

The Islander *Hospitality* Jamaica

KEEPING YOU CONNECTED TO THE BUSINESS OF TOURISM

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Beauty AND THE BEAST

**STAKEHOLDERS SAY FALMOUTH
IN NEED OF DEVELOPMENT**



One of the many drains in the town that are urgently in need of cleaning.

‘Urgent development needed in Falmouth’

Karrie Williams

Hospitality Jamaica Writer

“IT’S ABSOLUTELY beautiful inside here, but once we ventured out the gates, the reality of some of what we saw on the outside proved to be a rather rude awakening for us.” That was how Rose McCarthy, a cruise visitor from Ireland, described her sightseeing trip into the town of Falmouth last week Wednesday.

Speaking more candidly about her native Ireland, McCarthy continued: “We are living in a country that has poverty at the moment, but they would like to see the roads and some of the houses and the way some of the people live, and I tell you, they would think that they were millionaires in

comparison. That’s the sad part really, and I don’t think people in Ireland realise how well off they are.”

Since opening its doors to cruise tourism in 2011, Falmouth, which is also home to the world’s largest cruise ship port, has come under intense scrutiny, mainly due to the deplorable conditions that exist in the town.

When **Hospitality Jamaica** toured the town centre recently, several open drains containing black stagnant water giving off a foul odour were spotted throughout. Most of the streets were riddled with potholes, and there were piles of uncollected garbage in some sections.

The general consensus from many of the town’s stakeholders is that Falmouth’s current status is



An untidy town in need of urban renewal.



Stagnant water on the roadside.

unacceptable, especially in light of the numerous promises which were made by the Government of Jamaica to bring about improvements to its conditions. The stakeholders say they are now even more embarrassed about the town, particularly its pothole-riddled streets, as not only are they a let-down for the thousands of cruise-ship visitors that come to Falmouth on a weekly basis, but also a hazard for them.

“When you walk down the streets, there is water everywhere, so you have to hop, skip and jump in order to get around. People who come to visit have suffered broken limbs because they have fallen into potholes ... it’s that bad, and it’s just as bad for the residents and other users of the town,” said Florence Logan, a business operator in Falmouth.

According to Logan, Falmouth was much cleaner before the construction of the cruise-shipping enterprise. She further believes that the sanitation problems now being experienced in the town are primarily due to the fact that its current infrastructure was never expanded to facilitate the influx of people coming in to harness earnings from tourism.

“We have not invested in the infrastructure to keep the town clean after people started coming in for jobs, businesses and so on, so to me, that’s why the town is the way it is.

“And then Government had promised that once the development comes on stream, they were going to look at Falmouth and fix the roads, fix sidewalks and stop the water from running on the road, because it’s people’s wash water that runs out onto the road that gives the town its foul odour. But that promise was never fulfilled. They

never did anything much ... they haven’t done the work that they are supposed to do and so it has worsened since the ships come in because the roads are now worse,” she said.

Also expressing disappointment over the length of time it has been taking the authorities to improve Falmouth’s facilities is another business owner who operates from the pier, and who spoke to **Hospitality Jamaica** on condition of anonymity “Falmouth needs fixing up. It’s a disgrace, so much money has been spent here and we have not achieved much by way of improvement of the town. The sanitary conveniences are a total disgrace, there is sewage water running all over the place and the guests are fighting to get a space to walk. You hear that it’s being worked on, well it’s being worked on for three years ... they promise to fix, but absolutely nothing has happened.”

Despite its challenges, Falmouth cannot be seen as a total failure. The town has grown significantly in employment from its cruise shipping operations and there are even some investors who are seeking to bring about future sustainability of the town’s tourism.

One such investor is Judy Schnoenbein, owner of Braemar Tours, which offers a historic tour of the town centre via trolley. According to Schnoenbein, Falmouth has its challenges, but the town was still a work-in-progress which she sees as constantly improving over time. As part of her efforts, Schnoenbein partners with the Jamaica Tourist Board in educating school children about Falmouth’s rich history and how tourism can be a viable career option for them.



The dirt and grime from the garbage strewn in the open lots in the town.



A part of the town that needs to be cleaned.



Judy Schnoenbein



Irish visitors Elizabeth Horgan (left) and Rose McCarthy.



Artisans display their goods inside the Historic Falmouth Port.



The Falmouth Pier.



Shellion Rhoden, business manager for the Historic Falmouth Port.



The Courthouse in Falmouth.

The Historic Falmouth Port

The toast of the world

Janet Silvera
Hospitality Jamaica Coordinator

MORE THAN 769,379 cruise ship passengers visited the Historic Falmouth Pier in 2014. Of that figure, between 82 and 92 per cent of these loss leaders, came off the megaliners that docked in the western resort town.

“Twenty-five per cent go on tour buses and 22 per cent of them went through the gates into the town of Falmouth,” said Shellion Rhoden, business manager at Falmouth Land Company Limited, a subsidiary of the

Royal Caribbean Cruise Line (RCCL).

Last month, some 28,000 visitors went through the port’s gates, Rhoden noted, taking in the sights and sounds of the town known for its ‘ben’ down’ market.

The original intention of constructing the Historic Port was to help Jamaicans, begin to realise their vision of revitalising this historic town, which in its heyday more than 200 years ago, was one of the busiest trading ports in the Caribbean, said RCCL.

The town boasts a rich heritage



PHOTOS BY JANET SILVERA

Authentic Blue Mountain Coffee is served at Cafe Blue on the Pier.



The Margaritaville mascot.

with historic buildings and churches, while the port, partially completed in 2011, carries a thematic design and architecture reflecting the Georgian architectural era of Falmouth at its peak.

More than 60 artisans from the town are given access to the cruise-ship passengers, while another 58 specialty stores line the storied pier. Of that 58, only two are international merchants. The majority of the duty-free shops are owned by Jamaican-based merchants.

Jamaica's Margaritaville, Eaton's, makers of Jamaican mouth-watering jerk sauces; Café Blues' Blue Mountain coffee; Juicy Patties; carvers creating some of the most fabulous craft pieces on show; and artists painting spectacular landscape and people presentations all form the nucleus of the port.

"The visitors are able to watch the artisans creating their pieces," said Rhoden, adding that the port was so busy, the average calls were four ships per week.

Harassment is not tolerated on the pier, and no craft merchant is even allowed to solicit or beckon to the visitor, said Joy Laesch, the woman in charge of training and managing the craft traders.

"A passenger should be able to walk freely without anyone telling them to come shop," said Laesch.

Just over 1,000 Jamaicans are employed at the port, with Margaritaville Caribbean managing all food and beverage.

The entertainment complex operators have literally transformed the pier with the construction of a

multimillion-dollar bar, restaurants, swimming pool, Jacuzzi, and dance area.

"This is a huge change to the town," said Falmouth Resort board chairman, Judi Schoenbein.

An active member of the Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association, Schoenbein who operates Braemar Tours in the facility points out that the rich cultural heritage that Falmouth boast is the greatest asset to the port.

"There are three heritage sites outside the gates, these include, the beautiful courthouse, a monumnet dedicated to Jamaicans who survived in World War II, as well as many churches."

In fact, the historic Tharpe House is on the lands behind the port's gates and is currently being restored.

"This town is a proud heritage town and this is how it is being marketed," stated the resort board chairman.

One of her only concerns, she said, is the condition of the drains and the roads when the visitors leave the port.

"We have embraced this huge change, but we all must change accordingly. By 7 a.m., garbage must be collected because the cruise-ship passengers are coming off the ships at that time," said Schonbein, adding that cruise-ship passengers understand poor countries, but they don't understand open drains and signs that say, 'Danger'.

The Historic Falmouth Port is the toast of the world, it remains one of the most popular places to visit.

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A mascot at Margaritaville Caribbean.



A façade of the Historic Falmouth Pier.



PHOTO BY JANET SILVERA

A stall displaying local art and crafts for sale.



The Tharpe House, which is being refurbished within the confines of the Historic Falmouth Pier.

THE BUSINESS OF TOURISM

Time now for the CHTA to renew itself

STRONG PRIVATE-SECTOR associations offer government, the media, civil society and their own membership a voice and a central organisation able to organise and deliver programmes of relevance.

Tourism should be no different.

In the Caribbean, the role of its representative body is particularly important, as whoever speaks for the private-sector part of the industry as a whole is speaking on behalf of the region's single most important economic sector. In a national context, it is, therefore, not surprising, for example, that the president of the single most powerful business association in the Dominican Republic, the Consejo Nacional de la Empresa Privada (CONEP), is Rafael Canto Blanco, a nationally and regionally well-known and popular figure who owns and operates hotels there and elsewhere.

In the Caribbean, the private-sector part of hotel and tourism industry is represented by the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA). It is, in effect, an association of associations; one that brings together national hotel and tourism bodies in most Caribbean nations with suppliers to the industry.

NO SECRET

It is no secret, however, that in recent times, the CHTA has been through some troubled times and has lost some of its influence and voice as it has struggled to deliver the programmes that its membership requires, and has not done enough to engage publicly on the issues that matter most to the sector.

The announcement, therefore, in the last few days that Frank Comito, the former executive vice-president of the Bahamas Hotel Association, is to take on the role in March of chief executive officer of CHTA is therefore welcome. His experience and knowledge of the region and the industry ought to do much to place the organisation on a forward trajectory.

Over the last 50 years, the industry in the Caribbean has emerged from political rejection and social suspicion, but still has yet to clearly and publicly set out where it

wishes to go for its own members and the role it sees itself playing in the region as a whole on the key issues affecting tourism.

Critical to the future of the organisation will be finding new ways to embrace changes in airlift, new forms of marketing, intense global competition, ever more

burdensome taxation, the continuing challenge of the cruise ships, and the need to ensure the association's long-term viability.

The organisation needs also to retain and build membership so that it

encompasses an industry that now ranges from small local properties to large foreign-owned or marketed chain hotels that tend not to want to be involved in industry associations. It has to be able to relate much better to the region's political leadership and be able to carry with it governments and a public sector, which in many cases still have to come fully to terms with the industry and its needs. It will also need to be better at engaging commercially – in today's world, no association can be run on any basis other than for profit – while at the same time being able to keep onside and charm a sometimes fractious membership that embraces the Anglophone, Hispanic, Dutch and French Caribbean.

There are also new challenges ahead on the international front. The industry in Cuba needs to be engaged with, and brought back into the CHTA fold in the light of the gradual normalisation of relations with the US, the region's biggest tourism feeder market; the organisation ought to begin to engage with China, which is interested in having a tourism interlocutor in the region; it ought to be in closer dialogue with regional bodies and multilateral funding agencies; and it should engage with those in North America and Europe who set the public policy that affects the competitiveness of the industry.

The latest changes in CHTA's full-time leadership should be welcomed. The challenge now will be for the organisation to reinvent itself so that it repositions and enthuses the industry and begins the difficult process of preparing for a newer generation of leadership and fresh thinking.

David Jessop



2014 another record year for Jamaica's tourism sector

EXPECTATIONS OF another record year for Jamaica's tourism industry have been realised with stopover arrivals, cruise ship arrivals and earnings for 2014 surpassing the historic figures achieved in 2013.

Speaking recently at the first Post Cabinet Press Briefing held in Western Jamaica at the Office of the Prime Minister – West, in Montego Bay, Minister of Tourism and Entertainment Dr Wykeham McNeill disclosed the final figures for 2014.

"The tourism sector continues to experience steady growth; Jamaica achieved another major milestone in 2014 again welcoming more than two million stopover visitors," he said.

For the 12-month period, January to December 2014, there were 2,080,181 stopover visitors, representing an increase of 71,772 tourists or a 3.6 per cent increase over 2013. Concurrently, the island welcomed 1,423,797 cruise visitors, an increase of 158,529 or 12.5 per cent more than in 2013.

All the main cruise ports registered an increase in arrivals for 2014. Falmouth was up 19.5 per cent with 125,829 more visitors than in 2013, while Ocho Rios had an increase of 7.7 per cent or 29,214 additional passengers and Montego Bay increased by 0.9 per cent with 2,127 more cruise visitors.

Dr McNeill said a total of 3,503,978 visitors graced the shores of Jamaica in 2014, generating gross foreign exchange earnings in excess of US\$2.2 billion, which is 5.8 per cent more than the amount earned in 2013.

"So the important point that we should be taking from that is that while we are growing consistently in terms of our arrivals, our growth in earnings is outpacing that growth in arrivals," said McNeill.

The year-round figures were boosted by record figures for December in both stopover and cruise arrivals. Dr McNeill disclosed that, "We had a very strong December with an increase in stopover visitors of 5.9 per cent over the same period in 2013 with 213,129 arrivals and cruise arrivals also increased by 12.6 per cent."

In a breakdown of arrivals from Jamaica's major markets, McNeill disclosed that stopover arrivals out of Europe grew by 10.7 per cent; out of Canada by 5.2 per cent and from the US by 2 per cent. Inflow from Asia saw the largest increase of 9.2 per cent.

As a tourist destination, the island broke the two million stopover visitor arrivals barrier for the first time in 2013. Having topped that mark for 2014, the sector is now looking to further increases in 2015.



Share the Love



18 YEARS AND OVER. ENJOY RESPONSIBLY

A Tour of Historic Falmouth BY TROLLEY



St Peter's Anglican Church, part of the Trolley tour.

Karrie Williams
Hospitality Jamaica Writer

SINCE 2011, Braemar Tours has been sharing the story of the rich history of Falmouth to cruise passengers and other visitors to the island through its inventive excursion, Tour of Historic Falmouth by Trolley.

Offered exclusively on ship docking days, the tour departs from the port and takes passengers on a one-hour journey through the town centre, showcasing historical sites and making regular stops so guests can experience the scenery and the people of Falmouth.

Braemar Tours uses specially designed open-sided trolleys to facilitate this excursion. This design is used to depict Jamaica's mode of transportation during the colonisation era. There are three trolleys in total and each can hold up to 47 passengers at a time.

Last Wednesday, **Hospitality Jamaica** got an opportunity to experience this tour and our overall conclusion was one of satisfaction. The tour offers a very enlightening lesson of the town's history and it also adds significantly to Falmouth's tourism appeal.

We drove along several streets including Tharpe Street and Market Street. Among the sights and scenes we came across were a total of six churches, including the more than 200-year-old William Knibb Memorial Baptist Church and the St Peters Anglican Church, where we made a designated stop.

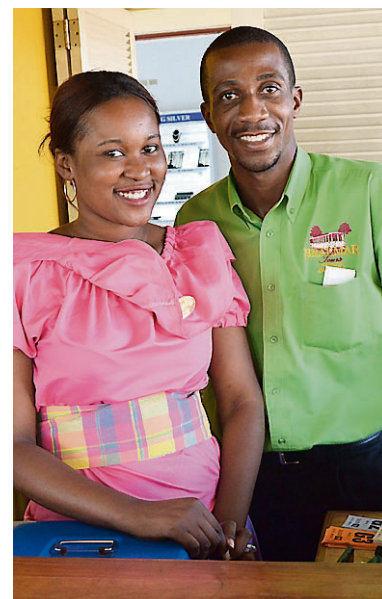
CHURCH'S HISTORY

Speaking with Rose McCarthy, a visitor from Cork, Ireland, who said visiting St Peters Anglican was her most memorable aspect of the tour, mainly because her family name 'McCarthy' is profoundly featured in the church's history.

"We love the church, we came across this beautiful plaque on the side of the church and it was a tribute to someone who was involved in the building of the church and his name was McCarty, so here we are all the way from Cork



William Knibb Memorial Church, one of the attractions visitors are exposed to on the tour.



Tour guides, Shantoy Myers and Sameer Sterling.

to find another McCarthy. I enjoyed the tour immensely and the people are so lovely, we had a lovely day and I would recommend it to anybody," she said.

At St Peters, we also encountered several craft vendors plying their wares in the vicinity of the church yard. They expressed their approval of the tour, claiming that it was largely responsible for their day-to-day earnings.

"I wouldn't say it's benefiting us a hundred per cent, but it does benefit us. Although we had greater expectations, we are still grateful, because no one else takes tourists around here to us, so this tour is primarily responsible for our earnings," said Winsome Dennis, one of the vendors.

Continuing our journey, we drove by the Falmouth Police Station,

which is currently said to be the largest in the Caribbean. What was also of great fascination to us were some residential dwellings that sported genuine Georgian architecture. Not surprisingly, we were told that these houses were a major highlight for visitors.

Since beginning its operations in 2011 with the opening of the Falmouth Cruise Shipping Pier, Tour of Historic Falmouth by Trolley has been having a very successful run, this according to owner of Braemar Tours, Judy Schnoenbein.

"The tour is well-received by passengers; they like to learn about the history of Jamaica and the history of Falmouth. They like to see how we live and at the end of it, they feel as though they have learnt something about the country

... it's very successful, and some days, we are even sold out," she said.

Schnoenbein also pointed out that tour employees were exclusively from Falmouth, as building the community was also of importance to her and her business.

In speaking of her experience working for Braemar tours, Shantoy Myers, who is a tour operators was simply ecstatic.

"Before the port was constructed, I wasn't working, but ever since Royal Caribbean and the Jamaica Port Authority built it, I got a job and that is something I am really happy about. I am also really happy about what they are doing in the town of Falmouth, which is restoring all these old buildings for us to continue doing tours," she said.



This house remains true to Georgian-style architecture.



Vendors ply their wares outside St Peter's Anglican Church.



Visitors on the Braemar Tours trolley tour.

Kingston City Run supports city's vulnerable

JAMAICA IS the sports Mecca of the Caribbean as the prowess of the island's athletes spreads across a plethora of sporting events. Dominance in track and field is complemented by dominance on the court, dominance in the ring, dominance in the pool, and dominance on the field.

Sports tourism is an important part of the marketing mix which attracts visitors to Jamaica's shores. Given Jamaica's sporting acumen and its reputation as one of the best tourist destinations in the world, the island has been leveraging the ability of the athletes and its award-winning tourism product to boost sports tourism.

Kingston has played host to many world-class sporting events and it is only natural for Kingston to host its own running event. Kingston City Run is organised by the Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association, Kingston Chapter. Now in its third year, the run will take place on March 15.

"Every great city has a great marathon, and as the cultural capital of the Caribbean, it is fitting that Kingston has its own," said Jason Hall, deputy director of



FILE

Charles Arumaiselvam, public relations director, Alpha Boys Home, addressing the media launch of Kingston City Run 2015. To his left are Nicola Madden-Greig, co-chair, Kingston City Run Organising Committee; and her fellow co-chair, Christopher Jarrett.

tourism, cruise, attractions and events, Jamaica Tourist Board.

"These events generate visitor pull, international media exposure and have the potential to stimulate economic gains. Kingston City Run has all the critical features for a successful event, and the value proposition augurs well for Destination Jamaica," he added.

Runners from around the world will experience an exciting weekend in the half marathon, 10K

and 5K run/walk through the heart of Kingston. The race route will take participants past some of the city's most picturesque, cultural and historic sites including Devon House, King's House, Vale Royal, Bob Marley Museum, Hope Gardens, The University of West Indies culminating at Emancipation Park.

There is an even more deep-seated cause that is attached to Kingston City Run, and it is the

charities that benefit from the proceeds of the race as earnings assist in the rehabilitation and the provision of skills training and temporary housing for the homeless.

IMPORTANCE OF THE RUN

Charles Arumaiselvam, public relations director, Alpha Boys Home, one of the beneficiaries, spoke of the importance of the run to the services that the home provides to at-risk boys.

"The cause makes the event great, and it is events like these that make the city (Kingston) great," he said during the event's recent media launch at The Jamaica Pegasus hotel.

"Alpha's commitment to the arts is tied to the cultural legacy of Kingston, and Kingston City Run reminds us of the power of our collective strength."

He expressed his depth of gratitude to Kingston City Run for the financial contribution, which he said goes a far way in providing financial and academic support for the boys of Alpha Institute.

The other beneficiaries are Food For The Poor, Open Arms Drop-In Centre, Missionaries of the Poor, and the Marie Atkins Night

Shelter. Nicola Madden-Greig, co-chair, Kingston City Run Organising Committee and president of the Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association, in addressing sponsors, volunteers, media and the beneficiaries, reiterated the importance of the Run and its role in assisting with the care of Kingston's most vulnerable.

"A city, like a chain, is only as strong as its weakest link. This year, we are hoping to net \$4.5 million from the race, thereby doubling the earnings of our two previous stagings."

An exciting weekend of activities has been planned leading up to the race day, starting with the Welcome Party at Bacchanal Mas Camp on Friday night, March 13. This will be followed with the Health Fair and Expo at The Jamaica Pegasus hotel on Saturday, March 14, where attendees are invited to get health and medical advice and purchase health and wellness gear and souvenirs throughout the day. The day will culminate with a pre-race party for runners to carb up before the big races on Sunday, March 15. The races will be followed by an awards ceremony at Emancipation Park.

To register for Kingston City Run, visit www.kingstoncityrun.com.



JAMAICA TOURIST BOARD

INT'L MEDIA AT JAMAICA JAZZ AND BLUES FESTIVAL

Several international media representatives were among the thousands who attended the 19th annual staging of the Jamaica Jazz and Blues Festival at the Trelawny Multi-purpose Stadium. The Jamaica Tourist Board sponsored several international media houses from the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom to cover the event. Damion Crawford (right), minister of state in the Ministry of Tourism and Entertainment, greets some of the journalists (from left) Miles Lewis, 'Ebony'; Janelle Watkins, 'The Scene in TO' and Terry Zinn of 'The Examiner'.

NEGRIL PALMS

Expedia's top-selling small hotel is J'can

Janet Silvera

Senior Gleaner Writer

WESTERN BUREAU:

THE WORLD'S largest online tour operator, Expedia, has named 34-room Negril Palms the 2014 top-selling small hotel in the Caribbean.

Top-selling means among all the hotels that Expedia sells in the Caribbean that are a 100 rooms or less, explained Joseph Smith, who runs the resort with wife, Evelyn, immediate past president of the Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association (JHTA).

The couple, who also runs TenSing Pen, took over Negril Palms in 2012. The property remains in receivership, out of which it is slowly digging itself.

Responding to the unprecedented recognition, Joseph Smith said the award was a credit to the staff who endured stressful times and very long hours to complete the work required to upgrade the hotel and serve its guests.

"At the time when we took it over, it was extremely run down, but we re-invested everything that we made back into the property, the buildings, the grounds, internal systems and marketing," Smith told **Hospitality Jamaica**, adding that significant effort was placed into the marketing of the hotel, primarily through the use of the Internet.

"The Internet and online tour operators are the saviours of small businesses in the tourism industry," revealed the long-time hotelier, who honed his skills at SuperClubs.

Pointing out the importance of



From left: Team members, Cordelia Blake, Charmaine Reynolds-Dunn and Latoya Hammond-Lee are all smiles on the recognition awarded by Expedia, the world's largest online tour operator.

online tour operators, Smith said because of Expedia, he was able to reach guests across the world,

"Expedia establishes a portal on their extranet in which each entity can post photos and manipulate their rates. As a result, small businesses in tourism are given direct access to the market."

In the last two years, the hotel's management has spent more than US\$300,000 on building a brand-new pool, refurbishing, extensive clean-up of all guest rooms, improved technology, and the installation of new equipment and appliances throughout the resort.

Located in the middle of the Negril Beach, Negril Palms boast neighbouring landmarks such as Margaritaville and Couples Swept Away. The small, moderately priced

resort operates on the European Plan, with its own restaurant and bar, which offers breakfast, lunch and dinner.

The resort caters to guests who primarily wish to stay in a small property and go out to enjoy the many offerings of a destination, said Smith, pointing out that his guests are strongly encouraged to dine in the many small seaside and roadside shacks along the Negril beach and road, and to take one of numerous tours to attractions in the area, as well as the rest of Jamaica.

In 2013, the hotel received the Jamaica Public Service Company Limited's Best Use of Energy award in a small-hotel award ceremony at the JHTA's annual general meeting.

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From left: Accepting the Expedia Top Partner Award are Jackie Raccuglia, marketing consultant; Nicola Madden-Greig, group director of marketing and sales; Carol Dunbar, senior sales and revenue manager; and Yeurys Marmol, sales coordinator.

Holiday Inn SunSpree Resort earns Expedia Top Partner Award for 2014

THE HOLIDAY Inn SunSpree Resort Montego Bay was honoured with an Expedia Top Partner Award during the just-completed Caribbean Hotel & Tourism Association (CHTA) Caribbean Travel Marketplace, held January 28-30, 2015 in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The award was presented in recognition of the resort's outstanding sales results across Expedia, Inc. online travel companies in 2014, ranking #1 among all Jamaica hotels.

"I couldn't be more pleased and proud to accept this award on behalf of the staff, management, and owners of the Holiday Inn SunSpree Resort Montego Bay," said Nicola Madden-Greig, group director, marketing and sales.

"It's always nice to win, but this award is especially great as it validates our position among the most popular resort destinations in Jamaica."

Expedia, Inc is one of the largest online travel companies in the world, with an extensive brand portfolio that includes some of the world's leading online travel brands. Collectively, the Expedia, Inc brands cover virtually every aspect of researching, planning, and booking travel, from choosing the best airplane seat, to reading personal travel reviews of hotels, to planning what to do in a destination once you arrive. The Expedia, Inc portfolio serves both leisure and business travellers with tastes and budgets ranging from modest to luxury.



PHOTO BY JANET SILVERA

VIP Attractions, operators of Club MoBay and Club Kingston, was named Expedia's Top Producing Partners in the Caribbean for 2014 after their numbers went through the roof. The Jamaican-owned airport facilities had an increase of more than 400 per cent in business with the online tour operator.

This comes on the heels of Club Kingston being tagged the Number One Global Travel Lounge of the Year by copping the coveted Priority Pass Award from a nomination field of more than 700 airport lounges across more than 500 airports throughout the world in June 2014.

David Hall, executive chairman of VIP Attractions, commented: "Hospitality is a treasured Jamaican heritage. We believe that during our three years of existence, we have made significant and innovative contributions to the travel experience for guests entering and leaving Jamaica, cognisant of the importance of a more enjoyable first and last impression."

Here, VIP Attraction's international business development executive, Jodian Brown, accepts the Expedia Top Producing Partners prize from that organisation's associate market manager, Jamaica, Adrian Harrison, during a special presentation at Club MoBay at the Sangster International Airport in Montego Bay last Friday.

Miss Couples Negril 2015 crowned

ON SATURDAY, January 24, Couples Negril held their Miss Couples Negril Pageant at the Bourbon Beach in the resort town, under the theme, Promoting the Beauty, Purpose and Strength of the Jamaican Woman.

Of the 12 contestants, Sasha Forrester was crowned Miss Couples Negril 2015, with her runners-up being Lacey-Ann Reynolds (second runner-up) and Ruth-Ann Hart (first runner-up).

Scholarships, cash, weekends for two and more were some of the main prizes.



Miss Couples Negril 2015, Sasha Forrester (centre) is flanked by first runners-up, Lacey-Ann Reynolds (left) and Ruth-Ann Hart.



Trade-show networking

From left: Gregory Shervington, director, Continental Europe, Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB); Dennis Morrison, JTB chairman; Albert Muntane Casanova, Air Europa's head of network planning and distribution; Dr Wykeham McNeill, minister of tourism and entertainment; and Marc Meister, JTB representative for Spain and Portugal, share a moment at the JTB booth at the FITUR International tourism trade fair in Madrid, Spain. FITUR 2015 is one of the largest and most important tourism trade shows on the international calendar.

Beaches graduates

Beaches Negril's first Sandals Corporate University (SCU) graduating class of 40 employees is a picture of pride following the ceremony last week, at which their certificates were conferred. Sharing in the moment is training and development manager, Althea Baker (partially hidden, fourth from far right). The staff members, who are among more than 100 persons at the property to have successfully completed core courses in customer service, leadership, the art of selling and professional communications, and will now move on to other areas, were also fêted with live entertainment and mouth-watering Asian fare at the resort's newly renovated and expanded Japanese Teppanyaki Kimonos restaurant. Through the SCU, which was launched in 2012 and formalises staff training and development, employees of Sandals Resorts International continue to benefit from access to scores of secondary to postgraduate programmes as well as top-tier local and international partner universities.





Richard Harvey displaying his Boa snakes.

Richard ‘Zapata’ Harvey, the snake contortionist is back!

Richard Morais
Hospitality Jamaica Writer

ZAPATA, THE veteran hospitality entertainer of 35 years, whose real name is Richard Harvey, is back in business after the authorities suspended his snake act more than a year ago.

This contortionist, who includes a snake act in his performance, started his career as a youngster doing contortion at schools fairs and at other local events. He later entered the hospitality trade, adding snakes, crocodiles and fire, along with the use of sharp objects on his skin without getting cut.

The act involved dancing and jumping barefoot and rolling his

body on broken bottles and nails without injury.

He was forced by the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA) to close the crocodile act, he told **Hospitality Jamaica** after disaster struck.

“The snakes I used were deemed not ideally housed by NEPA, and they were concerned about any hurt the animal may suffer during performances.”

The seizure reportedly cost the entertainer his livelihood, and according to him, although the snake act was removed from his performance, most persons were reluctant to employ him because of the stigma attached to employing an ‘illegal’ entertainer in the industry.

“The seizure appeared on television, and as the news spread, the tourism sector became aware and employment became nil,” he said.

TWEAKED HIS SNAKE ACT

Harvey, who has always been a lover of animals and who displays great care towards them, has since tweaked his snake act to facilitate NEPA’s regulation, and as a result, he was given back his snakes and allowed to perform.

“I use two adult female Jamaican Boa. I was given an official document verifying my status again as a legal performer.”

Harvey has also rewritten his act, and although his focus is on

entertaining guests, an important aspect has been added as part of the NEPA agreement, which is that of educating his audience.

What he wants now, he said, is a return to school performances.

“With the appearance of different cultures and the change of certain values, animal protection is crucial, Harvey said.”

He added that the consumption of snake and crocodile meat is gaining popularity and people have to be informed of the illegality of consuming their meat because they are protected.

Ja a top destination in the Caribbean

FOR THE 13th year in a row, TripAdvisor, the largest travel community in the world, released its annual 2015 Travelers’ Choice Awards to determine the most sought-after hotels around the globe based on the quality and quantity of traveller reviews. This year’s awards have awarded the family-friendly Beaches Resorts with five prestigious honours, including Beaches Negril Resort & Spa and Beaches Turks & Caicos Resort Villages & Spa as the No. 1 and No. 2 resorts, respectively, and Beaches Ocho Rios Spa Golf & Waterpark Resort as the No. 5 resort in the Top 25 Hotels for Families in the Caribbean category.

Beaches Turks & Caicos and Beaches Negril also received recognition in the Top All-Inclusive Resorts in the Caribbean category, ranked as No. 12 and No. 16, respectively. The awards come as a testament to the brand’s luxury-included vacation experience, featuring unforgettable service and top-notch amenities for all ages.

“We are thrilled to be recognised by the TripAdvisor Travelers’ Choice Awards, as they are decided by our most important critics – our loyal guests,” said Gordon ‘Butch’ Stewart, chairman of Sandals Resorts International.

“We work hard to offer the finest luxury vacation, and we are honoured that all three of our Beaches Resorts have been rated as the top family hotels in the Caribbean.”

For the past 30 years, Sandals Resorts International, parent company to Sandals Resorts, Beaches Resorts and Grand Pineapple Beach Resort, have garnered rave reviews from the toughest critics in the travel industry for its dedication to service and its consistent expansion of the finest amenities. This award from TripAdvisor is the latest in a recent line of accolades to recognise the Beaches Resort Luxury Included product as an excellent family vacation.

IMAKE costume jewellery with natural seeds, part of my connection with nature. There is this seed though, I call 'yellow nickal', which is hard to come by.

The only person I can source it from is a Rastaman named Sharn. I wrote about him awhile back, and about his life of 'highness'.

Sharn lives in the Don Figuerero Mountains, near a place called Lincoln in Manchester. The land is green, the air fresh, and the weather very cool. From Don Figuerero, there is a fantastic view of the Santa Cruz Mountains to the south. Between these two mountain ranges, there is a breathtaking expanse, a valley, I suppose.

The last time I went there, I was so taken up with the simplicity of Sharn's life and the happiness that he gets from it. Away from the madding crowd, devoid of the stress of modern living, he is. In the bosom of nature, he exists with his animals, farming and reaping his own food. So, in addition to my need for some yellow nickals, I wanted to get some of that cool mountain air on Friday.

ERRANDS TO RUN

Knowing what the weather can be like, I prepared myself, but I had some errands to run before heading to Lincoln. Unfortunately, night and rain greeted me in Mandeville. By the time I got to Lincoln, it was pitch black and wet. Connection was made with Sharn, who lived way off the main. He was on his way to meet me.

We greeted each other in the dark, and then we were off, up the mountainside. It wasn't a steep climb, but it was a winding, bumpy path, on which Sharn walked with confidence. I kept making sure my feet were landing on safe ground.

As we ascended, it got colder, and suddenly, I felt hungry. I hadn't eaten much all day. The cold, sudden hunger and rocky path made the journey a little challenging, but with Sharn's guidance, I endured the trod. When the silhouette of Sharn's circular board house came into view, I was relieved.

The glittering lights on the Santa Cruz Mountains and the valley below also caught my eyes. My nostrils were also sensitised. The aroma of food wafted in the cold air. Sharn had left some 'sip' over wood fire. But it was the fire, and not the stew, that was most welcome. I sat in front of it shivering and shaking, while Sharn dished out a portion for me. What

**AROUND JA
WITH PAUL H.**



Sharn Robinson enjoying his freshly made carrot stout as he looks to the skies.

PHOTOS BY PAUL WILLIAMS



Lincoln in Manchester, where Rastaman Sharn Robinson lives a life of 'highness', is located on the Don Figuerero Mountain range from which the Santa Cruz Mountains can be seen.

a place cold! Yet, I realised I was sweating under my coat from the walk up the mountainside.

Despite the hot stew and the fire, the shivering and the shaking took quite a while to subside. This made me retreat into the house, where we ‘camped’ out for the night. This life was as rustic as rustic comes, and I hoped for some rain on the zinc roof. As I listened to Sharn’s life lessons and jokes, I felt parts of my skin itching.

I thought I needed a bath from the long walk. But that ice-cold water outside, I was going nowhere near. So I let it itch, and I scratched. The rain didn’t come to lull me to sleep, but tiredness, the sounds of insects, and Eryka Badu did. The blanket I brought was a good choice. Cosy all night.

Daybreak saw Sharn leaving to tend to his cattle. I checked what was going on in ‘civilisation’ on my phone. Same old ‘crosses’. Turned off phone. This is my life highness. So I went to catch the fire to heat some water. A little piece of rosemary in the water was enough.

The piping-hot drink was not hot enough for the cold. And the water in the tank was still freezing. I really like this life of highness, but I don’t know if I could exist in this natural refrigerator. It can be numbing.

Sharn returned, and left again. The sun came out, but poor sunrays. The cold weather they could not pierce. So, I had to keep poking wood into the fire, beside which two cats sat in between their search for food.

Upon Sharn’s second return, he made a stout from freshly reaped carrots, a green sour sop, lemons and a little sugar. That was breakfast. I had some, and it was good, really good. But I was still yearning for a bath. The itching, the itching, the itching.

To a spring, we walked down another side of the mountain, not too steep either. On the way, I got a lesson on how to recognise and avoid grass lice, which are found not only on grass. The bath at the spring was not only refreshing, but invigorating. I then bade goodbye to my friend, who went back to his life of highness. The yellow nickals were in my back.

But when I reached home, my entire body was covered with welts. Then I remembered buying a fried fish in Old Harbour. Food poison! That was the cause of the itching, which I went through for hours. I quickly made some koala nut (bissy) drink, and by Sunday morning, my skin was glowing again from that life of highness.



Sharn Robinson preparing carrots to feed his animals.

PHOTOS BY PAUL WILLIAMS

At left: Freshly reaped carrots and sour sops ready for the stout that Sharn Robinson made on Saturday morning, February 7, for breakfast.

“ This life was as rustic as rustic comes, and I hoped for some rain on the zinc roof. As I listened to Sharn’s life lessons and jokes, I felt parts of my skin itching. ”



The wood fire that Hospitality Jamaica writer Paul H. Williams made on Saturday morning, February 7 at Lincoln, Manchester.



Jamaica to welcome more Scandinavian visitors

THOMAS COOK'S Nordic tour operator, VING, recently announced new flight routes from Europe to Jamaica starting November 2015. This builds on the success of the existing Scandinavia to Jamaica service, now in its second year of operation.

In addition to VING's existing direct flight service from Stockholm, a new direct service will operate from the Norwegian capital, Oslo, until April 2016, taking visitors to Jamaica. This means VING is

doubling its capacity to the island, allowing Swedish visitors to not only fly from the capital Stockholm, but also to fly from Gothenburg to Montego Bay via Oslo. The flights will operate from November 29, 2015 on a fortnightly rotation until April 2016.

TUI's Nordic tour operator, Fritidsresor will continue to operate their successful direct weekly flights to Montego Bay from Stockholm, as well as their direct flight from Copenhagen and Helsinki on a

fortnightly basis for the winter 2015-2016 season.

Paul Pennicook, director of tourism, said: "Jamaica has invested heavily in marketing to Scandinavia in recent years, so it is good to see our efforts are paying off as demand for Jamaican holidays from Scandinavia has been very encouraging. We have already seen how popular our island is for visitors from Sweden, Denmark and Finland, who are drawn by the stunning coastline and

laidback culture. With the additional airlift, we are confident that our destination will wow a whole new market of holidaymakers from Norway, too."

"One of the benefits of increasing the number of flights from Scandinavia is that our Northern European visitors usually stay on our beautiful island for longer stays. Scandinavians are also great explorers and love to get off the beaten track to discover all the delights that Jamaica has to offer."



PHOTO BY JANET SILVERA

RIU Ocho Rios general manager Katharina Doeehler poses with international reggae singer Maxi Priest during the recent Jamaica Jazz and Blues Festival.

The Cayman Islands ends year with record-breaking arrivals

CONSISTENCY IN delivering excellence and a commitment to providing Cayman-kind experiences has once again earned the Cayman Islands a record-breaking year of visitation. In what was notably the best year in more than a decade, the country welcomed more than 380,000 stay-over guests by the end of 2014, according to visitor-arrival statistics released by the Department of Tourism.

The data shows that 382,816 total visitor air arrivals were recorded, representing a 10.84 per cent increase over the 2013 performance and is the best stay-over visitor arrival figure the

Cayman Islands has recorded in more than 14 years. Notably the month of December showed the best visitor-arrival figures for any December since the year 2000 with 40,568 stay-over visitors accounting for a year-over-year increase of 3.58 per cent. This included an increase in cruise arrivals for the year which totalled 1,609,555 passengers, a year-over-year increase of 16.98 per cent. This cruise-arrival figure marks the best year since 2007.

"It has been a wonderful experience throughout 2014 to witness the success of tourism businesses continuing to climb throughout the year. Hotels

recorded exceptional occupancy, taxi drivers were consistently busy, and we have seen growth throughout the sector," shared deputy premier and minister for tourism, Moses Kirkconnell.

COMMITMENT TO PARTNERSHIPS

"We know that this success comes from our continued commitment to partnerships with private-sector entities, the diligent work of this government, the Department of Tourism and the unique approaches implemented throughout the year to an integrated strategic plan." This plan included Department of

Tourism in-market activations in key cities such as New York City, London and Toronto.

"It was another successful year of promoting the Cayman Islands to a global audience," commented Rosa Harris, director of the Department of Tourism.

"One fun initiative over the summer was taking Stingray City to the streets of London using a 3D chalk art simulation. We received such positive reactions from people who stopped by to 'kiss a ray' and learn about the destination in an unexpected way. We look forward to more creative initiatives in 2015 and further raising the awareness of the Cayman Islands as a leading

destination in the Caribbean for discerning travellers."

The Cayman Islands ranks in the top five of Caribbean destinations visited by cruise passengers. "The planned improvements for the cruise port and George Town should increase visitation to allow us to easily move into the number two spot on that list in a very short time," said councillor in the Ministry of Tourism, Joseph Hew. "The continued increase in visitor numbers is confirmation that our beautiful scenery, amazing activities and friendly people continue to draw visitors from far and wide."