in other areas including Negril, adding that as the task force moves ahead to regularise operations in these areas, consultations will be held with the relevant stakeholders including a meeting which will be held in Negril next week.



Director of the National Museum Jamaica, Dr Jonathan Greenland (second left), shows historic artifacts on exhibit at the newly opened National Museum West to (from left): Minister of State in the Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce Sharon Ffolkes-Abrahams; Minister of Tourism and Entertainment Dr Wykeham McNeill; Minister of Local Government and Community Development Noel Arscott; chairman of the Tourism Enhancement Fund, Senator Noel Sloley; and Venezuelan Ambassador to Jamaica Maria Jacqueline Mendoza Ortega. The officials were touring the Montego Bay Cultural Centre in historic Sam Sharpe Square following its official opening on Friday, July 11.

TEF invests \$100m in MoBay Cultural Centre

THE TOURISM Enhancement Fund (TEF) has invested over \$100 million in the creation of Montego Bay's first cultural centre.

Minister of Tourism and Entertainment Dr Wykeham McNeill disclosed at the official opening of the Montego Bay Cultural Centre (MBCC) in the historic Sam Sharpe Square on Friday (July 11) that to date, the TEF has contributed some \$109 million to its development.

The minister also hinted that more was in store for the square which has played an important role in several stages of national development. The former civic centre stands on the site of the old courthouse. In 1832, it was in that very court house that the trial of national hero, Samuel Sharpe and hundreds of other slaves, who were accused in the slave rebellion of December 1831, were conducted.

ICONIC SPOT

Labelling it "an iconic spot in its own right", McNeill said "discussions are already under way involving the parish council, the TEF, owners of businesses in the area and other stakeholders to transform Sam Sharpe Square into the architectural jewel I know it has the potential to become".

With details to be worked out, McNeill said this will be a major logistic and planning undertaking, but given the status of the square in national life, "it certainly has the potential to be an attraction in its own right". He has urged civic leaders and private sector interests to support this initiative.

Originally named Charles Square, the city's commercial centre was later renamed Sam Sharpe

Square in honour of Samuel Sharpe, whose life was taken on the gallows in the square for his leading role in the rebellion. A monument to the hero and the many other slaves who were also hung graces the square beside the building known as The Cage, which, during that era, was used as a slave lock-up.

OTHER AGENCIES INVOLVED

McNeill lauded the pivotal role other ministers, government officials, as well as public and private-sector entities played in transforming the facility into Montego Bay's long desired cultural centre. He noted that "over the years, there have been cries from the people of Montego Bay for the transformation of the city into not merely a tourism centre which focuses on sun, sea and sand, but a cultural tourism centre". The minister added that "people also want to see visible signs that represent the city's contribution to tourism, and the Tourism Enhancement Fund has been responding in a very big way".

He asserted that the TEF is dedicated to fulfilling its mission "of promoting growth and development in the tourism sector, recognising that tourism does not exist in a vacuum, but is closely linked to various other sectors important to national development and improving the quality of life of Jamaicans."

The Montego Bay Cultural Centre will house the National Gallery West, National Museum West, facilities for the performing arts and a bistro and will also have a gift shop and an artisan village. These are complemented by an impressive cenotaph bearing the names of slaves who were killed in the 1831 rebellion.

J'can is Carnival Cruise Lines' I AM Team Member 2013

Richard Morais
Gleaner Writer

FALMOUTH, Trelawny: A JAMAICAN, Peter Ainsworth of Granville, Trelawny, is the international Carnival Cruise Lines I AM Team Member of the Year for 2013.

Ainsworth is the senior team headwaiter and the first ever fleet-wide winner. Having won the Worker of the Month Award in November on his present ship, Carnival Glory, Ainsworth went on to win Worker of the Year. This qualified him for this big award. He was among 23 other qualifiers from each of the Carnival Cruise Lines 24-member fleet. However, with the average crew of 1,500 per ship, Ainsworth would have competed against thousands of other crew members in his company's fleet to win this prestigious award.

The 29-year veteran with Carnival Cruises said his hard work and

dedication are among the main reasons for his achievement. "The performance over the years, the guest feedback, my commitment, everything has made it possible."

He is also grateful to the company which has provided the opportunity for his employment, and reminisces on an incident when he was sick and the company went beyond the call of duty in providing care to him.

Carnival Cruises describes Ainsworth as a very dedicated individual who has great pride and passion for his job. "He aims to deliver his best and this is evident in his quality of work and service standards. He is willing to go the extra mile and works well with minimal supervision," said its managers in a recent newsletter.

ASSET TO THE COMPANY

They added that Ainsworth takes feedback constructively and was constantly looking for ways to improve. "He shows genuine care for his team and is always willing to step in and assist, especially when the going gets tough. It concluded that he is a great asset to the company and has gained respect

from management as well as others," said the organisation.

The I AM Team Member awardee, who is currently home on vacation, was recently flown to Miami, Florida, with his wife of 31 years, Dorset, to accept his award at a gala ceremony at the company's head offices.



CONTRIBUTED
Peter Ainsworth



Pierre Battaglia (centre), general manager of Couples Sans Souci, is congratulated by a group of multiple repeat guests of the resort for being the top ranking Jamaican hotel in 'Travel+Leisure Magazine's' recent World Best Awards in the list of top 25 hotels in the Caribbean, Bermuda and The Bahamas. Couples Sans Souci was ranked No. 3 and Couples Tower Isle No. 5, with Couples Swept Away and Couples Negril also included in the top 25.

Couples Resorts named Best of the Best in the Caribbean

TENS OF thousands of **Travel+Leisure** readers have been polled and the results are in. All four Couples Resorts are named on the list of the top 25 Hotels in the Caribbean, Bermuda and The Bahamas, with Couples Sans Souci and Couples Tower Isle also included in the Top 100 hotels in the world.

Couples Sans Souci tops the list at No. 3, with Couples Tower Isle a close No. 5. Couples Negril, and Couples Swept Away also placed in the top 25 on this prestigious list of top Caribbean hotels. **Travel+Leisure** has been asking its readers to rate the quality of destinations, hotels, spas, airlines, cities, rental-car companies and tour organisers in its World's Best awards since 1996. Survey participants are asked to rate each resort based on rooms and facilities, location, service, restaurants and value.

"It is an absolute honour to be ranked among the best hotels in the world, and we are especially happy to be chosen by the discerning readers of such a world-renowned publication as **Travel+Leisure**," commented Lee Issa, chairman of Couples Resorts.

"Couples Resorts strives to provide the Caribbean's finest guest experience and we feel honoured to receive these awards as recognition of our consistent efforts," added Glenn Lawrence, CEO of Couples Resorts.

TRADITIONALLY, VACATIONS have been about sun, sea, sand and getting away from it all.

However, with the emergence of social media and mobile apps, persons want to stay connected – no matter how far they go. To help create a fulfilling experience for their guests' exclusive destination getaway, Secrets Resorts & Spas has partnered with Digicel Business to add unlimited wireless connectivity to their unique island vacation offerings.

Since implementing the new state-of-the-art Wi-Fi solution, the hotel has been able to meet the connectivity needs of their guests while increasing customer satisfaction by approximately 80 per cent.

"Before, it was sun, sea and sand; now, you need to have phones with Wi-Fi capabilities to fulfil the needs of the guests," said Deryk Meany, resident manager at Secrets Resorts & Spa.

"Our guests want to stay connected to their friends and family at home and share their experiences on social media. In addition to that, they want to watch movies on Netflix and browse the Internet. Wi-Fi is therefore a major part of the entertainment and social activities each day," he added.



Secrets Resorts add wireless connectivity to its Unlimited Luxury Experience

The solution, which supports up to 2.5 devices in each of the 700 rooms, provides unlimited connectivity for the guests, regardless of where they are on the vast property. According to Meany,

"The phone has become the new way to communicate." To further improve communication using technology, the resort created an app to make some of the hotel's services available at their guests'

fingertips. These include making spa reservations and accessing shopping deals at their duty-free store.

Emilio Huhn, general manager of Secrets, states that, "As an

organisation that is keen on understanding the needs of our guests and making sure that their every need is fulfilled, communication is key to what we do. We were especially pleased to have been able to implement this solution with the least amount of disruption to the guests. Digicel Business provides an extraordinary level of service and we must commend them for that."

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

General manager at Digicel Business, Jason Corrigan, commented on the partnership, saying, "The mobile phone has become an integral part of our daily lives that we feel the need to be connected all the time, no matter where we are. Any company that realises this and takes steps to ensure their customers can remain connected already has a competitive advantage. Digicel Business has a long-standing relationship with Jamaica's hospitality sector in ensuring that they are able to give their guests a world-class vacation experience, and so we are happy to partner with Secrets Resorts to create the ultimate vacation experience for their guests while in Jamaica – one where they are connected and happy."

CK MONDAVI

THE FAMILY

Established in the 1940's by Italian immigrant brothers, Cesare and Rosa Mondavi; C. Mondavi & Family remains a family owned business.

Currently under the stewardship of Peter Mondavi Sr., the winery handcrafts a selection of the most popular wine varieties around the world. Using a large portion of their own grapes from the family estate, the wines are very high quality with consistent, vintage-to-vintage excellence.

THE WINES

With over 70 years of production under their belts, CK Mondavi has perfected their winemaking using the following key methods:

- Grapes are sourced, crushed, blended and bottled in St. Helena, Napa Valley
 - All grapes are hand sorted, fermented in smaller tanks, and aged in French Oak
-
- Whites – Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc
 - Reds – Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel
 - Sweets – White Zinfandel, Moscato



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JTB, JHTA launch ‘Fall in Jamaica’ promotion

JAMAICA IS offering the Fall in Jamaica destination-wide vacation deal with savings of up to 50 per cent when booking at www.getallrightjamaica.com. Travellers can experience their ideal vacation in resort areas such as Negril for its gorgeous stretch of Seven Mile beach, Montego Bay and Ocho Rios for world-class attrac-

tions, and the capital city of Kingston for its music and culture. More than 30 hotels plus attractions and restaurants are participating in the island-wide deal, which is being coordinated by the Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB) and the Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association (JHTA).

“Travellers looking to unwind this

fall can choose Jamaica’s varied offerings as part of this new destination deal,” said Sandra Scott, Jamaica’s deputy director of tourism with responsibility for marketing. “We are the ‘Home of All Right’ and want everyone to experience our warm hospitality. Jamaica is an easily accessible destination with many

non-stop flight options. These savings provide added value to those looking for a Jamaican fall getaway.”

The Fall in Jamaica promotion features accommodations ranging from small intimate hotels to large all-inclusive resorts. Travellers can select a personalised vacation that fits their lifestyle, interest and

budget. The promotion is available for booking until December 1, for travel between August 25 and December 15.* Visit www.getallrightjamaica.com to book using the promo code: FALL DEALS.

*No minimum night stay is required on hotel offers unless stated. Blackout dates may apply.

Surrounded by the Jamaica Get All Right crew members are (front row from left): Aloun Ndombet-Assamba, Jamaican high commissioner to the United Kingdom; Elizabeth Fox, regional director for the United Kingdom and Northern Europe at the Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB); Pete Stirling, JAMAICA Get All Right skipper; and Torrance Lewis, district sales manager, JTB, at the St Katharine Docks.



JAMAICA TOURIST BOARD

Visitor arrivals from Canada up

THE FINAL 2013-2014 winter arrival numbers are in and Jamaica recorded an increase in Canadian visitors over last winter (November to April) with 264,605 arrivals. This figure is a jump of five per cent over the 2012/2013 winter season.

“We are thrilled to report further growth in Canadian visitors to Jamaica,” said Philip Rose, regional director of Canada for the Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB). “Our efforts to drive demand have been successful, thanks to great partnerships with our airline, resort and attraction partners who continuously deliver great Jamaican experiences to visitors. It is clear that Canadians have cultivated a strong relationship with Jamaica which we will continue to foster.”

The JTB also credits this increase in visitors to Canadian travel agents and the JTB’s A One Love Rewards Programme. Launched in 2012, the programme serves as a dedicated training platform for the travel agent community to become experts on destination Jamaica. The programme guides agents through vibrant, picturesque online pages that provide insider knowledge about the island. In addition to learning about Jamaica, agents earn valuable reward points and incentives as they complete the curriculum. Agents can access the step-by-step instructional website at oneloverewards.com.

Jamaica, easily accessible via non-stop flights from many major gateway cities, is 146 miles long with mountainous peaks soaring to 7,402 feet (2,256 meters). The island features over 120 rivers, stunning waterfalls and white-sand beaches. Its accommodations range from luxury resorts to charming cottages and inns, all focusing on top-notch service. Jamaica also features restaurants to fit any taste and price point. A year-round vacation destination, some of the island’s diverse activities include hiking the Blue Mountains, bird-watching, championship golf, award-winning festivals, caving in the Cockpit Country, zip-lining, horseback riding, cliff diving, rainforest bobsledding, deep-sea fishing, bicycle tours, dog-sledding, dolphin and shark encounters, and more.

Tourist board bids farewell to ‘JAMAICA Get All Right’ crew

JAMAICAN-STYLE SUNSHINE welcomed the JAMAICA Get All Right Clipper yacht on July 12 and 13 as it returned to the St Katharine Docks after completing the 2013/2014 Clipper Round the World Yacht Race.

The yacht and its crew, skippered by Pete Stirling, arrived at London’s St Katharine Docks to resounding cheers as it made its way down the River Thames and under London’s iconic Tower Bridge.

The Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB), which sponsored the yacht, and the Jamaican High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Aloun Ndombet-Assamba, were on hand to congratulate the crew on their race completion and for their eighth place achievement.

From July 12 to 13, an area of St Katharine Docks was transformed into a ‘mini-Jamaica’ complete with a life-size cut out of Jamaica’s track star, Usain Bolt. Visitors and the crew had the opportunity to pose against it, with the best ones receiving giveaways. Members of the JTB team handed out flyers featuring details of the latest holiday offers in Jamaica while the flavour of Jamaican jerk chicken cooking nearby drew the longest queue of all the attractions in the race village.

The Clipper Round the World Yacht Race began at the St Katharine Docks on September 1, 2013, and over the course of the past 10 months, the crews of the world’s longest ocean race have visited some of the finest destinations in the world. Based on

feedback from crew members, Port Antonio in Jamaica was ranked as one of their most memorable stopovers.

Elizabeth Fox, regional director for the UK and Northern Europe at JTB, said: “We’re very proud to have sponsored the JAMAICA-Get All Right Clipper yacht for the 2013/2014 Round the World race. The yacht and our enthusiastic crew have been the perfect showcase for the Jamaica brand around the globe over the past 10 months. We are so proud of our crew and hope the Clipper experience has been a phenomenal life achievement for them. They really embraced the Jamaican culture, and we hope they take away the Jamaican spirit with them.”

US carriers to offer new air service to Antigua

TRAVELLERS TO ANTIGUA and Barbuda will have easier access by air following a series of successful meetings led by Asot Michael, minister of tourism, economic development, investment and energy, and held with executives of American Airlines in Miami, Florida, and Delta Airlines in Atlanta, Georgia.

The meeting with American Airlines was convened in their Miami offices with their director of marketing development for the Caribbean, Mexico and Latin America, Gary Alfson. The minister was accompanied by Molwyn Joseph, minister of health and the environment. Both Michael and Joseph, who comes with a wealth of experience as a former minister of tourism, used the opportunity to

share the new government's vision for the tourism industry.

The delegation next met with Christine Kennedy, general manager and Global Partnership Development at Delta Airlines in their Atlanta office, who welcomed the opportunity to discuss in detail areas of collaboration that will grow the country's airlift with Delta Airlines.

The airline executives were pleased to hear of Antigua and Barbuda's relaxation of visa requirements for visitors from China and Latin American countries such as Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina and Chile as well as the Citizenship by Investment Programme, which will propel demand for new investments in Antigua and Barbuda.

As a result of the negotiations with American Airlines, the carrier will continue

with their four weekly flights from JFK International Airport, New York to Antigua for the start of this year's winter season in November. In September and October, American Airlines will have two flights from JFK, with a late 5 p.m. departure on Fridays and Sundays, which will overnight in Antigua and depart the next day. This will allow connections over JFK from the all-important European markets. Negotiations continue for a second daily departure on Saturdays and Sundays from the all important, Miami, Florida gateway to Antigua.

At the meetings with Delta Airlines, a second flight to Antigua out of the Atlanta, Georgia gateway was confirmed. This will allow air access for travellers from Atlanta as well as from the feeder markets of Minneapolis, Detroit, St Louis and Kansas City.



St Maarten's Divi Little Bay unveils all-inclusive option

TRAVELLERS LOOKING for a tranquil tropical vacation complete with all amenities at their fingertips can now book all-inclusive packages at the family-favourite Divi Little Bay Beach Resort on the picturesque south coast of St Maarten.

Divi Little Bay joins just two other properties on the Dutch island offering all-inclusive benefits to visitors: Sonesta Maho Beach Resort & Casino and Sonesta Great Bay Beach Resort.

The resort's guests can now relax without a care in the world, knowing that with their all-inclusive stay they will enjoy spacious

air-conditioned accommodations, unlimited food and drinks from three bars and dining options, three freshwater pools, numerous entertainment activities, kids' club, beach umbrellas and chairs, Wi-Fi access, and more.

The property lies along a semi-private peninsula extending between Great Bay and Little Bay, conveniently located just a few short miles from the many shops, restaurants and casinos that line the island's capital of Philipsburg, and just seven miles from the airport.

An added benefit for families searching for

the perfect Caribbean retreat is Divi's policy that all children five years and younger stay free.

PACKAGE PRICING

All-inclusive packages start at \$181 per adult, per night, and \$63 per child, per night, for kids ages six to 12 years. For reservations at Divi Little Bay Beach Resort, call 800-367-3484 or visit www.divilittlebay.com.

The undisputed gastronomic capital of the Caribbean, St Maarten is home to 37 square miles of breathtaking beaches and boasts numerous historical and family-

oriented attractions.

During the day, watersport enthusiasts can take advantage of the island's scuba diving and snorkelling facilities, while the capital of Philipsburg offers duty-free shopping with a friendly city atmosphere.

By night, travellers can visit one of 14 world-class Vegas-style casinos or dance the night away to the beats and rhythms of the world's trendiest DJs at a variety of nightclubs all designed to provide endless entertainment.

For more information on St Maarten, visit the official site of the St. Maarten Tourist Bureau at www.VacationStMaarten.com.



Combat medic Sgt A. Myers attends to the injured big toe of one of his 'patients', while another waits.



Meal time at base camp, and Sgt R. Burke (right) chose a calabash bowl instead of a 'messy', in the hand of Cpl C. Huie.



Rope specialist and physical instructor Cpl E. Ricketts (right) looks at the swamp fire he made at base camp during an recent expedition to Old Nanny Town in the Blue and John Crown Mountains.



Infantry Platoon Commander 2Lt T. Stewart and Gaa'mang Gloria Simms, who plays the role of Nanny in 'Queen Nanny: Legendary Maroon Chieftainess', get cuddly just before they depart for a trek to Old Nanny Town for the shooting of the film.



Maroons, soldiers

exchange hospitality

Paul H. Williams

Hospitality Jamaica Writer

QUEEN NANNY of the Maroons, Jamaica's only national heroine, was a woman who dwelt and fought in the remote and rugged terrain of what is now known as the Blue and John Crow Mountains.

Her story is being documented in a full-length film called **Queen Nanny: Legendary Maroon Chieftainess**.

And to capture the essence of Nanny's struggles in that do-or-die place, 38 people recently went on an expedition to Old Nanny Town. Twenty-seven of them, including Harcourt Fuller, an assistant professor at Georgia State University, and one of the producers, actually reached the historic village, while the others remained at base camp.

"In order to fully comprehend how Nanny and her people lived and how they were able to militarily defeat the British forces ... we had to include the area in and around Nanny Town ... Nanny Town and its environs formed the stronghold of Queen Nanny in the early 18th Century. This was her world where she and her people lived, fought to maintain their freedom, and where many of them joined their ancestors," Fuller told **Hospitality Jamaica**, which was represented on the trek.

But because of the rough and mountainous topography, the producers needed help. And for that, they turned to the Jamaica Defence Force (JDF), which provided a helicopter to transport film equipment, utensils, food supplies and production personnel to base camp.

"The JDF's support of the Nanny Town

The JDF soldiers and Maroons from different parts of Jamaica who spent five days together in the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park for the filming of 'Queen Nanny: Legendary Maroon Chieftainess'.

expedition ... was critical ... given the distance and difficulty of traversing the terrain, as well as the historical and cultural significance of Queen Nanny to Jamaica, we had to approach the JDF for assistance,” Fuller said.

Seven soldiers, led by liaison officer, Infantry Platoon Commander 2Lt T. Stewart, embarked upon the trek. The others were Warrant Officer E. Brown, Cpl C. Huie, Sgt A. Myers, Sgt R. Ellis, Lance Cpl E. Ricketts and Sgt R. Burke.

Two others, Cpl Anderson and Cpl Daley, remained at the point of departure at Windsor. The JDF Expedition Support Team also included CDS, Major General Antony Anderson and Major Mahatma Williams, leading from JDF headquarters.

The JDF involvement in the trek came as part of the logistics and support services that the JDF provides for civilians and non-government organisations.

“Once we are called upon and we are able to, we try to provide assistance to organisations and individuals,” Lt Stewart said. Among the soldiers were rope and jungle specialists, instructors, a combat medic, and an army ranger.

HIGH PRAISES FOR SOLDIERS

Fuller has high praises for the patient soldiers who “literally helped members of our expeditionary party to ascend the treacherous mountains going to Nanny Town”. He said, “I was amazed at the level of patience that the soldiers had throughout the entire operation. They were always behind us, letting us rest when we needed to, giving us water to drink, food to eat, helping us climb steep inclines, etc. They even cut walking sticks for us, which we used to help our battered knees and legs carry us along.”

Despite the physical and material assistance from the JDF, what stood out for the five days that the groups were together was the spirit of camaraderie that was forged. It was a time of sharing food, drinks, equipment and ideas. While Sgt R. Ellis and Cpl E. Ricketts showed how to build a swamp fire, wild-hog hunter Clinton West demonstrated to the soldiers and others how to make a wild-hog trap.

There was much laughter, debating, picture-taking, river bathing, crayfish-catching, singing, dancing and drumming in between filming. One poignant moment was when while Sgt Myers was attending to one of his ‘patients’, there were festivities around them.

It was a joy to see Lt Stewart drumming, singing and dancing with the Moore Town Maroons while Cpl Ricketts accompanied them by knocking two sticks on bamboo. This collaboration was hardly surprising to Fuller, it seems.

He said, “The Maroons and the JDF have many things in common. They both represent the warrior tradition of Jamaica, the Maroons being traditional and the JDF modern warriors



PHOTOS BY PAUL WILLIAMS

The soldiers who supported the producers of ‘Queen Nanny: Legendary Maroon Chieftainess’ with an expedition to Old Nanny Town in the Blue and John Crown Mountains National Park recently. From left: L Cpl Daley, L Cpl E. Ricketts, Sgt R. Ellis, WO11 E. Brown, Cpl Anderson, 2Lt T. Stewart, Cpl C. Huie, Sgt A. Myers, and Sgt R. Burke.

The Jamaica Defence Force provided a helicopter to transport film equipment, utensils, food supplies and production personnel to and from base camp during a recent filming expedition to Old Nanny Town in the Blue and John Crown Mountains.



Moore Town Maroon, Dr Harcourt Fuller (left) of Georgia State University, a producer of ‘Queen Nanny: Legendary Maroon Chieftainess’, and Hollywood stuntman Roy T. Anderson (right), another producer, were instrumental in getting the Jamaica Defence Force to support an expedition to old Nanny Town, recently. Others in the photo (from second left) are guides and wild hunters Ewart West, Jeff Campbell, Clinton West, Wayne Crawford, Gregory Crawford, Isaac Campbell, (Front from left), Gerald West, and Marvin Gray.



WO11 E. Brown cooking a pre-packaged meal over a pre-packaged fire at base camp during a recent expedition to Old Nanny Town.

... I think that the camaraderie between the JDF and the Maroons on this particular project shows that civilians and the military can come together for a common cause, which is of benefit not only to themselves, but also to Jamaica.

It was indeed the coming together of two very different groups who have different agendas. One was called upon to help the other, while the Maroons, who are survival strategists themselves, might have learnt a thing or two from the soldiers.

SPIRITUAL CONNECTION,

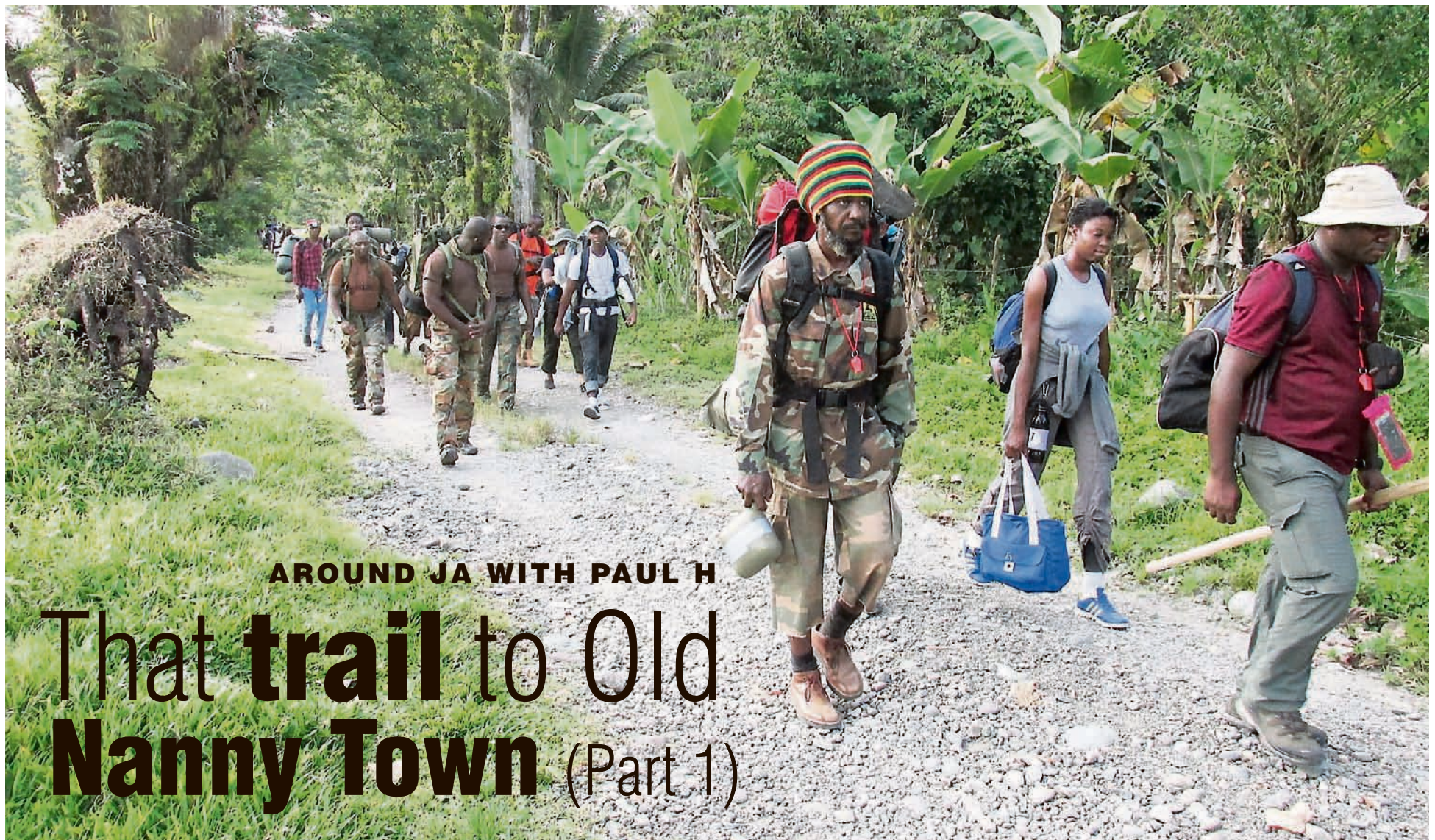
How did the soldiers feel about being on the ‘spiritual’ journey to old Nanny Town? Sgt Burke said for him, initially, there was no spiritual connection, but “now I know why they defeat the British, it wasn’t easy”.

He said the trek gave him an idea of what could have happened in the mountains between Nanny and the British.

For Lt Stewart, the only female soldier in the group, the expedition “has been one that brought me back to nature. It has brought me back to the roots of what Nanny, our heroine, fought for. It resonates with me because it was a woman who fought in this terrain, and it shows that women are more powerful than we are made out to be, and for that, it empowers me to continue doing what I am doing”.

And, with all the efforts and significance, how successful was this perilous venture?

“The expedition gave us a tremendous amount of film footage and photographs ... equally important was the coming together of representatives from the Leeward and Windward Maroon groups and other members of the Jamaican society, including the JDF and the Jamaica Conservation and Development Trust park rangers,” Fuller said.



PHOTOS BY PAUL WILLIAMS

This piece of level land at Windsor, Portland, where the expedition to Old Nanny Town started on June 30, belies the hardship that Hospitality Jamaica Writer Paul H. Williams faced in the rugged terrains of the Blue and John Crow Mountains.

Paul Williams
Gleaner Writer

THE BLUE Mountain Peak (several times), Orange Vale 18th-Century coffee plantation, Bangor Ridge/Zion (wild hog hunt), and Sambo Hill (of which I wrote in the previous publication) are places my adventurous spirit has conquered despite my sometimes 'near-death' experiences.

But they, all of them together, by any stretch of the imagination, did not prepare me for the trek on the brutal trails that lead to Old Nanny Town about 1,500 feet away in the Blue and John Crow Mountains of Portland and St Andrew.

I heard it would be rough, but it turned out to be a big lie. For me, the trail to old Nanny Town was merciless.

Upon the invitation of the producers of the documentary, **Queen Nanny: Legendary Maroon Chieftainess**, I was excited. The plan was long in the making, so when the time came at the end of June, I was mentally and physically ready, but unfortunately, in the three months leading to departure day, my weight ballooned for reasons which I

won't disclose. I was very concerned, so I tried to shed some of it.

On the day before departure, the group, including members of the Jamaica Defence Force (JDF), park rangers, Maroons from Portland, hunters and guides, gathered and camped out at Donaldson Bernard's Rio Gran Health Farm, perched on a hill at Windsor in Portland. There was the pouring of libation, drumming, singing and dancing, and, of course, food and drinks. There were also briefings by key members of the group. Up to that point, I still had no remote (pun intended) idea of what I was going to go through.

On the morning of June 30, I got up singing a Bob Marley song. After much milling around, sorting out logistics, a real Jamaican breakfast (chocolate tea and fried dumplings for me), we set out about 7:30. I got a lift to the spot where a JDF helicopter would pick up supplies and equipment. There, I waited for the rest of the crew.

Five minutes from that spot and we reached a section of the Rio Grande. We had to remove our shoes to cross it. The trek had begun, and right away, I knew I was going to



These are not donkeys under 'cool shady'; they are some of the trekkers to Old Nanny Town taking a well-needed rest stop.

be a slow trekker, but I was comforted by the fact that the JDF soldiers, led by 2Lt T. Stewart, Infantry Platoon Commander and an experienced guide and hunter, would be staying with the stragglers. Some hours into the walk, Corporal Elrico Ricketts, physical instructor and rope specialist, appointed himself my personal assistant. Did my ancestors whisper something into his ears?

So, up and down steep slopes, some forested, some bare, we went; in between them were few areas of flatland. Some of the paths were covered with slippery bamboo leaves and loose stones. Over yonder, across huge expanses of valley were majestic, verdant mountains, some covered by clouds. Misty images of my ancestors waved to me from those hills of hardship and beauty.

Hardship it was, as fear and the will to go on clashed and fought along precipices, on narrow ledges and ridges, in gaping ravines, holding the narratives, the stories of what our forebears had been through in that jungle where they hid, to resist, to fight. My fighting spirit, too, was on fire, but my body was not fit. There were times when we would be going down, down, down, and then up, up, up. And my big toes burned.

MILITARY ORDERS'

Yes, many times, my mind and body felt like they were going to collapse at any moment. But I had to press on especially with the 'military orders' of Cpl Ricketts, who pushed me up some inclines. He and his colleagues developed strategies to get me ahead of the group, but they all failed. My legs were done. I believe at points, they were frustrated with me, especially when they wanted me to stand and walk.

From time to time, we caught up with the leaders, especially at the rest stops. But I was not in their league. I took consolation in the fact that I was young and fit once. With the assistance of a piece of walking stick; holding on to tree trunks, limbs and roots, overhead vines and 'twists'; sliding down gravelly slopes on my backside; walking on all fours up dangerous slopes, I was getting there. Where? To nowhere, it seemed.

But the road to nowhere was not without sweetness. In addition to the mints, Glucose, syrups, there was an abundance of otaheite apples, mangoes, mamees, rose apples, and soursop. Several springs provided us with water, and not the rusty pipelines once used to supply water to a mountain district called Johns Hall. It is now abandoned. How could anyone really live in that desperate place, where despair on my left, excitement on my right, and the patient soldiers behind were my company most of the way. The scariest moment in all of the trudge was when we came to a point where some people would have to use a piece of rope tied to trees to get down a very steep path of dirt and loose stones.

RIGHT: While others were almost literally dying at a rest stop, a young show-off in the person of Tajay McLeod does push-ups on river stones.



Jamaica Defence Force Cpl C. Huie, Sgt R. Burke and Sgt A. Myers make the trek to Old Nanny Town look easy. For some, it was brutal.

ABOVE: Road block! This blockage by fallen bamboo trees was a blessing in disguise for some of those who really wanted a rest along the treacherous trails during the trek to Old Nanny Town.



Moore Town Maroon Aaron Ireland chews on a juicy stem as he takes a break on the Old Nanny Town trail.

PHOTOS BY PAUL WILLIAMS
Springs and streams along the rugged terrains of the trail to old Nanny Town provided much-needed fluid for weary trekkers.

When it was my time, I froze. My weight wouldn't allow me I thought. What was this now? Cpl Ricketts, seeing my dilemma, pulled out a pair of leather gloves. I was hastened to put them on, night was coming. With gloves on, I gripped the rope, held on for dear life, and down I went, bracing my feet on the ground. Thoughts of my possibly fatherless son helped me down that slope. Who was going to 'mine' him? I thought, should I fall. Ah! And I was safe. I was alive to tell the tale to my unborn grandchildren.

At another juncture, after we had conquered one of the toughest hills, we came upon a clearing. I refused to go any farther. My nerves were in tatters. I was no longer enjoying the expedition. These were challenging hills, and though they took the wind out of me, there was still much more to go after about eight hours.

Day one was over for me. But Lt Stewart would have none of it. After a moment of tension, a stand-off if you will, I got up only because I wasn't going to have my all honey-tinged blood removed by the legions of mosquitoes that were having a frenzy of a welcoming party around my head.

Now, I was literally walking and sleeping downhill in the twilight. My big toes felt numb. Then I heard water rushing below. Determination kept me moving until I finally reached a stream by which there was a makeshift shelter. When I saw it, my mind and body shut down immediately after more than nine hours of walking.

I was assisted in crossing the stream. Towards the 'shelter' I headed, and collapsed on to a bed of braided coconut fronds as pitch darkness enveloped us in its eerie embrace.

Read the next issue of **Hospitality Jamaica** for the dramatic climax of my trek to Old Nanny Town.

‘SOON COME Back’ is the slogan used by Sandals Resorts’ guests who anxiously anticipate their return to their favourite Sandals property.

At Sandals Montego Bay, it is not unusual for guests to make the Sandals flagship resort their second home.

Such was the case for Dr Peter and Nancy Coville, who visited 82 times as a couple, and with Mrs Coville’s passing and a personal gesture from the hotel chain’s chairman, Gordon ‘Butch’ Stewart, Peter Coville returned to his home away from home for his 83rd visit.

For the couple, visiting the resort 82 times was not only a feat, but simply, their desire to rekindle the memory of their first visit. Both loyal guests, they never regretted their decision to travel to Jamaica in February 1991, a change from their customary annual vacation cruise.

Little did they know that when their travel agent advised them they had missed the deadline to book their annual cruise, that an island resort love affair would begin with Sandals Montego Bay.

TEST RUN

While Mrs Coville accepted the opportunity to indulge in an island style experience, her husband raised his eyebrows at the thought. “I was doubtful as I never had the desire to travel to the island. However, Nancy convinced me as the winter season had peaked and the weather in New England, Massachusetts was unbearable.” In just a few weeks, the couple landed on Jamaican soil for the very first

Peter Coville – one of Sandals’ most loyal



Peter Coville (centre), Sandals signature guest, receives a prize of a complimentary week stay at a Sandals of his choice from Sandals Montego general manager, Carl Beviere (right) and long standing employee, Dalton Smith.

time with all expectations that it would be a test run.

Fast forward to June 2014 and Mr Coville’s recent 83rd visit to Sandals Montego Bay. This time, he had his usual butler suite, and the spirit of his wife, Nancy, in his

heart. His beloved had passed away earlier this year from a massive stroke, dying only five days after leaving the resort in March.

The entire Sandals team was so accustomed to the couple’s simple

daily routine of enjoying the tranquil view from their patio and a quick chat, usually an exchange of anecdotes, which was a cherished moment. Nancy Coville’s sarcastic, but joyful comments had team members

amused at all times.

“I know for sure that the people of Sandals are my extended family. When Nancy died, I received a letter from Butch Stewart and past general manager, Josef Zellner, who both extended their condolences. I never expected that, but it meant everything to me as Nancy and I have shared so many memories at Sandals. I was deeply overwhelmed by the thought and remembrance.”

SANDALS SELECT

Coville’s 83rd visit was anticipated by the Sandals team, and on arrival, the Diamond-level guest was welcomed with big hugs and honoured at the weekly Sandals Select dinner.

“We cannot thank our guests enough who remain loyal to the Sandals brand. We are deeply honoured to have Peter here with us. His personal choice to return to the resort is symbolic, and like Peter who remains faithful to us, the Sandals family in turn remains grateful to him and our valued guests,” expressed Carl Beviere, general manager, during a champagne toast.

The glorious 1990s of being served a freshly chopped coconut by the groundsman or being hailed by the wayside by the housekeeper or the bartender who eagerly shouts “Hey man, how are you doing?” still remains at the resort that continues to evolve. The physical upgrades are evident and the cherished, consistently warm and hospitable customer service levels ensure the allure of the Sandals flagship resort remains.

Travel + Leisure names Jamaica Inn’s spa among World’s Best

TRAVEL + Leisure, one of the most celebrated travel magazines in the US, revealed last week that Jamaica Inn’s Ocean Spa was the Top Hotel Spa in the Caribbean, Bermuda, and The Bahamas and No. 6 in the world in the Travel + Leisure 2014 World’s Best Awards.

General manager, Kyle Mais, commented on the accolade stating, this was an incredible accomplishment and honour for the hotel and its newly renovated Ocean Spa.

“Admittedly, we are blessed with an amazing setting. However, just a year ago, we embarked on an ambitious journey to become one of the finest spas in the industry, and I am so proud of my team

for believing in themselves, relentlessly pursuing excellence – and in so doing, taking the overall guest satisfaction levels to a whole other level. This really does feel somewhat like a David and Goliath achievement, encouraging the team to push the boundaries of products and services even further to better serve our guests.”

Now in its 19th year, **Travel + Leisure** readers voted on their favourite hotels, resorts, spas, airlines, cruise lines, tour operators, rental-car agencies, and more, in the annual World’s Best Awards survey, honouring the best of the best in travel.

Results are available now on **TravelandLeisure.com** and will be

“ Just a year ago, we embarked on an ambitious journey to become one of the finest spas in the industry, and I am so proud of my team for believing in themselves, relentlessly pursuing excellence ... ”

featured in the August issue of **Travel + Leisure**, on newsstands July 18, 2014.

Located in beautiful Ocho Rios, Jamaica Inn boasts an eight-acre property situated on a private cove with an offshore reef two miles east of the town centre. With a 700-foot private white-sand beach considered to be one of the best in the Caribbean, this boutique hotel is the perfect getaway for the traveller seeking unassuming style and great service. Family owned since 1958 and boasting a roster of famed guests including Marilyn Monroe, Ian Fleming and Kathryn Hepburn, Jamaica Inn offers timeless elegance and relaxed luxury on the best white-sand beach in Jamaica.



A painted stone shaped like a shark's head at Ahhh... .



An old sun dial at Ahhh... .



One of the scenic views at Ahhh... .



PHOTO BY CLAUDIA GARDNER

Co-owner of Ahhh, Tamika Williams sits at a bird-watching spot on the property.



Organically grown cilantro is among the numerous herbs to be found at Ahhh... Ras Natango.

Ahhh... true ecotourism site

Claudia Gardner

Hospitality Jamaica Writer

ANYONE WHO visits Ahhh... Ras Natango Gallery and Garden, in the hills of Camrose in St James, will no doubt agree that it is one of, if not the best bird-watching and bird interaction sites in Jamaica.

They will agree, too, that it is one of the best eco-learning sites, not only for the very scientific-minded, but for those who appreciate the proverbial 'all things bright and beautiful' and 'all creatures great and small'.

Located mere minutes from the city of Montego Bay, Ahhh... is a respite for humans, and likewise for birds, because the owners, Tamika Williams and her husband, Ras Natango, have created a supporting environment through a perfect blend of flowering plants, trees and herbs, where hundreds of birds and other living things are able to thrive effortlessly. This they have achieved by using the natural

lay of the land, their scientific background, their love of nature and their own ingenuity.

Ahhh ... Ras Natango is an asset to Jamaica's biodiversity conservation efforts, as it is a haven for a total of 18 of Jamaica's 28 endemic birds, including the Jamaican Tody or the Rastabird, Hopping Dick, Banana Quit, Jamaican Patoo, Jamaican Mango, and others. Of course, the Jamaican national bird, the Streamer-tailed Humming bird, can be found there in droves and can be spotted flitting about every second. Of note is the very tame 'Rudie', whom it is said has fathered many of the national birds in the garden.

But Ahhh... is not like the typical botanical gardens in Jamaica which are set on flat sprawling expanses of land. Instead, it is tucked into the hillside with a myriad of different species of flowers and herbs planted on contours running parallel to meandering rustic footpaths, which facilitate an easy stroll throughout.

Birds are not the only creatures which

are nurtured at Ahhh...; honeybees are, too. One section of the garden is specifically dedicated to ensuring the flourishing of butterflies, and so plants on which those creatures feed are specially cultivated for their benefit. For the parrots, there are numerous bitter damsel trees, a favourite nesting place for Jamaican parrots.

PLANT LOVER'S DELIGHT

Ahhh... would delight any botanist or plant lover from anywhere in the world as hundreds of different plant species are found on less than an acre. The herbs and spices grown on the property are used in the preparation of scrumptious lunches and natural juices for visitors.

Almost all the exotic herbs one can think of can be found at Aaah... Cilantro, oregano, parsley, celery, basil, peppermint, rosemary, comfrey, fresh cut, dill, chard, aloe vera and lemongrass grow abundantly, as well as numerous flowering and ornamental plants such as Joseph's coat,

cana lily, gynora, and blue pea, an endemic Jamaican plant.

For the visitors to the attraction, Ahhh... Ras Natango Garden and Gallery soothes the human soul. It is a respite where all the cares of the world are left at the foot of the Camrose hill, and patrons can simply do nothing but enjoy the sounds cool breezes and the sounds of the birds and, or sit on a rock and enjoy the ambience and be at their most elemental.

The property incorporates the natural environment into the artwork, some of which is almost indescribable. But rocks and wood from fallen trees have been painted to create beautiful works of art.

Botanical Gardens in Jamaica are few and far between, but the Ahhh Ras Natango Gallery and Garden is a welcome one. It has many things to see and many things to learn. It is a true ecotourism site, where man has aided nature and the two work together in glorious harmony.