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Hard Rock Café
COMES TO MOBAY



THE BUSINESS OF TOURISM

Caribbean gov'ts must revisit APD issue

David Jessop
Contributor

REMEMBER AIR passenger duty (APD), the ticket tax that the United Kingdom continues to levy on all passengers leaving its shores by air?

One year ago, the Caribbean won a famous, if partial, victory. After years of campaigning, successfully mobilising its diaspora, working closely with tour operators and airlines, and introducing the issue into almost every aspect of the region's government-to-government dialogue, the British Chancellor of the Exchequer (finance minister), George Osborne, decided to abandon the four-band APD system in favour of a short haul-long haul two-band system, effectively giving the Caribbean APD tax parity with competing destinations in the US.

It was a campaign that demonstrated that by staying on message, the Caribbean was capable of mounting a sustained and co-ordinated lobby overseas.

In the intervening year, it has almost been forgotten that the change, which benefits all destinations currently in Band C (which includes Jamaica and the rest of the Caribbean), only takes effect from April 2015, as this was the length of time required by the airlines to alter their fare structures.

What will be introduced next month is essentially a tax that divides long-haul from short-haul. This means that the APD on an economy/coach fare to the Caribbean will fall from the US\$127 (£85) per person levied in 2014-15, to US\$106 (£71) per person from April 2015. Rates in premium economy and club/upper-class and above will also fall from April 2015 on to the same level that applies to the US: US\$212 (£142) per ticket.

Although the Caribbean fought for parity with the US and won, the reality is that even at the new rates, the tax remains the highest on travel and tourism in the world, and almost 400 per cent higher than any other similar European airline tax.

Moreover, when added to local taxes and the hundreds of dollars in charges airlines and all airports levy, APD makes travel from the UK to the Caribbean a particularly highly taxed commodity, pushing ticket



JESSOP

prices to levels that make the Caribbean ever less competitive.

Additionally, there is still little sign that carriers will overall reduce base airfares; preferring instead to improve profitability, despite the fact that the cost of aviation fuel has fallen dramatically.

What is often forgotten is that APD will continue to rise each year by the rate of UK inflation. As such, it remains a damaging form of extraterritorial tax on the region's most important industry.

What this suggests is that the Caribbean should, when the UK's May 2015 general election is over, consider whether to again campaign against the tax, its inflation escalator, or some other aspect of APD.

In his December 2014 pre-budget statement, Osborne announced that he would gradually remove APD for children under the age of 12 from May this year and for under-16s in 2016. He also indicated that for Scotland, he will devolve the power to set the tax. Both cases indicate that he is prepared to make changes.

The Caribbean has a good case. It is the most tourism-dependent region in the world; it has been graduated out of development assistance on the basis that, Haiti apart, it consists of middle-income developing countries; Britain continues to indicate that it is supportive of the region; the tax, when added to the fare and other taxes and charges, is particularly damaging to the Caribbean's diaspora in the UK, who continue to want to return home for traditional family reasons; and aviation and the industry continue to have an appetite for lobbying on the issue.

There is a case to be made for Caribbean tourism ministers and the industry to at least consider how the region might seek a reduction in the tax.



Andrea Leslie, membership services manager, Jamaica Manufacturers' Association, at their product display at the second Jamaica Hotel & Tourist Association Speed Networking event at The Jamaica Pegasus on March 17, 2015.

Sandals launches regional cross-training initiative

OVER THE next 12 months, 100 managers and supervisors at Sandals, Beaches, and Grand Pineapple Resorts across the Caribbean will be the first to participate in Sandals Resorts International's (SRI) newest training initiative – the Management Exposure Programme (MEXP).

The MEXP is an initiative of the Sandals Corporate University (SCU), which was launched in 2012 to formalise and augment the company's staff development and training initiatives, and provide team members with opportunities to further their studies.

Under the MEXP, resorts will nominate managers to be seconded to various properties across the region for at least one month in order to expose them to new working environments and cultures, widen their skills and insights, enhance their career development, and positively impact their job performance on return to their home resort. In addition, participants will be able to share their own experiences and skills with their host resort.

Each participant's unique training programme, including length of stay overseas and learning objectives, will be determined through collaboration with the home resort and the SCU. All participants will submit a reflective report at the end of their training and will also be assigned SCU coaches who will assist them throughout their training journey.



ADAM STEWART

The launch of the MEXP, which in its first year will receive an investment of more than US\$200,000, is especially timely as the company has officially dubbed 2015 "the year of leadership development". Under this theme, other development programmes to be implemented include the SCU's partnership with Knowledge Works Consulting, which will grant executive managers across all resorts access to Harvard ManageMentor, the premier on-demand learning and performance support resource for leadership and management skills development. In addition, all heads of department will benefit from training in a range of topics, including innovation and creativity, change management and project management, using the resources of Harvard ManageMentor.

Adam Stewart, chief executive

officer at Sandals Resorts International, said the company is very excited about the launch of the MEXP and is confident that team members across the region will benefit greatly.

He said, "Sandals is a regional company, and it is only fitting that we provide opportunities for regional integration and knowledge exchange. We want our team members to travel to other resorts, spend some quality time, and learn from their colleagues."

"Each island is unique, and so is each resort. This programme will not only build professional skills and relationships, but will bring our team members closer together. MEXP will give our team members a refreshing learning and training opportunity, while deepening their appreciation for different cultures."

The programme is a further show of SRI's commitment to regional integration – already evident in programmes like the Management Trainee Programme (MTP). The MTP identifies and grooms outstanding young recruits to become managers in the company through hands-on learning and training at resorts across the region.

In addition, the company continues to carry out region-wide job recruitment exercises, offering continuous employment to Caribbean nationals and taking advantage of CARICOM's Free Movement of Skilled Persons Agreement.



A generic Hard Rock look in the Caribbean. **Below:** The signature guitar at a Hard Rock Café.

Hard Rock Café planning a location in MoBay

VIKING PRODUCTIONS, the company that owns two Hard Rock Café locations in the Caribbean (Nassau, The Bahamas, and Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands), is planning to open a location in Montego Bay in the near future, says Andre Dixon, chief operating officer.

“Hard Rock International (HRI) identified Montego Bay as a key market for expansion, and we agree with them,” says Dixon, noting that they were already perusing some interesting options, but nothing had yet been solidified.

With a total of 198 venues in 63 countries, including 152 cafés, 21 hotels and 10 casinos, HRI is one of the most globally recognised companies.

Beginning with an Eric Clapton guitar, Hard Rock owns the world’s greatest collection of music memorabilia, which is displayed at its locations around the globe. Hard Rock is also known for its collectible fashion and music-related merchandise, Hard Rock



Live performance venues, and an award-winning website.

“With Jamaica’s reputation for great live music, we think that having a Hard Rock Café in

Montego Bay is the right choice at the right time,” says Dixon.

A naturalised Jamaican who has been actively involved in tourism-related businesses for the past 13

years in MoBay, Dixon cited a need for more entertainment options in the Second City.

“It must be mind-boggling to some visitors when they come to a city like this, only to find that there are limited entertainment options relative to the local and hotel population in this city. In my opinion, Montego Bay has to be at the forefront of providing more choices to satisfy persons who visit from across the globe.”

He said that he has been spending time retooling the procedures at the other two locations to ensure that the template is set for entering Montego Bay.

“I’m very familiar with the challenges that are associated with operating a business in Jamaica, especially one that has to adhere to international standards. However, I know what it takes to make reasonable accommodations

that will make it more palatable for consumers and local purveyors. We want to be certain that we can appeal to patrons who are not only loyal to the Hard Rock Café brand, but those who also want to know more about it.”

However, Dixon is even more enthused about The Hard Rock’s motto of ‘Love All, Serve All’, a phrase that he described as simply meaning that the brand respects people from all walks of life and that it values its relationship with the local community.

“That’s easy for me to adhere to because it’s part of my own value system. Because I’ve been actively involved in many aspects of serving the needs of the community since I’ve lived here, I know that Hard Rock Café is the right fit for this city. We’re looking forward to a mutually beneficial relationship with the local citizens and the tourists alike.”



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Deep-sea fishing, water skiing and cruising around the Montego Bay coastline are some of the expeditions Taylor goes on with his guests.

Captain Lamar Taylor Striving for EXCELLENCE

Karrie Williams
Hospitality Jamaica Writer

LIKE SO many others, Lamar Taylor grew up not quite knowing what he wanted to pursue as a lifelong career, but once he started working in water sports, he knew immediately that he had found his calling.

Now an accomplished boat captain employed to Captain's Water Sports, in Ironshore, Montego Bay, Taylor sees only the sky as his limit. Initially, he joined the company as a lifeguard, but in less than a year on the job his quest for knowledge combined with a diligent work ethic quickly moved him up the ranks in the organisation.

Despite his accomplishments to date, Taylor's journey to Captain's Water Sports was not an easy one. He experienced a childhood that was woven in poverty, and he lacked vital family support when he decided to move away from his native St Catherine to Montego Bay in pursuit of employment opportunities and an overall better life.

"No one believed in me, but I am naturally motivated and I am all about moving forward. I don't like people limiting me, and I really don't like limiting myself. Whenever I see that I have reached one goal that I was aiming towards, then I want to go further, I just want to

keep going and going," Taylor told **Hospitality Jamaica**.

Now in his fourth year as a boat captain, Taylor, who is also a past student of the Cumberland High School in St Catherine, is considered by his boss, Bryan 'Captain' Langford, to be his foremost employee.

"Lamar is one of my best staff; he is energetic and he is very willing to do any job. No job is too small or too big for him, and he is always on time and can be seen doing something productive. Even when the other staff are slacking off a little bit, he still takes care of what he has to do and he make sure his boat is always clean and ready for business," said Langford.

It was this very same work ethic that got Taylor his job with Langford. When he first came to work in Montego Bay, he was employed as a horse trainer, doing horseback riding and swimming tours. But after outperforming himself in that job role, his then employer recommended him to Langford in a bid to push him to higher heights.

"Since I have been employed by Mr Langford, I have gotten certified as a lifeguard, a boat captain and an open-water scuba diver. I am now currently in training for my master diver's certificate, which will allow me to instruct other divers and oversee



Lamar in his boat.



(Front row, from left) Lucci Gardner, Gary Duffus and Lamar Taylor. (Back row, from left) Craig Simpson, Len Walker, Denford Anderson, Bernard Gray, Yanni Blake, Narel Scott and Duduf McFarlane.

diving expeditions. The next goal I want to accomplish is to get my coastal licence, which will allow me to captain bigger vessels," Taylor said.

Deep-sea fishing, water skiing

and cruising around the Montego Bay coastline are some of the expeditions Taylor has been on with his guests. Before he embarks on any outing, there is one important feature about his boat,

the Cobalt, which he always maintains.

"I like my vessel clean and ready for work; I cannot drive an untidy boat," he said.

Taylor readily admits that his ascension to boat captain was not without help from Langford and his fellow colleagues, namely Lance 'Hercules' Erskine and Cossaly 'Moon' Ennis.

"Mr Langford has taught me a lot about how to be a good boat captain, and he continues to encourage me to go further with my career. Hurcules and Moon are very fine captains and I really admire them. Hercules is one who taught me how to interact with the tourists and how to drive the boat properly, and Moon taught me about the engine and how to fix mechanical issues," he said.

Taylor, who confessed to being a foodie and especially enjoys eating chicken and dumplings, said some of his most fascinating sights out on the water include the sighting of a pilot whale and experiencing a pod of dolphins swimming so closely to his boat, that one could reach out

Hotel construction hits seven-year high

MICHAEL MCMORRIS, CEO of Kronos Investment & Development Consultants, says that project momentum for new hotel-room construction and refurbishment is building to a seven-year high.

Arising from his participation on the Caribbean Tourism Investment Outlook panel at the recent Jamaica Investment Forum in Rose Hall, Montego Bay, McMorris says that a tabulation of projects suggests that approximately 860 new rooms are currently in the final planning, permitting or construction phases and will come on line between 2015 and 2016.

"The number is over 1,000 if you include the Hyatt, which completed 200 new rooms in December/January 2015," said McMorris in a media release.

He noted that refurbishing construction will upgrade, refresh and reintroduce at least 1,170 rooms at some point in the same time period (1,600, if Hyatt is included).

"Refurbishment should not be underestimated as a critical driver for attracting new consumers and maintaining the momentum," he stated.

According to the tourism consultant, Kronos' research with the help of JAMPRO, Jamaica's investment promotion agency, while not an exact accounting, was consistent with the findings of the members of the Caribbean Outlook Panel. The panel included senior representatives from Smith Travel Research, the leading global tourism analytics provider; attraction operators Chukka; and Playa Hotels & Resorts, regional hotel owner/operators of Jamaica's new Hyatt Ziva and Hyatt Zilara.

"Hard statistics as well as the on-the-ground experience of some of the most successful regional players across disciplines indicate that the recent performance and outlook indicators for Jamaica's hospitality is green across the board, with record levels being set for national average occupancy percentages and the rate of increase in the average daily rate in 2014."

This, he said, translates into a further green-light upstream for investment from industry players who are already in Jamaica or who



MCMORRIS

'The number is over 1,000 if you include the Hyatt, which completed 200 new rooms in December/January 2015.'

have been eyeing Jamaica's competitiveness against other destinations in the region.

He urged tourism stakeholders to guard the success of these projects jealously, as outcomes will either accelerate or derail the momentum.

"As in the pre-recession years of this century, we have a chance to resume serious growth in the hospitality sector, which can be a massive driver of the construction industry, both at the grassroots and professional levels; also of new permanent employment in the hospitality industry itself, new housing demand, while expanding the demand for goods and services," he noted.

He pointed out that what is required is for the relevant government agencies and private sector players to be acutely responsive and forward-thinking about developments.

"Keep abreast of the pipeline and plan for the demand at the permitting and monitoring levels so you avoid missteps and missed opportunities," he warned.

Speed Networking #2 a success

THE SECOND Speed Networking event of the Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association (JHTA), in association with the Ministry of Tourism & Entertainment and the Jamaica Manufacturers' Association on March 17, 2015, further strengthened tourism linkages in Jamaica.

The event at The Jamaica Pegasus built on the success of the inaugural one hosted at the Half Moon, Montego Bay on January 21, 2015, giving representatives of the local manufacturing companies an opportunity to market their products and services to hoteliers.

Nicola Madden-Greig, president of the JHTA, noted that "the Speed Networking events give the manufacturers an opportunity to truly understand the needs of the industry by meeting face-to-face with key decision makers".

She said, "As we focus on the changes in the international market, local suppliers to the industry must also get attuned to the demands of the new traveller the millennials, the technology driven and those seeking new and unique experiences in both products and services."

Noting that JHTA spearheaded the events to give the local suppliers of goods and services an opportunity to market to the local tourism sector, Madden-Greig said, "They also have a chance to impress chain hotels and get into the regional/international market."

As such she said, "The Speed Networking events



Koen Hietbrink (right), general manager, Marriott hotel, Kingston, in discussion with J. Wray & Nephew representatives (from left) Chana Hay, commercial director; Howard Britton; and Levi Bloomfield.

can provide a platform for growth of exports from our shores and the demand for our products and services by over three million visitors each year."

The Minister of Tourism and Entertainment Wykeham McNeill said that he was pleased that the manufacturers and hoteliers were meeting again "to forge new partnerships and linkages towards strengthening and showcasing brand Jamaica".

He said that the collaboration between tourism and manufacturing is "a demonstration of the real commitment to the concept of backward and forward linkages, which can make a great contribution to the development of a truly sustainable tourism sector".

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From left: Graduates showing off their diplomas. Samantha McLeggon, Janice McLoud, Charisse Pink, Lance Rose, Patricia Berry-Greenidge, Dudley Malcolm, Verona Warburton, Marry Daley, Shawnette Montaque, Audrey Bennett and Sharon Parris-Chambers.

Local spa therapists become ITEC certified

Karrie Williams

Hospitality Jamaica Writer

A TOTAL of 10 spa therapy professionals recently graduated with their diplomas in holistic massage from the Ocho Rios-based, Personal Body Health Care (PBHC) Clinic and School of Holistic Therapies, becoming the school's first-ever graduating class.

The diploma is certified under the International Training and Examination Council (ITEC), which is a specialist examination board renowned for providing certification in beauty and spa therapy, hairdressing, complementary therapies, sports and fitness training, and customer service.

The graduation ceremony took place last Saturday night at the Sunset Beach Resort, Spa and Water Park in Montego Bay, with graduates being fêted to a lavish dinner party by the hotel's management. The graduates, who

all achieved distinctions, include, Sharon Parris-Chambers, Verona Warburton, Lance Rose, Audrey Bennett, Charisse Pink, Janice McLoud, Samantha McLeggon, Shawnette Montaque, Marry Daley and Dudley Malcolm, who currently works as a spa therapist at the resort.

Patricia Berry-Greenidge, who is the founder of PBHC Ocho Rios during her presentation of the diplomas to the proud graduates, said, "I feel very proud to be awarding these top-achieving spa professionals their diplomas tonight. Today, as we all know, stress is the greatest factor that is affecting all of us."

She warned: "Whether we like it or not, everything is changing and things are changing beyond our control. The simplest of treatment sometimes helps to alleviate stress, which is the greatest factor in illnesses today; and I think everyone should try spa therapy. At least once monthly, do something where they



PHOTOS BY COURTNEY LOCKE

Patricia Berry-Greenidge (left), PBHC founder, is presented with an appreciation plaque by Sharon Parris-Chambers.



Dudley Malcolm and Patricia Berry-Greenidge.

can feel relaxed and get into a more balanced state, which is very important."

PBHC Ocho Rios was born out of a shared vision by both Parris-Chambers and Berry-Greenidge, who also operates a similar school in her native Barbados. In fact, both women have worked on proposals since 2009 in a bid to secure financial backing for the training programme, which was offered completely free to the graduates through grant funding provided by the Caribbean Development Bank

(CDB) and the Caribbean Export Development Agency (CEDA).

"It's a wonderful feeling. Over the past years since I've met Patricia, she has been working very diligently to help uplift the spa standards across the Caribbean. Her determination is so strong that it led her to approach the CDB and the CEDA to amass the funding needed to pay the value of US\$6,000 for each student to take the course free," said Parris-Chambers.

"I have never done massage

before, but I believed in her believing in me that I could do it. Her belief carried me and she made it all possible because of her strength. She is a phenomenal woman who has helped to guide our strength, and now she has formed PBHC Jamaica and we are her first graduating class, and I'm very happy," she continued.

During the ceremony, Greenidge was awarded a plaque containing personalised notes of appreciation for her motivational support by the graduating class.

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Rohan Dawkins (left), who placed third among the men in the 10K event, is all smiles as he collects his prize from Christopher Jarrett, co-chair, Kingston City Run Organising Committee.



Avril Leonce gets pumped up ahead of her 10K race at Kingston City Run.



Kingston City Run a success

Kingston City Run runners make their way through the beautiful surroundings of Kings House on Sunday, March 22.

ON SUNDAY, March 22, hundreds converged on New Kingston for the third staging of the Kingston City Run. Everyone from fitness buffs to newbie racers, were among the vibrant field of participants who tackled the scenic courses of the 5K, 10K and half-marathon events.

As runners made their way through some of the Corporate Area's most iconic landmarks – from

Devon House to King's House to Hope Gardens – they also enjoyed entertaining fan zones in front of the Pulse Complex and Eden Gardens. After touring the city, the thrilling races all culminated at Emancipation Park, where runners cooled down at a misting truck positioned by the finish line, visited a number of booths, including KSAC, Tastee and Elle & Vere, and were treated to lively

performances by the Alpha Band and high-energy music spun by DJ Sparks. What's more, the event was all for a good cause as net proceeds from the run will go towards the capital's homeless community through partnerships with Open Arms Drop-in Centre, Marie Atkins Night Shelter, Food For The Poor, Missionaries of the Poor and the Alpha Institute.



They call themselves 'Body by Kirk' and rightly so. Their trainer has a body that says, 'full hundred'.

PHOTO BY JANET SILVERA



The National Supply team was out in full force at the Kingston City Run, where we caught up with a few of them.



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These runners were very accommodating to the Hospitality Jamaica team at Kingston City Run.



Cleveland Charles happily crosses the finish line after completing the gruelling half marathon at the Kingston City Run on Sunday, March 22.



The group, Challenge Accepted, poses for Hospitality Jamaica's camera at the Kingston City Run on Sunday.



President of the Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association and co-chair, Kingston City Run, Nicola Madden-Greig (left), shares lens time with Hospitality Jamaica coordinator Janet Silvera at the run on Sunday, March 22.

JAMAICA

TOURIST BOARD

Tourism Action Club members exposed to industry careers

RECENTLY, TOURISM Action Club (TAC) members participated in a field trip designed to foster dialogue with industry personnel as they chart their career paths.

Participating schools included The Queen's School, St Andrew High School for Girls, Wolmer's Boys, Calabar High, Holy Childhood High, Jamaica College, Dunoon Technical High, Campion College and Vauxhall High.

TAC, a Jamaica Tourist Board initiative, was conceptualised some 20 years ago as one of the ways to empower young minds to continue the industry's rich and successful legacy.

Today, there are more than 80 clubs ranging from secondary to tertiary institutions. The TAC also provides leadership opportunities which prove invaluable as members transition to the world of work. They are given opportunities to interact with industry experts who embolden them to be industry leaders themselves.

The field trip began with a rap session with Paul Pennicook, director of tourism. He provided a fulsome overview to the students on employment opportunities in the industry, explaining that there are numerous career opportunities for employment in the hotel sector, attraction companies, airports and the JTB. He also elaborated on the other careers that support the industry, for example, accountants, information technology specialists, statisticians, human resource personnel and administrators.

"If you are going to be in this industry, you need to have a passion



Tourism Action Club students during a tour of the Norman Manley International Airport.



Shanalee Palmer of The Queen's School expressing appreciation to Director Pennicook on behalf of the Tourism Action Club members.

for it. What has kept me motivated over these years is the positive results that I see that come from being committed to selling Destination Jamaica regardless of the entity in which you work. I am encouraged by the number of you here today and wish you the best of luck in your career path," said Director Pennicook.

He also spoke about his personal



Third Officer McKoy Gordon, lecturer's assistant, leads students in the simulation exercise, which is a recreation of the Kingston Harbour.



Director Paul Pennicook during his rap session with Tourism Action Club members at the Jamaica Tourist Board's head office in Kingston.

provided practical experiences on how to navigate a vessel. The first simulator was a re-creation of the Kingston Harbour done to scale, providing a real-life demonstration for students at the institute. The second was the control room simulator, which demonstrated the mechanical and engineering skills required to safely operate a vessel.

A tour of the Norman Manley International Airport (NMIA) completed the day's activities. Christopher Powell, NMIA's operations manager and acting director of airport security, gave an overview of the security, procedures at the airport. He was pleased to tell the club members that he has fulfilled many career goals during his years working at the airport. This he said was as a result of the many learning opportunities available to staff. He continued by saying that he has been able to have rewarding experiences as he had worked in multiple departments during his tenure.

The feedback from the students was positive. According to John-Paul Smith of Wolmer's Boys School, the experience was very enlightening.

"I particularly liked the presentation by Pennicook as he mentioned career opportunities in the tourism sector that I had not previously considered."

The experience at Caribbean Maritime Institute was also illuminating for Smith. He was impressed by the simulation activity as it offered a practical introduction to the task of working in the marine industry.

For Shanalee Palmer of The Queen's School, the trip was very insightful and informative.

"It exposed us to things that we would otherwise not have the opportunity to see and experience. For those of us who were unsure of our career path, the information exposed us to various facets of the industry in which we could be employed," she said.



Training and development manager for Sandals Negril, Sonia Wynter, presents the Supervisor of the Year Award to Landscaping Supervisor Sheldon Reid.



'I AM SANDALS ... I'M AN ICON'

Sandals Negril Annual Prestige Awards ceremony



Suzette Bailey Anderson, assistant food and beverage manager, is all smiles as she collects the General Manager's Award from David Latchimy during the Sandals Negril Annual Prestige Awards ceremony.



Sandals Negril's general manager, David Latchimy (left, back) is flanked by some of the awardees from his hotel. From left (first row, kneeling) are: Derwin Tomlinson, Manager of the Year; Jerome Ferguson, Keron Scott, Andrew Williams, Anthony Bryan, all from the Photoshop, which copped Department of the Year; Dave Shagouari, Hotel Manager's Awardee; (back row, second from left) Keron Pinnock, Photoshop Manager; Christopher Pringle, Resort Team Member of the Year; Kevin Lackasingh, Most Improved Team Member; Delroy Deans, Runner-up Team Member of the Year; Darlesia Montaque, Sandals Foundation Community Spirit Awardee; Sheldon Reid, Supervisor of the Year; Dalasha Ferguson, Financial Controller's Awardee; Kendra Salmon, Most Guest-Nominated Team Member and Sandra Williams, Smile and Courtesy Awardee. Missing from photo are Suzette Bailey Anderson, General Manager's Awardee; Michelle Brown, Revenue Earning of the Year; and Kenroy Andrews, Sandals Earth Guard Awardee.



Dave Shagouari (left) from the Engineering Department at Sandals Negril collects the Hotel Manager's Award from Jackson Weech.



Members of the Sandals Negril Photoshop department are in a celebratory mood after copping the Department of the Year Award.

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Jamaicans celebrate TAINO NEW YEAR



The sharing of food with Taino ancestors at the bonfire.



Carol Miller reading a message from Roberto Mukaro Aqueibano Borrero, president of the United Confederation of Taino People.

Paul H. Williams
Hospitality Jamaica Writer

AS THE sun set in the west, a group of people circled a small bonfire on the black sands of the Copacabana Beach at Bull Bay, St Thomas. At 5:45 p.m., they shouted, “Happy New Year!” and danced around a circle, which they had entered after being cleansed with smoke from burning white sage leaves.

It was also the first day of spring, and the activity on the beach was organised to coincide with the spring equinox, the beginning of the Taino New Year. It was to remember the Tainos at the setting of the sun. So, from shortly before five, people started to gather. A bonfire was built on the sands, around which a circle with a portal was created.

In addressing the gathering of

more than 25 people, Carol Miller, organiser of the process, said, “Part of what we try to do in the various activities in which I participate is to try to bring to us an awareness, a consciousness of our Taino ancestors, that they also need to be honoured, need to be loved, need to be appeased, need to be invoked, need to be told the problem of the country, need to be asked to fix the problems of the country.”

Miller also said she was not concerned about whether she was connected to the Tainos by blood, it was about recognising them as ancestors who brought so much to the island.

“The Tainos as indigenous peoples, played a part in the shaping of this country, making it what it is today. They are ancestors of this

land, if they are personal ancestors, I do not care,” she said.

Some of the things Miller said the Tainos had bequeathed to us are the food they brought to the island which Jamaicans still enjoy, and even the barbecuing and jerking of meat.

“From that point of view, I have engaged a number of different kinds of activities to honour them, to recognise them, because for a long time, we didn’t.

“A few people started, I am joining those who have gone before, hopefully it will get bigger and bigger,” Miller explained.

Among the participants was Dr Cecile McCalla, who claims biological Taino ancestry. She is a longtime campaigner for national Taino Day observance.

“I have been feeling this for years, as I’ve told Carol, I want to



Carol Miller (third from right) addressing the gathering during the observance of the beginning of Taino New Year 2015 on Friday March 20 on Copacabana Beach, Bull Bay, St Thomas.

agitate for September to be made Taino Month, because we are a funny people ... the people who started our civilisation have no recognition ... We are busy recognising national heroes who were created a hundred years ago," she told the group, "I am totally fazed by this."

It was an evening of rituals, but there was also an educational component by way of a presentation by Leslie-Gayle Atkinson, research manager at the Jamaica National Heritage Trust.

She gave a learned and informative talk on the history and customs of the Tainos, after which she fielded questions from members of the rapt audience. Atkinson herself has adopted a Taino name which means Sweet Water Flower.

One the highlights of the evening was the reading of a message by Miller from Roberto

Mukaro Agueibana Borrero, president of the United Confederation of Taino People. Borrero has already visited Jamaica.

Among others things, he said, "Your energy joins with all other ceremonies taking place today and over this weekend across the islands into the diaspora ... To Taino people, these moments are important, not only for our individual selves, but for our collective well-being, including the environment and our ancestors."

After the formalities, it was time for the sharing of communal food, including fried fish and bammy, and roasted sweet potatoes. By then, it was dark, and the roar of the waves accompanied the drumming of Philip Supersad and company. And near the dying bonfire was a plate of food to feed the ancestors, to honour them, to celebrate their New Year.



Lesley-Gail Atkinson, manager, Research Department, Jamaica National Heritage Trust, giving a presentation on the Jamaica Tainos during the celebration of the Taino New Year on Friday, March 20 at Copacabana Beach, Bull Bay, St Thomas.



People dancing around a ring to celebrate the arrival of Taino New Year 2015, Friday, March 20 at 6 p.m.



The bonfire to herald the start of Taino New Year 2015 on Copacabana Beach, Bull Bay, St Thomas on Friday, March 20.



The last sunset of the Taino year of 2014.



Bammy and tobacco burning in a wood fire for the fulfilment of the wishes of the participants in the Taino New Year celebrations.



PHOTO BY PAUL WILLIAMS

These stylish Revivalists are from Winter Pen, Spanish Town, St Catherine.

AROUND JA WITH PAUL H

That Watt Town Revival pilgrimage

ON THE top of a huge rocky hillock in Watt Town, St Ann, perched the Zion Headquarters and Jerusalem Schoolroom, where people go to learn about Revivalism and to heal themselves.

Regularly, revivalists from all over the island set off for Watt Town on a pilgrimage of sorts, especially when there are quarterly conferences. I attended one of the conferences a few years ago, and came away with mixed emotions for whatever reasons. I didn't know whether I wanted to return or not.

Yet, on impulse, earlier this month, I decided to travel with a Revivalist associate of mine to this year's first quarterly conference. Two cars, each holding at least eight people, left Kingston at about 7 a.m.

Soon, there was prayer and singing, which I didn't join. I chose to listen and learn, though I was

reminded of my youthful days when I used to visit the Hill Sixty AME Zion Church in St James.

Everything was going well until we reached midway along the Treadways to Moneague leg of the North Coast Highway. One of the cars started to have challenges, and the steeper the climb got, the more severe the challenges got. Eventually, the vehicles changed drivers, and things improved.

Yet, the problem vehicle was still under pressure. The concern was that it would break down in the middle of nowhere. However, it chugged along and overcame the steepest point. After we left that tolled segment of the highway, the problem vehicle stopped. The one I was travelling in stopped, too.

We waited to see what was going to happen, and out came some of the passengers in their blue and white tunic and turbans. One woman led the charge as they sang



A section of the largest group to have arrived at the first 2015 quarterly conference at Watt Town Zion Headquarters and Jerusalem Schoolroom on Wednesday, March 4.



The church at The Zion Headquarters and Jerusalem Schoolroom at Watt Town, St Ann.



This little Revivalist insisted that her picture be taken.



This brother from Silver River, Westmoreland seems to be in a spiritual realm.



All over the compound of the Zion Headquarters and Jerusalem Schoolroom at Watt Town, St Ann, there were different, sessions going on at once.

and circled the car. Zion was under assault and the spiritual defence was now in full force. Around and around they went, touching the car as they sang and danced. When they were satisfied, it was back inside, and the journey continued.

I fell asleep along the way, and it must have been a deep slumber. Places I was expecting to see were long passed when I woke up. Even busy Browns Town I missed. Soon after my own revival, the singing started again. Songs I haven't heard in decades were now igniting my memory cells.

The arrival in Watt Town was without fanfare, but many vehicles were parked, some had just arrived. Finding suitable parking near the headquarters was itself a challenge. Yet, I was more interested in the stuff that people had for sale at the foot of the hillock. It was like a little market day.

There was singing atop the hill, and people in colourful uniforms were queued up, waiting to be

formally received. Each church group is called a bans, and is identified by the uniform its members wear. Before each bans member enters the church, they have to go through a certain ritual. Should they arrive while the ritual for another group is going on, they have to wait.

I didn't wait for the group I journeyed with. Too much was going on atop the hill, so I bypassed the group, walked on jagged stones and bent under branches until I found myself in a revival festival, with many more groups yet to join the festivities.

Inside the church was packed; preaching, singing, dancing and trumping were going on, and so it would be for the rest of the day. Newly arrived groups were on the 'seal' (consecration ground), making their presence felt in their own way. The sun was high in the sky, and colourful flags fluttered in the breeze. In the kitchen, food was being cooked. At the back of the church, different bans were

scattered, doing their own thing.

Young and aged Revivalists and in-betweens were in their element while others walked around nonchalantly, perhaps not understanding the significance of the day. For some, it was about the food they brought. Mouth-watering food was also the order of the day. It was a picnic in the heart of Zion.

And there I was, enjoying the feast of singing, dancing and trumping, as I clicked away on my little Canon camera. Then I saw a little boy looking up at me. He was alone. Turned out he had travelled from St James, my home parish, with his grandfather and another relative, he said. We were friends now.

While I was taking pictures of come colourful turbans, I saw a woman staring at me. She seemed familiar. So I stared back. She beckoned to me. I went over. As I neared her she asked, "Paul?"

I responded, "Ann?" She said yes. And we just hugged each other for minutes.



This pilgrim certainly needs a revival.

She was someone from my past. We were kids brought up in the same community, and she was at Watt Town with the Hill Sixty AME Zion Church I visited regularly in the past. Then she went on to announce to the members. Some recognised me some, didn't. Their members must have changed a thousand times since I last visited decades ago.

Then one of them, who used to be a friend of my mother, was only interested in whether I was married or not. Many responses came to mind, but I calmly asked, "Is that the most important thing in the world?" With that, I bore through the throng.

It was shopping time, and I had to find a way from the hill. The prices for the food for sale were great, but I refused to buy coco for \$80 a pound. Not in a rural context. While I was milling around, my new friend, I didn't realise, was right behind me. He wanted something cool.

Back on the hill, he just wouldn't go away, he was interested in my camera and camcorder. So I showed



Costuming is very much a part of the elements of the Zion denomination, and this young pilgrim pulled out all the stops.

him what to do with the camcorder; shot sizes, angles, how to zoom in and out, how to pan, how to tilt, etc. With that, I loan him the camcorder and let him loose. The place was really a photographer's dream, even the little chap could see, despite the religious significance.

I came upon him taking pictures like crazy, instead of videotaping. I smiled to myself and let him be until I was ready to leave. I couldn't find him. I got a little flustered. A young man told where to find him. And there he was, still taking pictures. I met his grandfather, told them I was leaving, said goodbye, and headed down the hill.

But when I was about to go into the vehicle, I felt a tug on my shirt. I turned around, and it was my new friend.

With an incredulous look on his face, he asked, "So you were just going to leave me like that?" I quickly wrote my number on a piece of paper told him to give it to his grandfather." He took it, smiled, and ran off.

They haven't called me yet, but one day they will, and I will show him the pictures he took, even his own selfie, and mine giving the thumbs up, perhaps to a rather interesting day at Watt Town Zion Headquarters.



Couples Swept Away 5K run participants along with staff members at the hotel share lens time on St Patrick's Day after the run.

At left: (From left) First-place winner Dean Prigent; second placed, Ralph West; and third finisher, Lindsay MaCordum in the Couples Swept Away 5K run on St Patrick's Day recently.

Go off the grid to Montserrat

Appreciating the island's green and gritty sides

THE ISLAND of Montserrat is on the rebound. A dynamic tourism marketing thrust driven by a new website, which has just gone live, is seeing the island creatively and meaningfully brought to life.

The former capital, Plymouth, now literally suspended in time, is a central feature of Montserrat's new lease of life in its tourism brand strategy.

At the forefront of this new drive is Montserrat's director of tourism, Anita Nightingale.

Nightingale, in the job for a little over eight months, has been consulting with stakeholders on- and off-island, including tour operators in key target countries, as she leads the drive to craft Montserrat's post-volcano tourism industry.

The Soufriere Hills volcano, along with the walk-through

museum of the island's former capital, are central features of that strategy.

"The volcano," enthuses the new tourism director, "forms our gritty side and it has positively influenced this new strategy. But it is always in partnership with our lush green side."

"We want people who are fascinated by our geography of contrasts," she adds, pointing out that in terms of the volcano, "We are at our lowest hazard level ever. Now is the time for people to come."

FIRST STEP

A first step on that journey to discover Montserrat – and to rediscover for others – begins with the rebranded, cutting-edge yet user-friendly website www.visitmontserrat.com, which was designed by Katalyst Creative Partners.

"The goal of the site," Nightingale explains, "is to make it intuitive and accessible via any medium, from desktops to laptops, from tablets to smartphones. We are emphasising bold imagery and less text. The pictures tell the story."

'Go Off the Grid; Explore the Green and the Gritty' is the greeting awaiting visitors to the image-laden site, giving a first hint of the adventure that beckons.

"In Mexico, they have the lost city, in the United States, they have ghost towns, but here, we have a hidden town, the only one of its kind in the Americas."

"And especially with the volcano and Plymouth, we definitely want to make Montserrat a destination of intrigue."

"We are targeting people who appreciate a nature-rich environment and are willing to do things within it to challenge

themselves. That would be hiking, diving, bird watching, spearfishing, boat tours and other outdoor activities."

On the other hand, the villa tourism industry which successfully underpinned Montserrat's tourism in the past years and for which the island has become well-known, is also highlighted.

"The villa sector, which was the cornerstone of Montserrat's pre-volcano tourism industry, still accounts for 80 per cent of accommodation, but for those who want something a little more intimate with more of a local connection, bed and breakfasts and guesthouses are equally important."

And after all that exploring of the only buried capital in the Americas, all that hiking, diving, touring and relaxing, turn it up for

some serious partying Montserrat style.

Montserratians know how to unwind and party. After all, this little gem of an island gave the world the party anthem, **Hot Hot Hot**, by local artiste and international star Arrow.

It was also the home of the world-famous AIR Studios of ex-Beatles producer George Martin, where the likes of Stevie Wonder, Sting, Paul McCartney, and Earth Wind & Fire recorded albums.

So, exactly how do you party in Montserrat?

Nightingale knows.

"The beauty about Montserrat is that you can bring your own party here – preferably on a moonlit black-sand beach.

And you are also welcome at any local shindig.

As the Montserrat saying goes: "You're safe."