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# Hospitality Jamaica

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WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2014



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# Relax and free your mind at Blue Hole Mineral Spring

**Claudia Gardner**

*Hospitality Jamaica Writer*

WHEN WELLINGTON Clayton took his American friend, Matthew Lameroux, to a section of his childhood 'playground' in 2007, little did he know that just a few years later, the property would have blossomed into one of Negril's favourite attractions.

"I was working at this small resort called Coral Cove in Little Bay, Westmoreland. I took him (Lameroux) on a hike, up in the mountains where Blue Hole Mineral Spring was," Clayton told **Hospitality Jamaica**. "No one used to swim in it. We could only look and throw rocks in, because if you fell in, you couldn't get out, because there was no ladder in there."

"He wanted to go in that very same day and I told him 'no you can't go in it because how are you going to come out, and that would be trouble for me'. The following morning at breakfast, he said we really could do something with that spring. I said I always thought we could do an attraction like Rick's Café, but that we would have to buy the property," Clayton explained.

## OFFICIAL BUSINESS

The duo decided to officially become business partners and approached the owner of the land in an acquisition attempt. The owner initially later suggested they purchase five acres, which he thought would be a better deal for them.

Today, Blue Hole Mineral Spring, located at Brighton, near Negril, has thrived into a hot spot for eco-tourists. Visitors have two options for experiencing the waters of the attraction; They can either jump from the top, or make the 30-foot venture inside, by metal ladder, or for the less adventurous, splash about in the swimming pool which is fed with water from the mineral spring.

"We built the swimming pool



PHOTOS BY CLAUDIA GARDNER

Lifeguard Roekech 'Aaron' Rayson gives the thumbs-up sign after completing one of his superb reverse somersaults.



A section of the hotel at Blue Hole Mineral Spring.

because older people and small kids would not be able to experience the mineral waters otherwise. My idea was that we could pump the water in the pool, making it easy for them to swim," Clayton said.

Inside the Blue Hole at the fringes of the water are rocks where visitors can sit and watch lifeguards and other stuntmen do somersaults

and other acrobatic-style jumps into the water from above or observe fish swimming around. The attraction's lifeguards, Hammer, Curtis and Micky and Aaron, also double up as masseurs and upon request, treating guests to soothing body massages using limestone mud.

Blue Hole Mineral Spring also



The balconies at the Blue Hole Mineral Spring's hotel provide beautiful views of the coastline and forests.

boasts a bar and restaurant and also caters to weddings and other special events. For those who want a serene place to dine at night, they can call in and make reservations and have dishes of their choice cooked to order.

The accommodations side of the

attraction features 10 bedrooms, which became available in January this year. All rooms are equipped with king-size beds, air-conditioning units and televisions. Bed and breakfast or all-inclusive options are offered there.

Clayton said while he had high hopes in the initial stages that the

attraction would entice large numbers of guests due to its proximity to Negril, he had some misgivings about whether people would hear about it in its early stages. However, those concerns were erased after the posting of his first Youtube video, which along with other marketing strategies used by Lameroux, generated such a huge feedback that guests began streaming in.

“It was by word of mouth that the word got around that Blue Hole existed. Between 2011 and 2012, Blue Hole was rated the number-one attraction in Negril on Trip Advisor. People wrote a lot of reviews about staff. We just need to advertise more,” Clayton said.

Clayton and Lameroux have the distinction of being the first persons to ever swim in the Blue Hole. It was a feat Clayton accomplished while still very petrified, due to old community tales that claimed it possessed “river maids” and was very dangerous.

“When I hit that water, it was so amazing, cold and refreshing,” he said. “We made a rope ladder and we dropped it down and climbed down on it. I reached halfway, I jumped off. A lot of our friends were here, but only Matthew came down that day. Everybody else was scared. We were down there for 20 to 30 minutes. That was like history, then for everybody in the community to know that someone really went and swam in the Blue Hole. People didn’t believe we could do it,” Clayton said.

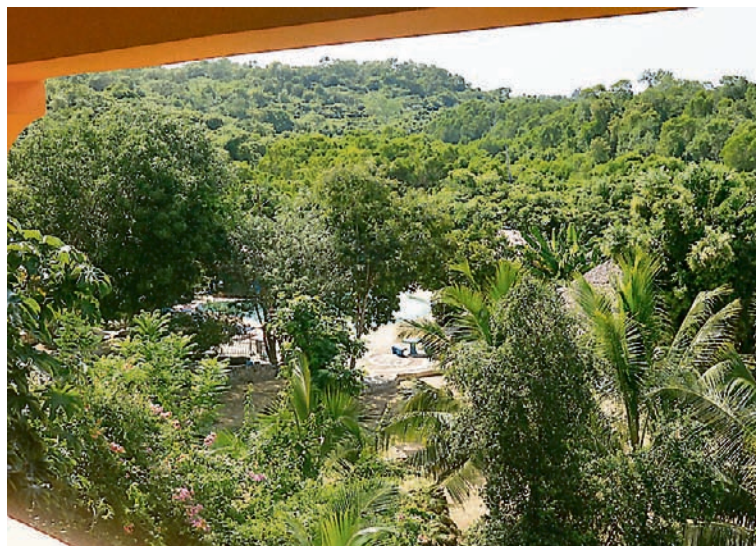
#### CONSERVATION COMMITMENT

Clayton says Blue Hole’s owners are committed to conserving the natural environment, and so, during clearing of the property for construction, all the bird feed trees were left uncut.

“I went through the property and marked every tree that bore berries for the birds. So we saved all of those. I knew if we saved those trees we would attract more birds. If you stay here for a night, when you get up in the morning, all you hear is birds, and them all over on the ground and in the trees,” he said.

Clayton said all the employees at Blue Hole, including housekeepers, lifeguards and bartenders, are from the Brighton community. Future plans include construction of a gym, tennis court, spa and the offering of yoga, as well as a water slide to the pool.

“Blue Hole is a very calm and relaxing place, a big getaway where you can come and free your mind, relax and be comfortable. The water is awesome – full of power,” he said.



PHOTOS BY CLAUDIA GARDNER

A bird's-eye view of the grounds of Blue Hole Mineral Spring.



Blue Hole Mineral Spring's lifeguards flex their muscles last Friday morning at the property. From left are Curtis Clayton, Roekch 'Aaron' Rayson and Micky Farrier.



Blue Hole Mineral Spring's lifeguard Roekch 'Aaron' Rayson somersaults 25 feet down into the depths of the spring.



The swimming pool at Blue Hole Mineral Spring. Water from the spring is pumped to the pool, which enables small children, the less adventurous and the elderly to enjoy its refreshing waters.



A section of one of the bedrooms at Blue Hole Mineral Spring, in Brighton, near Negril, Westmoreland.



A scenic view through a window bordered by artwork at Blue Hole Mineral Spring in Brighton, Westmoreland.

## Karrie Williams

Hospitality Jamaica Writer

CHARMING, SOPHISTICATED and ever confident, Alisteer Nelson is the quintessential hospitality professional.

At the Sunset Beach Resort, Spa and Water Park in Montego Bay where he works, he is everyone's favourite go-to guy for all things related to sales and marketing.

"Alisteer, in the past couple of years that he's been with us, has proven himself a bright, educated, trainable, focussed, disciplined and consummate service professional. I'm really very impressed by what he has brought to the organisation and the expectations that he's fulfilled so far as somebody with tremendous growth potential," remarked Evatt Bloomfield, the resort's general manager.

In fact, Nelson's passion for tourism hospitality could be deemed innate. He has consistently worked in the industry, where he first gained employment at the age of 17. Now 25, Nelson, who is a former Munro College head boy and graduate of the University of the West Indies, Mona, recently achieved a major milestone – a promotion from marketing executive to sales manager for local development.

### HELPING OTHERS

"I have a passion to assist and a passion to give back, and I find that through tourism, one is always able to help others ... it's about making people happy, and it's what I call servant leadership," Nelson said of his love for hospitality, adding that, "To be successful in the industry requires determination and perseverance, coupled with emotional intelligence."

In his newly appointed role, Nelson will be handling responsibilities such as travel agent tours and bookings, group bookings and event planning and implementation.



Alisteer Nelson, local sales manager for Sunset Beach Resort, Spa and Waterpark, is all smiles as he relaxes with a cocktail in the resort's Oasis lobby.

The sales manager's passion for his job was on full display during his recent interview with **Hospitality Jamaica**. While walking to the Oasis lobby where he was photographed, Nelson took every opportunity to point out the resort's many features and amenities along the way – one being the water park, currently the largest of its kind in the island.

Declaring that intrinsic motivation

was paramount to his well-being, Nelson said the environment at Sunset Beach has also significantly fostered his development and fuelled the passion he has for his job.

"Here, we are like a family; it's as if you have the baby and then you have the parents, and the parents then groom the children, and because of that grooming, you find that continuous growth and develop-

ment of employees is dominant here," he said.

He acknowledges Sales and Marketing Manager Tanesha Clarke and Bloomfield for being most integral to his growth and development at Sunset Beach, citing, "Their encouragement has moulded me into who I am today."

A track and field enthusiast, Nelson also recognises his mother,

Elair Clarke, and aunt Juliet Birch for their positive influences in his life.

"These two women have really been a tower of strength for me, they have been there through all my successes and through all my failures and they continue to encourage me ... They do have my best interest at heart and I really do appreciate everything they have done for me so far," he said.

## Carl A. Hendriks named GM for Hyatt Ziva Rose Hall and Hyatt Zilara Rose Hall

PLAYA RESORTS Management, the operational management component of Playa Hotels & Resorts BV, has announced the appointment of Carl A. Hendriks as general manager for Hyatt Ziva Rose Hall (designed for guests of all ages) and Hyatt Zilara Rose Hall (exclusively for adults).

Both resort are expected to open on November 1, 2014 ([www.hyattallinclusive.com](http://www.hyattallinclusive.com)).

The two new premier hotels are located on Montego Bay's renowned Rose Hall Plantation and are the culmination of an extensive \$80-million recreation, renovation, and expansion to the former Ritz-Carlton. This storied

resort destination is being reinvented in a way that brings effortless indulgence to the all-inclusive vacation experience.

"Carl's leadership, exceptional hospitality industry background, and his love for his native Jamaica make him a tremendous asset to the Playa team that is working to create the 'evolution of the all-inclusive experience' at this singularly beautiful resort destination," said Alex Stadlin, CEO, Playa Resorts Management.

"Under Carl's direction, we know that we will raise the bar, not only for Jamaica, but throughout the Caribbean, in setting a new

standard for service, dining and experience at an all-inclusive resort," added Stadlin.

Hendriks officially assumed his position as general manager of Hyatt Ziva Rose Hall and Hyatt Zilara Rose Hall on Monday, September 1. He brings more than 30 years of hospitality industry leadership. He joins Hyatt Ziva Rose Hall and Hyatt Zilara Rose Hall from the Apple Leisure Group. Prior to that, he enjoyed an extensive career as general manager at numerous Sandals Resorts throughout the Caribbean. He began his hospitality career in Miami with Unique Vacations, Inc.

A native of Mandeville, Jamaica, Hendriks

started his education at deCarteret College, and then attended Miami Dade College and Cornell University. He is an advocate of the hospitality industry and furthering education in Jamaica. He has served as the school board chairman for Negril, as well as a board member for the Vocational Training School at Westmoreland. He is actively involved in the Montego Bay Chamber of Commerce, the Jamaica Hotel & Tourist Association, and the Caribbean Hotel & Tourist Association.

Hendriks can be reached at [Carl.Hendriks@hyatt.com](mailto:Carl.Hendriks@hyatt.com).



The longest-serving early-childhood practitioners in St Ann pose with sponsors and officials of the education ministry and the Early Childhood Commission (ECC) after receiving their awards. The occasion was the ECC's 10th Anniversary Parish Awards sponsored by the Spanish-Jamaican Foundation at the Bahía Principe on Thursday, August 28. The practitioners have served from 40 to 51 years in the early-childhood sector. At left is Dr Rebecca Tortello, general manager, Spanish-Jamaican Foundation; (back row, from left) Dr Joan Reid (partially hidden), executive director, ECC; Karen Brown, regional environmental health officer; Professor Maureen Samms-Vaughn, chairman, ECC; June Sutherland-Boucher, JP; Paulette Mitchell, project manager, CHASE Fund; and (third row, right) Maxine Headlam, regional director, Ministry of Education.

## Bahía Principe hosts ECC's 10th Anniversary St Ann Awards

SEVERAL OF the island's hotels have collaborated with the Early Childhood Commission (ECC) to sponsor its 10th Anniversary Parish Awards that recognise outstanding early-childhood institutions and practitioners across the country. The parish awards will continue until November.

In St Ann on Thursday, August 28, long-serving early-childhood practitioners (ECPs) and outstanding early childhood institutions (ECIs) were duly recognised in a ceremony sponsored by the Spanish-Jamaican Foundation. The top-10 practitioners who have given a total of 443 years of service were awarded and feted at the Bahía Principe in Runaway Bay. The hotel's general manager, Ricardo Esteban, was eager to participate in awarding the top-10 institutions attaining the ECC's



General manager, Bahía Principe, Ricardo Esteban, presents a certificate to Emma Moncrieffe-James, principal of Union Basic School, for being among the top-10 early-childhood institutions that attained the highest legal standards. The occasion was the Early Childhood Commission's 10th Anniversary Parish Awards Ceremony held at the Bahía Principe on Thursday, August 28.

legal standards. "It is my great pleasure to share in this way with people who have done well in serving their country," he said.

The education ministry's regional director for St Ann, Maxine Headlam, commended the ECC for providing structure and regulation to the early-childhood sector, by implementing curriculum guides where previously ECPs were required to prepare their own curricula. "The mission is to improve access to quality education," she said, as she challenged ECPs to embrace quality for ECIs.

Providing an update on the parish's achievements, Professor Maureen Samms-Vaughn, chairman of the ECC, noted that of the 206 early-childhood institutions in St Ann, 69 have been granted permits to operate, while 183 institutions have applied for registration. The majority of the 713 teachers and

practitioners have also acquired some level of training from vocational to the masters level. Professor Samms-Vaughn promised more support for the various schools' development plans, even as she indicated that over the next five years, the education ministry will be reviewing its inspection process.

The inspections at ECIs are based on the 12 standards set out by the ECC. The standards cover the areas of staffing; development of educational programmes; interactions and relationships with children; physical environment; indoor and outdoor equipment, furnishings and supplies; health; nutrition; safety; child rights, protection and equality; interactions with parents and community members; administration and finance.

The ECC will next venture to St James on September 11 where the Riu Hotel will host the awards for outstanding early-childhood practitioners and institutions in that parish. Other sponsors of the ECC's 10th anniversary celebrations include UNICEF, the Jamaica Social Investment Fund and the CHASE Fund.

## THE BUSINESS OF TOURISM

# The new breed of travel agents offering more value for money

**David Jessop**  
Contributor

TRAVEL AGENTS, for over a decade a dying breed in many parts of the world, are making a comeback, but in many cases as specialist travel advisers offering a personalised service

For years now, travellers of all kinds have become accustomed to booking online everything from packaged holidays to hotels, flights and other services. For most, this made them feel more in charge, more easily able to obtain discounts or select the exact connections they wanted; but a trend steadily emerging in some parts of the travel market now suggests otherwise.

Independent-minded travellers are beginning to tire of the time they waste on the



JESSOP

Internet and the often frustrating experience of finding exactly what they are looking for. They are instead turning to the new breed of travel agent. Businesses, too, having made their staff responsible for their own bookings within company guidelines, are starting to realise that for anything other than a short out-and-back travel, it is worth paying in efficiency alone.

They see the US\$50 plus booking fee for complex itineraries that many travel agents have charged since airlines ended or reduced commissions as value for money.

Speaking recently to colleagues and those who travel frequently for business and pleasure, it is clear that they want to be able to identify rapidly flights, connections and hotels when, for instance, booking multi-sector travel in regions like the Caribbean, Latin America or South East Asia which involve more than

one airline, or as one highly respectable Asian business acquaintance suggested, routings that avoid his bad experience in US ports. The consequence is that they all, without exception, wanted to use a travel adviser if they can find someone who understands them and their needs.

### BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY

This trend at the higher end of the business and leisure market suggests that there is a large business opportunity waiting to be filled.

According to industry experts, those companies offering travel-advisory services are likely to be very different to the high-street travel agent of old. They spend time getting to know their customers and needs, provide value-added services that include planning, accommodation and leisure activities, and are able to develop complex itineraries involving multiple forms of transport and

make and monitor all bookings. They will almost all offer a host of ancillary facilities, selling up, for instance, hard-to-get-into events and restaurants.

The suggestion, too, is that this part of the market is evolving rapidly to embrace new technology and in future will provide apps for smartphones, enabling location-specific online travel guides for clients; round-the-clock support; will be linked to multi-service centres or to others such as banks that offer concierge-type services to their higher-end customers; may choose to diversify by region; and may create linkages and cross-selling opportunities with other similar advisers providing personal expertise they cannot match.

Articles in the mainstream US media confirm the overall trend. In a test of agents versus online search engines, *The New York Times* suggested that agents won nearly every time on both price and service; and in a recent interview with USA today, Adam Weissenberg, the leader of Deloitte's US Travel, Hospitality and Leisure business, was quoted as saying that travellers are more willing to turn to professionals when they're dealing with unusual locations or high-end luxury and specialised travel.

For the Caribbean, which needs to do much more to differentiate its product from other upscale warm-water destinations and offer more, these developments should be particularly interesting. Being able to ensure visitors feel immediately comfortable with where they have chosen and receive the welcome and service levels they are accustomed to is what will help ensure satisfaction and repeat visits.

## TEF donates motorcycles to Negril police

AS PART of an ongoing effort to further enhance safety and security in resort areas islandwide, the Ministry of Tourism and Entertainment, through the Tourism Enhancement Fund (TEF), has been pumping millions of dollars into boosting the crime-fighting efforts of the Jamaica Constabulary Force.

The latest move in this initiative was the donation of three Yamaha motorcycles to the Negril police on Friday, August 29.

Minister of Tourism and Entertainment Dr Wykeham McNeill formally handed over the motorcycles by presenting the keys to acting assistant commissioner for Area One, Gary Griffiths, at the Negril Police Station in Westmoreland.

McNeill stressed, "For the development of our economy as Jamaicans, we have to ensure that we can boost safety and security in our country." He pointed out that an important part of crime fighting



Minister of Tourism and Entertainment Dr Wykeham McNeill (centre) seems elated as he and other officials prepare to check if these new motorcycles are revving as they should before handing them over to the Negril police recently. McNeill is flanked by acting assistant commissioner for Area One, Gary Griffiths (left), and mayor of Savanna-la-Mar, Councillor Bertel Moore.

was the mobility of lawmen as "you can't simply chase criminals on foot; you have to be mobile, and it's a problem that has to be resolved".

For its part, over the past few years, the Ministry of Tourism and Entertainment has been collaborating with the Ministry of National Security to enhance crime-fighting efforts.

### ENHANCED MOBILITY

In December 2013, 15 vehicles were donated to the security forces at a cost of more than \$45 million, matching a similar gesture the year before. McNeill said, "In discussions with Minister Peter Bunting, we again intend to look at the issue of motor vehicles for the police force this year because we recognise how important it is to have enhanced mobility."

The decision to donate the Yamaha motorcycles arose out of a community meeting attended by

Ministers Bunting and McNeill about three months ago when the issue of the mobility of the police to effectively patrol the Negril West End and the hills surrounding the resort town was raised.

The motorcycles donated to the Negril police are three of several acquired by the TEF at a cost of \$4.3 million. The others are being distributed to other resort areas.

McNeill pleaded with the riders that "while you have to be aggressive in your fight against crime, I must ask you to care the motorcycles, because we need to ensure that even as we are donating them, we are building our fleet".

Griffiths expressed thanks for the "generous contribution" and reinforced that the motorcycles were well needed. Chairman of the Negril Resort Board, Cliff Reynolds, also welcomed the move to help the police in their crime-fighting efforts and said the motorcycles should make a significant difference.



# CPJ / Remy Martin serve up a GOOD time!!

*Spirits*

The recently staged Live in the CITY event at CRU Bar and Kitchen has been lauded as success. The first of a series of live shows was dubbed “The CHARITY Edition” with part proceeds set to support Lanesa Downs, a UWI Law student who is currently battling Lupus. Event promoter, Andre Blake Marriott rallied sponsors to do more and CPJ stepped up the plate making a cash donation to Lanesa. Global entertainer Konshens was keen

to support by performing, and enhancing the event with a showcase from the SubKonshus band and fellow performers. To top it all off, Remy Martin served up specialty cocktails to all entrants and invited trendy men spotted at the event to join their search for the island’s ultimate Ringleader—one man will be the winner of the soon to be launched sweepstake program and win the ultimate VIP experience courtesy of Remy Martin. With so much more to come, we can’t wait for the next show!



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Photography provided courtesy of Skkan Media Entertainment.





PHOTOS BY PAUL WILLIAMS

A thatch-and-bamboo hut at Riogran Jamaica Health Farm at Windsor in Portland. It's a Maroon-inspired structure that forms part of the accommodation at Riogran.

**Right:** The Riogran picnic spot is located at a point in the Rio Grande Valley where there are beautiful vistas such as the one pictured here.



Donaldson Bernard talking with retired principal of Rusea's High School, Joan Thompson, about a special species of pineapple grown on his farm at Windsor, Portland.



Eco-friendly bamboo cups and eating troughs used at the Riogran picnic spot.

**Paul H. Williams**  
*Hospitality Jamaica Writer*

**T**O REACH it, you have to cross it. It's the Riogran Jamaica picnic spot, and to reach it, invariably, you have to cross the Rio Grande, the river that is so much a part of the natural and tourism landscapes of Portland.

The spot, which is ideal for picnics, days-out and special events, is located beside the Rio Grande at Seaman's Valley.

It's part of a business project that includes a farm located at Windsor, a few miles away. Together, they are called Riogran Jamaica Health Farm, a family-operated business, for which retired principal of Rusea's High School, Donaldson Bernard, is the front man. The farm itself is located on family lands which Bernard has always wanted to develop, and so when he retired in 2007, he began to give it some serious attention.



# Riogran Jamaica taking tourism a step farther

The farm is perched on a hill from which there are fantastic views of mountain ranges way over yonder. Bernard, who himself loves to hike in the mountains, considers what he is doing agri-tourism, which falls under the broader umbrella of community tourism. It's about experiencing the unpretentious and absorbing what nature has to offer.

In essence, for people who want to get away from resort tourism and desire a real rural experience, Riogran is ideal. There are dormitory facilities for overnight stays, and guests get a chance to see how a small farm is operated. "This is to give people an experience of country life – experience of healthy living," Bernard told *Hospitality Jamaica*, during a recent visit to the farm.

And on that farm, no chemical is used to cultivate varieties of pineapple, bananas, ginger, turmeric, ackee, coco, and some exotic plants. In-season, non-commercial fruits



A birthday 'girl' and 'boy' celebrating their big day recently at the Riogran picnic spot at Seaman's Valley, Portland.

are complimentary.

It's an eco-friendly place where it is demonstrated that farming can actually take place on slopes without compromising the environment.

From the farm, guests may take a short journey to Seaman's Valley by vehicle to the picnic spot mentioned earlier. When the ride is over, there is a little walk to the shore of the Rio Grande, where some skilled young men take you across the river by rafts.

It's a pleasant five-minute trip to the other side for the riparian experience. Located near the river, the picnic spot is surrounded by lush vegetation, and there is a stream that joins the river, which teems with a variety of edible creatures ideal for the soup pot. And though cooking is allowed, care must be taken to prevent fires, and all non-biodegradable matters must be disposed of properly. This is in keeping with the eco-friendliness of the experience.

Activities at the spot include river

bathing, tubing, rafting, stilt racing on bamboo 'jointers'. There is also a 'triathlon' in which participants run the first leg on stilts down to the river. On the second leg, they sail downstream on tubes to a certain point from which they return with a bamboo 'joint' filled with water.

And from time to time, there is entertainment by way of singing, drumming and dancing from the Moore Town Maroons. The area is Maroon country and has historical and cultural significance. Part of the offering at Riogran is the teaching of Maroon history and culture. On the farm at Windsor, there is a bamboo-and-thatch hut which is heavily influenced by traditional Maroon technology. It's a way of preserving Maroon culture, Bernard said.

The Riogran Jamaica Health Farm experience is ideal for family and group activities, but individuals can go it alone just to laze away and be at peace with nature.



Raftman Davel Bernard preparing to anchor his raft which took some patrons from one side of the Rio Grande to the other, where the Riogran picnic spot is located.



River bathing and tubing are some of the activities Riogran picnic spot at Seaman's Valley, Portland.



Stilt walkers (from left) Dillon Smith, Damoy Bernard and Kamarie Bernard preparing for a race.



# Jamaican wins international children's essay contest

**J**AMAICA'S GABRIELLE Pratt of St Andrew Preparatory School has topped the Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association (FCCA) Foundation Children's Essay Contest. She emerged the winner among contestants from 19 participating nations, effectively elaborating on the competition's topic 'Why is it important that the cruise ships come to my destination'.

Entering in the junior division of the competition, Gabrielle posited solid arguments in support of the importance of cruise ships to destination Jamaica. Among the key points, she argued that cruise ships, also called floating cities, are a significant source of foreign exchange from passenger spending. She also elaborated that the ships are a source of employment, hiring many of her countrymen in various capacities such as engineers, cap-



From left: Paul Pennicook, director of tourism; Gabrielle Pratt; Christine Pratt, Gabrielle's mother; and Janet Walsh Davis, principal, St Andrew Preparatory School, during the presentation at the Jamaica Tourist Board in Kingston.

tains and chefs. The development of resort towns as in the case of Falmouth in Trelawny, as well as the cultural exchanges between



visitors and Jamaicans that the ships facilitate, were equally important areas of discussion that she highlighted in her essay.

Minister of Tourism and Entertainment Dr Wykeham McNeill said, "I am very pleased that Gabrielle has emerged the winner of this very important essay competition. She has truly done Jamaica proud and has built on the successes of the many Jamaican students who have excelled in this competition in the past." He added, "Her success is proof that she is an outstanding scholar who is poised for great things in the years to come. I congratulate her on this victory and wish her continued success in the future."

"Heartiest congratulations on a job well done, Gabrielle. We knew that your essay was an excellent piece of work, and your triumph over your peers in the region confirms our conviction," said Paul Pennicook, director of tourism. "You masterfully illustrated the critical role that the cruise shipping industry plays in Jamaica's tourist industry. We are extremely proud of you. You are definitely one for the future," he added.

As the champion in her division, Gabrielle will be awarded a scholarship, and her *alma mater*, St Andrew Preparatory School, will also receive a monetary prize. She, along with a chaperone, will travel to St Maarten to receive the award during the FCCA Caribbean Cruise Conference in October later this year.

Each year, the Jamaica Tourist Board organises the national leg of the FCCA Foundation Children's Essay Contest and students are selected from the junior and senior divisions to represent the island. The competition aims to encourage children's creative expression on the importance of cruise tourism, thereby generating awareness of the vital role that cruise shipping plays in the Caribbean.

## Experience your Jamaica

THE JAMAICA Tourist Board's (JTB) local marketing campaign, 'Experience Jamaica', is reaping success across the island's six resort areas in Jamaica. The Experience Jamaica programme aims to encourage Jamaicans, members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps communities, and the Jamaican diaspora to vacation on the island.

To promote the incredible vacation deals on offer, the JTB has participated in several roadshows and outside broadcasts. These have taken place in major towns such as Mandeville, Ocho Rios, Montego Bay, Portmore and Kingston. The Experience Jamaica Campaign has also had exhibits at the following notable events: All Jamaica Grill Off, Relay for Life, Denbigh Agricultural Show, Jamaica College Parent Teachers Association, Independence Celebration and the interCaribbean Airways launch event. These occasions provided opportunities to promote the island's tourism product and interact with a wide cross section of Jamaicans.

### DEEP DISCOUNTS

The continued success of the Experience Jamaica campaign is a result of the partnerships that the JTB has forged with the more than 100 tourism stakeholders who offer exceptional discounts at the country's tourism facilities. Accommodations, transportation providers, attractions and restaurants have signed on to offer discounts of up to 50 per cent. It is hoped that persons will capitalise on the deals on offer and experience the delight that millions of visitors have experienced for many years.

In commenting on the campaign, Sandra Scott, the JTB's deputy director of tourism, marketing said, "Heartfelt thanks to all our partners who continue to make the Experience Jamaica promotion a success. At the Jamaica Tourist Board, we are passionate about



Patrons of the Experience Jamaica Event interact with tourism partners.

domestic tourism, and we want you to experience the many reasons that millions of travellers continue to vacation on the island."

Dave Chin Tung, managing director of Go! Jamaica Travel, said, "The Experience Jamaica programme is a great programme that allows Jamaicans to enjoy our great tourism product. We have received many calls and taken many bookings from Jamaicans to vacation at home."

As part of the initiative to spread the word to the business community, the Experience Jamaica team has been making presentations at various corporate offices. Staff members have been very receptive to the campaign. "We recognised the importance of this initiative by the Jamaica Tourist Board, and wanted our staff to benefit," said Shelly-Ann Henry, chief officer, marketing, EXIM Bank, Jamaica.

Experience Jamaica runs until December 15. To view a list of all participating partners as well as discounts available, visit: [www.visitjamaica.com/experiencejamaica](http://www.visitjamaica.com/experiencejamaica).



**New York City served a taste of Jamaica at the Get All Right Lounge:** Jamaica's professional tennis star, Dustin Brown (left), served up some Jamaican culinary delights at the 15th annual Taste of Tennis held at the W New York Hotel on August 21. Anthony King (right), regional director, Airline & Tour Operator at the Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB), and Gael Monfils (centre), French professional tennis player, take a break from hosting duties at the ultimate kick-off celebration to the US Open. Secrets Resort & Spa in Montego Bay partnered with the JTB in hosting the Get All Right Lounge, where Chef Paul Evans dished out mouth-watering chicken roulette stuffed with pumpkin and glazed with jerk sauce. The US Open is the last of the four major tournaments that comprise the Grand Slam, and goes from August 25 through September 8.



General Manager Clifton Reader being escorted to the podium by Theresa Bailey.



Erving Russell and Barbara Henry.



The Graduation backdrop.



Natty Bald Head with Jamaica Grande's senior hotel manager, Errol Lingo (fourth left, in white).



From left: Jovan Thomas, chief engineer; Claude Walker, Michael Fletcher, Nicollette Smith-Dennis, and Melville Harris.



Romika Salmon from Guest Services.

## 'Graduation' party for Sunset Ja Grande staff

**Carl Gilchrist**  
*Hospitality Jamaica Writer*

**T**HE CURTAINS came down on the Sunset Jamaica Grande era when the hotel closed on Thursday, August 28, with a party appropriately named 'Graduation'.

The 730-room property has been sold to Mexican group, Moon Palace, which will carry out extensive refurbishing to get it to five-star status and reopen early in 2015 as Moon Palace Jamaica Grande.

The good news for the staff is that all 500 workers have been offered employment by the new company and more than 100 of them will leave for Mexico on September 15 for training, ranging from two to four weeks.

They will then return and train the remaining staff as they prepare for the new era.

Graduation had management and staff coming together to celebrate the good times spent at Sunset and to bid farewell as they look towards the Moon Palace era.

The party included performances by Gem Myers, Peter Lloyd, the

group Natty Bald Head, with Errol Lingo appearing as a guest, performing a solo selection; staff member, Mr Fletcher, and resident band, Grande Ingredients.

### FOND MEMORIES

Erving Russell, who spent the last 21 years at Jamaica Grande, dating back to the days of The Marriott, had fond memories of the resort, so, too did Barbara Henry, who has been employed there for five years.

"I have fond memories because I enjoyed moments with most of the staff, most of them are great, but then life goes on," said Henry.

General manager, Clifton Reader, told the staff, "The Sun is setting, but the Moon is rising", in reference to the name change.

He thanked them for their many years of excellent service, which he said impacted Moon Palace's decision to retain them.

The hotel's managing director, Ian Kerr, spoke with mixed emotions, but said he was happy he was leaving the staff in the hands of a company he feels confident will treat them as well as Sunset Resorts did.



The Whispering Winds villa at Negril Retreat.

## Negril Retreat the ideal place for those seeking serenity

**Claudia Gardner**

*Hospitality Jamaica Writer*

**N**OT MANY people in Jamaica know about Negril Retreat, a beautiful boutique hotel perched in the hills of Hog Heaven, in Negril's West End.

The off-the-beaten-path hotel is ideal for those who are seeking serenity, looking for a place for family gatherings and reunions or for retreats, family weddings and private parties.

The property is owned by Connie Lisowecki, a Canadian information technology professional. According to Lisowecki, she initially had no plans to build a hotel of this magnitude.

"I have been coming to Jamaica since 2006 and fell in love with the island. It was really a getaway after the death of my daughter who died in a motor vehicle accident. I had post-traumatic stress disorder and all of that, and this place offered the getaway I needed," Lisowecki told **Hospitality Jamaica**.

### FRESH BREEZE

Also known as Sun Ups, the name given by its previous owners, the villas are sited on one acre of land, where guests are able to directly enjoy the fresh southern sea breeze and a million-dollar panoramic view of the southwestern coast of the parish of Westmoreland.

But what is remarkable about the property and the area in which it is situated is the area in which it is coincides with the rising of the full moon, offering one of the most



A bird's-eye view of a section of the Negril Retreat.



The ocean can be viewed from the Jacuzzi at Negril Retreat.



The swimming pool at Negril Retreat was designed in the shape of a bottle-nosed dolphin. Behind it is the property's bar and lounge.



One of the upper-level rooms at the Whispering Winds villa at Negril Retreat.

magnificent sights the universe has to offer.

"The sun and moon seem to orbit around Negril Retreat. Every sunset is different," Lisowecki said, smiling.

The property consists of a total of 11 rooms including a detached stone room, a duplex with two bedroom apartments and another multi-room villa, Whispering Winds. Each room comes with its own balcony from where the sunset and moonrise can be experienced. A section of the second floor of Whispering Winds also has the capacity to be converted into a conference room to host small meetings, and as such, the Negril Retreat has played host to work-

shops and yoga retreats.

A plunge pool shaped in the form of the Jamaican indigenous bottle-nosed dolphin, a poolside bar and lounge, a Jacuzzi and a grill are among the other features of the property. The plunge pool is treated by a salt-generated chlorinator and so does not use raw chlorine.

The upper part of the gentle sloping grounds consists of a vegetable garden where small crops such as pumpkin, tomatoes, melons and canteloupe are grown. In addition, fruit trees, including papayas, as well as bananas, plantains and coconuts, can be found thriving across the property for guests to enjoy at leisure.

# Sandals Whitehouse hosts annual back-to-school fun day for team members

**S**ANDALS WHITEHOUSE recently hosted its Back-to-school Family Fun Day on the resort's famed Croc's Lawn. The yearly event provided non-stop kid-friendly entertainment for some 250 team members and their children, who were treated to thrilling rides on Ferris wheels, access to water slides, pool, face painting, competitive races, dance-offs and yummy meals.

Each child also received back-to-school packages and many capitalised on opportunities to win extra supplies by participating in various competitions. According to General Manager Courtney Miller, the fun day was a worthwhile initiative that was very much appreciated by the team.

"Children all want to have fun during the summer holidays, and parents want to spend less on their back-to-school shopping. The fun day was an answer to both needs; while the children had a blast, the parents were happy that each package helped in some way to offset their expenses."

Appreciative of the assistance, one team member spoke glowingly of the luxury-inclusive resort chain.

"I am happy that Sandals Whitehouse does this every year, and I can look forward to a day in

August where my two children will get a full day of fun and I would spend less on supplies during my back-to-school shopping," she said.

After helping to monitor their children for a whole day of fun, the adults blew off steam at the Sandals Whitehouse Sports and Social Club's Summer Rave Colours Party later in the night.



Sandals Whitehouse's head butler, Damion Lewis, busily paints a butterfly on this little girl's face during the Sandals Whitehouse Back-to-school Family Fun Day.



Entertainment Manager Geraldine Willis and the Sandals Whitehouse Croc mascot share a photo op with these winners in the lime-and-spoon race during the Sandals Whitehouse Back-to-school Family Fun Day.



Children enjoy the Ferris wheel during the Sandals Whitehouse Back-to-school Family Fun Day.



PHOTO BY ERROL CROSBY

A section of the ruins of a house that enslaved Africans used to live in. It is located on Government Mountain in St Catherine.

# Sligoville

## ancestral wail

**Paul H. Williams**  
Hospitality Jamaica  
Writer

I GREW up listening to 'duppy' stories, especially those of my mother. For me, they were more thought-provoking than scary. Of course, I got a little jittery at times, but as I got older I had heated discussions with her about these apparitions. I just could not understand how people could see and communicate with the non-physical and how the non-physical could do the things people say they do.

Yet, I have come to believe that there might just be a realm out there where we dwell after we have made the transition from the physical. But I do not know what exactly this metaphysical realm is and



PHOTO BY PAUL WILLIAMS

A part of the ruins of the foundation of the British governor's summer house at Sligoville, St Thomas.

frankly, I do not want to know. I might not like what it turns out to be, so let it continue to be a mystery.

Some people believe that there is a connection between that realm and ours. In fact, African people,

long before they were introduced to Christianity, and until today, believe in having communion between the living and the departed to honour and remember them. Many of our indigenous rituals right here in

Jamaica are based on that belief.

The retention is not only ritualistic and material, as some people claim to have strong ancestral spiritual connections. And they will give you personal anecdotes. For me I have a keen personal and professional interest in my African ancestry, but I will not claim to have extraordinary access to those who have gone on before me.

Yet, I get excited when I see historical sites on which enslaved Africans lived and worked. I would stare at piles of stones said to be their grave sites. Those spots usually put me in a reflective mood. I think about what it was like for them in the fields, the animal pens, the boiling house,



PHOTO BY PAUL WILLIAMS

Dalton Cooper pointing at the names of his ancestors who were among the first free villagers at Sligoville, St Catherine.



PHOTO BY ERROL CROSBY

This farmer on Government Mountain in Sligoville, St Catherine is tilling soil that her ancestors perhaps worked for decades. The plot is located on a former coffee plantation.

the mills, the workshops. It's unimaginable. It is a story that must be told, lest it happen again.

That's why I find it extremely painful when people scoff at my interest in my story, the story of my African ancestors. Yet, everywhere I go, people call me African. They say I look like a real African, but they want me to forget my past, the African people and place from which I have come. But they are only wasting their time. My interest in my forbears will never die.

So when I was requested to do a series on the free villages of Jamaica as part of the commemoration of the 180th anniversary of **The Gleaner**, I was happy to take it on – an opportunity to see the places where they first lived after they were freed in 1838.

Sligoville, in St Catherine, then known as Highgate, was actually established in 1835 by James M. Phillippo. It is regarded as the first free village in Jamaica, but it was the third village on our tour, and like Sturge Town in St Ann and

Maidstone in Manchester, it was set up on hill and gully lands with small farming as the major economic activity.

Now, it has many points of historical interests including Winchester, known as Government Mountain. The foundation ruins of Highgate House, the governors of Jamaica's summer residence, are still there. While some residents were showing us around on the hill, they pointed out a little, old structure. They said it was a slave house. Really?

#### READY FOR RUINS

A man, a woman and a young man were tilling a piece of land beside it. I started to get flashes of another era, of enslaved Africans working in the sun. Suddenly, it started to drizzle. And over yonder, there were dark clouds. My eyes were now fixed on the ruins I told Dalton Cooper, a young resident, that I wanted to go see it.

By now, the farmers had sought shelter in it. Cooper ran down an

incline. I followed suit. There was a curved road to the house. At the bend, there was a tree. Cooper passed it. As I approached it, I felt a scream coming. Strange! I couldn't move. The scream was coming out fast. And my legs were going nowhere. My body shook and then a loud wail escaped from the bottom of my guts, and years of pain in the form of tears streamed down my face.

It was only then I was able to move past the Mahoe tree. Cooper and the farmers stared at me. I told them I was OK and I was. I was only greeting my ancestors. So did I make an ancestral connection? Did I enter a grey area where their spiritual world met mine? Why was I not able to move past that tree? And why was Cooper? Did slaves really live in that house?

I still reflect on that strange and poignant moment on Government Mountain in Sligoville, and I still cannot figure out what happened. Perhaps I never will.



PHOTO BY PAUL WILLIAMS

The graves of poor, enslaved Africans were not marked as the one above. They are usually marked by piles of stones or nothing at all.



PHOTO BY PAUL WILLIAMS

After a very 'strange' moment while Hospitality Jamaica writer Paul H. Williams was on his way to view a slave house on Government Mountain at Sligoville, St Catherine, this man, Rufus Taylor, told him about a very interesting personal story of how angels intervened and cured him of his near-death renal failure.



PHOTO BY ERROL CROSBY

Stephanese Walters, a trained tour guide in Sligoville, St Catherine, points to a horseshoe affixed to the ruins of a house that was once occupied by enslaved Africans. Horseshoes are used to ward off duppies/ghosts in Jamaican folklore.



# Hospitality Jamaica's

10th Anniversary

# Awards

Recognising organisations and individuals who have contributed significantly to improving the quality and experience of the hospitality industry.

**SATURDAY 25  
OCTOBER 25**

## CRITERIA

1. Comply with all applicable tourism industry and other standards.
2. Provide exceptional customer service which enhances the visitor experience.
3. Engage in continuous upgrading of facilities and training of staff.
4. Contribute significantly to the improvement in quality of Jamaica's tourism industry.
5. Entity must be in operation for at least a year.

The awards will be made in the ten categories shown below. The Hospitality Personality of the Year will be selected from category winners.

## JAMAICA'S BEST

**EP Hotels//All Inclusive Hotels//Boutique/Small Hotels  
Entertainment//Purveyors//Transportation//Cuisine  
Convention//Attractions//Eco/Sustainable Tourism**

## NOMINATION PROCEDURE

1. Send a fax to 952-3828, a letter to Editor, The Gleaner P.O. box 40, Kingston or e-mail to [hospitalityjamaica@gleanerjm.com](mailto:hospitalityjamaica@gleanerjm.com) nominating an individual or organisation meeting the criteria. Nominations must be sent by September 18.

Set out the: \*Nominee's full name \*Nominee's address and telephone number \*Brief description of the specific reasons for nominating the individual or organisation \*Category in which you are nominating your candidate \*Your name, address and telephone number

