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HospitalityJamaica

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TOP AWARDS FOR
Jewel
RESORTS



Jewel Resorts awarded top Aimbridge Hospitality honours

AIMBRIDGE HOSPITALITY, the nation's second-largest independent hotel management and investment firm, awarded three top performance awards to Jamaica's Jewel Resorts last week at its Annual Sales Conference.

All three Jewel Resorts are owned by Sagicor Life Jamaica and its fund, Sagicor Real Estate X Fund Limited. The hotels are managed by Aimbridge Hospitality.

Jewel Dunn's River Beach Resort and Spa was awarded the President's Award for Best Year over Year Performance for 2014, which is a top honour.

The new Jewel Paradise Cove Beach Resort & Spa was awarded for Best Online Reputation, holding the number one position in Runaway Bay on **TripAdvisor.com**, while Jewel Runaway Bay Beach & Golf Resort claimed the Service Excellence Award for number two positions on TripAdvisor and for the most improvement in Employee Opinion Surveys.

General manager of the newly acquired Hilton Rose Hall Resort & Spa and area spokesperson, Carol Bourke expressed her appreciation and attributed the award to the dedicated team of managers and staff at all the Jewel Resorts in Jamaica, as well as to the Aimbridge training platform which encourages and mentors staff members to provide the best and most unique hospitality guest experience.

HIGH STANDARDS

Bourke explained: "Our employee training, education and recognition helps us to exceed our performance goals in the highly competitive all-inclusive arena. Jamaica and Jewel work hard to maintain our worldwide status as a renowned destination for upscale all-inclusive resorts, and myself and my fellow general managers, Scott Robbins, Barbara Burton and Anne-Marie Goffe-Pryce, and their 1,200 plus associates, are dedicated to this mission," Bourke added.

Jewel Runaway Bay Beach & Golf Resort was also most recently selected as one of the Top Hotels



An aerial shot of Jewel's Dunn's River.



The Vichy shower spa.

“Our employee training, education and recognition helps us to exceed our performance goals in the highly competitive all-inclusive arena. Jamaica and Jewel work hard to maintain our worldwide status ...”

for Families in the Caribbean, as TripAdvisor's Travelers' Choice Awards for Hotels in 2015. For the 13th year, TripAdvisor highlighted the world's top properties based on the millions of reviews and opinions collected in a single year from travellers around the globe. The hallmarks of Travelers' Choice winners are remarkable service, quality and value.

Aimbridge senior vice-president of Caribbean operations and development, Rich Cortese applauded the accomplishment and his team in Jamaica.

"We don't rest on our laurels, we continue to strive to excite, delight and surprise our guests, making sure their all-inclusive experience is as good as it gets," he detailed. "Our high rate of repeat guests at all of our properties is a good measure that we are giving to our customers the programming, amenities and hospitality they have come to expect from us," emphasised the veteran hotelier.



Teresa Clarke, 2013 Taste of the Caribbean Cheesecake winner, proudly displays one of the dishes prepared by Alberto Atilas (fourth from right), executive sous chef, Sandals Grand Riviera. Dennis McIntosh (centre), president of the Culinary Federation of Jamaica, and his Team Jamaica colleagues, look on.

Taste of the Caribbean showcases region's food and beverage industry masters

TASTE OF the Caribbean, the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association's (CHTA) premier culinary competition and cultural showcase, brings food and beverage specialists together to witness the latest techniques utilised during the competition. Chefs and bartenders can meet face to face with their peers from around the industry to discuss industry trends that will help them in their respective fields. Taste of the Caribbean returns to Miami for its fourth consecutive year and will take place at the Hyatt Regency, Miami, June 12-14, 2015.

Each year, the Caribbean's top chefs and culinary teams unite to learn and compete, providing a dazzling exhibition of eclectic dishes and drinks from the islands, and participants enjoy some of the best Caribbean cuisine and libations the region has to offer.

Participating teams, event sponsors and all attendees benefit from

exploring industry trends and exchanging ideas, skills and techniques.

"We're excited about the opportunity to showcase the depth and variety of the Caribbean's incredible culinary offerings," said Frank Comito, chief executive officer of CHTA. "The three-day event is designed to appeal to the tastes of consumers, professionals and Caribbean enthusiasts who want to learn, connect, and enjoy the delights of our unique region," he added.

A highlight of the event is the head-to-head competitions between Caribbean culinary teams vying for top honours in Caribbean cuisine and beverage creation. There are currently 10 culinary teams registered for the event from Anguilla, The Bahamas, Barbados, Bonaire, British Virgin Islands, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, St Lucia, Suriname and the US Virgin Islands.

Each national team is comprised of two senior chefs, one junior chef, one bartender, one pastry chef and

one manager. The participating team members represent hotels, restaurants or educational institutions in the Caribbean which are members of CHTA.

COMPETING FOR HONOURS

During a series of competitions, chefs and bartenders from each country will present a variety of Caribbean entrées and cocktails as they battle for top honours including: Caribbean Culinary Team of the Year, Caribbean Chef of the Year, Caribbean Pastry Chef of the Year, Caribbean Bartender of the Year, and Caribbean Junior Chef of the Year.

"The Caribbean has a unique food culture that enhances guests' vacation experience," said Emil Lee, president of CHTA. "Taste of the Caribbean provides a platform for showcasing the best of our region's cuisine and unique drink offerings to professionals and consumers attending the event, driving awareness of the Caribbean brand throughout the south Florida area, one of our priority

markets," Lee noted.

For more gastronomic delight, Caribbean cuisine and culture will be on display for the public to experience at the Taste of the Islands Festival taking place on Saturday, June 13 from 6:30-9 p.m. at the Hyatt Regency, Miami. Consumers can gather information about their favourite Caribbean destinations, sample gourmet appetisers and signature cocktails, and listen to authentic Caribbean music. For tickets and display information, contact CHTA at events@caribbeanhoteland-tourism.com.

REGISTRATION

Full event registration, applicable to hoteliers, government entities and food/beverage professionals attending the entire duration of the event, is US\$175 for CHTA members and US\$225 for non-members. The registration fee includes access to all events on the programme, including the awards dinner. The

competition events are not included and are an additional US\$40 for Taste of the Islands and US\$50 each for the competition lunch and competition dinner.

The CHTA has arranged a group rate of US\$149 plus taxes and service charges (run of house, single or double occupancy) per night at the Hyatt Regency, Miami. The group rate is available until May 10, 2015 and can be made via the hotel website: miamiregency.hyatt.com.

Taste of the Caribbean is staged by the CHTA in conjunction with sponsors Anco, Aloutte, Esser Wines, International Dairy Farms and Interval International.

The CHTA is accepting additional sponsors for Taste of the Caribbean. Companies interested in learning more about sponsorship opportunities should contact Matt Cooper, chief marketing officer, via matt@caribbeanhoteland-tourism.com or (305) 443-3040.

Holiday Inn rebrands after US\$15M renovation

Barrington Flemming

Hospitality Jamaica Writer

THE INTERCONTINENTAL Hotels Group (IHG) rebranded the 518 Holiday Inn Sunspree Resort, following the completion of a US\$15-million renovation at the more than 45-year-old property, which is situated along Montego Bay's elegant corridor.

Dr Wykeham McNeill, minister of tourism, said the refurbishing and rebranding was a strong show of the confidence that stakeholders in the industry have in Brand Jamaica and its ability to deliver.

"What this shows is a strong level of confidence in the Jamaican tourism product, when our partners are investing in their properties and keeping them on the move. This is good for Jamaica. What you have happening here is part of a larger process – there is an energy in our tourism product where we are constantly reinventing, moving ourselves upwards."

Kevin Hendrickson, managing director, Holiday Inn Resort, said the partnership with the IHG since acquiring the property in 2008 has been rewarding, resulting in record revenues and profits, despite the dire challenges



Kevin Hendrickson (fourth left), managing director, Holiday Inn Resort, prepares to cut the ribbon to unveil the new sign and logo of the resort. Sharing in the occasion with him are (from left) Clark Lobban, general manager; Jackie Hendrickson (Kevin's wife); Nicola Madden-Greig, group director of marketing and sales; Wykeham McNeill, minister of tourism and entertainment; Glendon Harris, mayor of Montego Bay; and Paul Pennicook, director of tourism.

impacting the tourist market.

"The investment that my family made at a time when the industry was going through tremendous challenge – our main market, the United States, was going through one of the worst recessions in history – but together my family, the staff and the IHG team weathered the storm. I am confident we have a bright future ahead of us."

Nicola Madden-Greig, group director of marketing and sales said while the Holiday Inn Resort – synonymous with families – will continue to be the mainstay of the rebranded resort, she was pleased to introduce the Rose Hall Club Concept, designed specifically for couples.

"We recognised that couples find the layout amenities and services perfect for their needs so we have strictly dedicated an adults-only area where they have their own private lounge, access to their own pool and bar as well as other premium amenities."

The newly renovated property also boasts 161 standard rooms, 143 superior rooms, 107 junior suites, 73 deluxe rooms, 26 one-bedroom suites and 10 spacious kid suites, as well as a Japanese Tapanaki restaurant, a small private island and a miniature nine-hole golf course.

TRANSPORTATION IN Montego Bay and Negril received a major boost this week following a \$2 million contribution from Jamaica's leading hotel company.

The Montego Bay and Negril chapters of the Jamaica Union of Travellers Association (JUTA) each received \$1 million to go towards upgrading their existing headquarters as a part of their ongoing relationship with Sandals Resorts International (SRI). Specific focus was placed on the Negril Chapter which recently suffered a fire at its offices and has since been renovated. Work on the Montego Bay Chapter is ongoing.

Wayne Cummings, director of business processes and administration at SRI, commented, "There is no question that tourism is the engine driving many of the economies in the Caribbean, including Jamaica, but like all engines, our tourism product needs maintaining and upgrading to take us to the next level and compete in the global marketplace. JUTA, like Sandals, invests heavily in its product so that it can continue to offer the best service imaginable. We're happy to be a long-standing partner to JUTA

Transportation booster!

JUTA set for new offices as Sandals partnership kicks in



Sandals and JUTA executives celebrate their ongoing relationship. From left: Don Smith, Sandals vice-president of guest transport and airport operations; Charles Myrie, immediate past president, JUTA Negril; George Witter, president, JUTA Ocho Rios Chapter; Garfield Williamson, president, JUTA Montego Bay Chapter; and Wayne Cummings, Sandals director of business processes and administration.

in their ongoing efforts to advance."

"This contribution is just one in a long line of initiatives that are designed to, not only strengthen our relationship with JUTA, one of our most trusted partners, but also help to heighten the standards that both locals and visitors expect and deserve."

The two organisations have enjoyed a long and fruitful relationship which began with JUTA overseeing the transportation needs of one resort in Negril 30 years ago and has since developed to see the organisation now responsible for an estimated 99 per cent of Sandals' guest transportation needs.

The contribution forms part of ongoing programme announced in November last year that will see the introduction of an awards scheme, enhanced customer service training and tour visits.

Sandals Ocho Rios rebrands

It's now Sandals Ochi Beach Resort

Carl Gilchrist

Hospitality Jamaica Writer

SANDALS RESORTS last weekend rebranded its 529-room Ocho Rios property and is now known as Sandals Ochi Beach Resort.

The former Sandals Grande Riviera Beach and Villa Golf Resort boasts several new amenities as outlined by the company's CEO, Adam Stewart, and is expected to continue offering the first-class service that has characterised the company over its 34 years in existence.

The property was branded Sandals Grande in 2004 after a merger between the then Sandals Ocho Rios and Grande Sport Villa Golf Resort and Spa by Beaches and became the largest Sandals property in the chain.

Dozens of travel agents and media partners from the United States, Canada and Europe, along with guests, several of whom were returning for the umpteenth time, were present at the new beginning.

The rebranding took place during Reunion Week, a time when Sandals recognises loyal visitors (dubbed Sandals Select Guests) who make frequent visits to the resort.

Describing the occasion as "a special night", Stewart spoke of Sandals' tremendous track record

when it comes to offering top-class service, reminding that in their 34 years, the company has been voted the world's Best All-inclusive Resort chain for 20 years in a row.

He thanked all the stakeholders for making Sandals what it is today, highlighting the important role of guests to the resort.

REPEAT VISITORS

"The most important persons to us are all you past guests that are here, that come back year after year after year," Stewart said.

On the back of three new hotels which opened in the Caribbean (Barbados, Grenada, and Turks and Caicos) since last year, Stewart said Sandals has eight new projects under development, including moving into new islands.

These plans also include several for Jamaica.

Meanwhile, director of tourism, Paul Pennicook, congratulated Sandals for the "tremendous work" that the company has been doing.

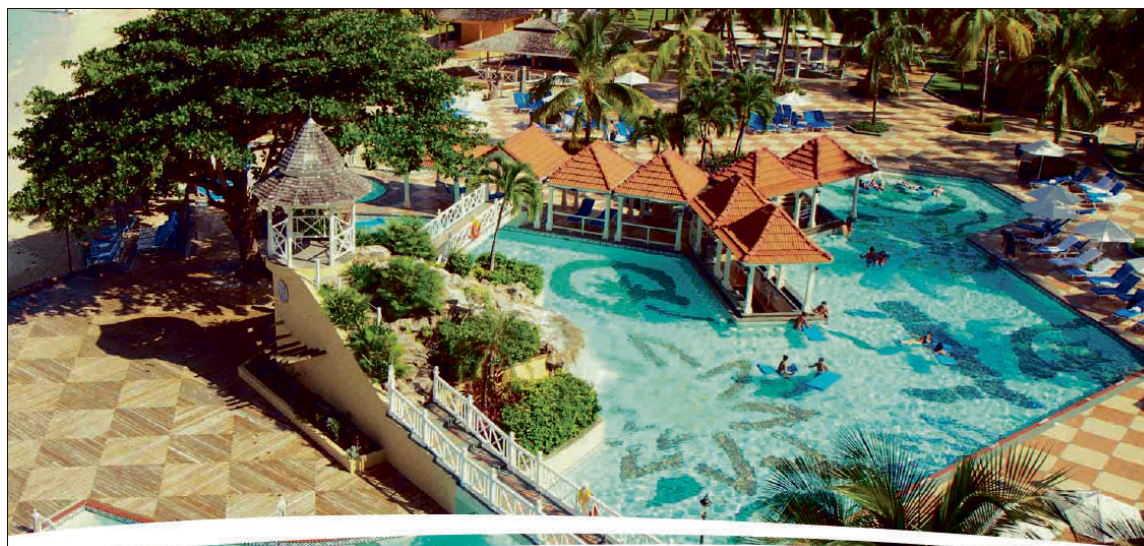
"I want to use this opportunity to really congratulate Sandals for the tremendous work that they have been doing," Pennicook stated.

"Sandals has become such a powerful brand and such a trendsetter that when you talk about all-inclusive industry today, Sandals is the standard by which all-inclusive resorts are judged."



PHOTOS BY
CARL GILCHRIST

From left:
Ricky DuQuesnay,
Chris Mullins,
Tiffany Mullins,
Jennifer Kruse
and Adam Stewart are all smiles at the reopening of the Sandals Ochi Beach Resort.



CONGRATULATIONS TO THE JEWEL RESORTS FOR BEING AWARDED TOP HONORS AT AIMBRIDGE HOSPITALITY ANNUAL SALES CONFERENCE

- President's Award for Best Year over Year Performance for 2014
- Jewel Dunn's River Beach Resort and Spa
- The Best Online Reputation
(holding the number one position in Runaway Bay on TripAdvisor)
- Jewel Paradise Cove Beach Resort & Spa
- Service Excellence Award
(holding the number two position on TripAdvisor)
- Jewel Runaway Bay Beach & Golf Resort
- The most improvement in Employee Opinion Surveys
- Jewel Runaway Bay Beach & Golf Resort

JEWEL
RESORTS


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Paul Pennicook and Gordon 'Butch' Stewart share lens time.

Time to consider the future shape of Caribbean tourism

IN A previous column, I suggested that as Caribbean tourism continues to recover from the lows it experienced following the global economic crisis of 2007/8, the industry ought to consider taking a much longer-term view of how to reorient and develop the regional tourism offering so as to better reflect changing international demand for the authentic.

By this, I meant that the present return to profitability ought to offer a space in which those who think about the future of the industry organise a retreat to debate whether there is a need to reconceptualise Caribbean tourism, hotels, and the tourism offering; that is to say in ways that meet changing demand and guarantee that the product is uniquely Caribbean, globally competitive and sustainable.

I suggested that one line of thought might involve thinking about developing part of the product in a vernacular manner that better reflects the real Caribbean.

Since first writing about this, I have been happy to receive emails suggesting that I expand on the idea of the vernacular and



David Jessop

what it might mean in the context of regional tourism.

By the vernacular in tourism, I meant giving greater consideration to the genuine in the physical, cultural and social environment in which tourism takes place. Simplified, while there is a place for Disney, the Hard Rock, and the Ritz Carltons, these offerings have nothing to do with the region. They bring visitors, but they are based solely on generic global brands that have little to do

with the nations in which such properties choose to locate.

Worse, in their desire to attract globally branded properties that put the destination on the map, governments unintentionally imply that these are benchmarks that all should aspire to. The effect is to promote emulation and a clash in its broadest sense with local culture, homogenising architecture and cuisine, dumbing down entertainment and much else that is unique to the Caribbean.

MORE TO OFFER

This is not to suggest that achieving this in a rational and balanced way is easy, or even viable for certain parts of the tourism market, but if the Caribbean does not recognise that it has more to offer than a smart international hotel, with smart international cuisine, set on a white sand beach with a golf course, it is neither doing the country in which the property is located a service nor underwriting long-term competitiveness in an international market where almost everyone else is doing the same.

There are already in the region some interesting examples of how the vernacular might be achieved. At its most obvious, the approach has tended to be in old colonial districts. At its most successful, it is a few streets in the colonial part of old Havana, but it also exists in a number of largely upscale hotels and some restaurants in Barbados, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba.

This is not to set aside what the Caribbean already has, but to suggest that there is a need in future for a more creative approach that ensures that from the moment a visitor arrives, they are not in a pastiche of the authentic.

This will not be easy. It requires the industry and government to consider how best to renew and develop the product in a manner that promotes the uniqueness of the Caribbean nations in which it is located.

There is now every reason to take a much longer-term view on these and other issues, to look over the horizon, and to try to envisage what a competitive Caribbean tourism mix might look like in 20 years' time.



Mayor of Falmouth Councillor Garth Wilkinson (left) engages in intense discussion with Richard Campbell, chief, culture and tourism section, the Organization of American States (OAS), on issues including ways in which Falmouth can benefit from participating in global sustainable tourism initiatives such as the new Sustainable Destinations Alliance for the Americas (SDAA). The discussion formed part of a meeting held recently at Glistening Waters, Falmouth, Trelawny. This as Jamaica embarked on the first phase of its participation in the SDAA, supported by the OAS and other partners such as Sustainable Travel International. Jamaica's participation in the programme is being coordinated by the Ministry of Tourism and Entertainment and its agencies. Involvement in the three-phased initiative will help Jamaica balance the protection and enhancement of its rich natural and cultural assets, while managing long-term risk and appealing to the growing tourism market interested in responsible management practices and authentic travel experiences. The representatives also met with various other officials and tourism partners from across the island.

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Tremendous support for MoBay City Run

RIU RESORTS walked away with the Largest Corporate Group trophy at the second staging of the MoBay City Run last Sunday at the Old Hospital in Montego Bay.

The Spanish chain had 521 entries in the 10K/5K Run and Walk, which closed down sections of the tourism capital. RIU had a 50 per cent increase in registration over their 2014 numbers.

The event, held in collaboration with US carrier, JetBlue and telecoms giant, Flow, received tremendous support from the hospitality sector. Sandals Resorts International, one of the major sponsors of the event, took home second place in the corporate section, with Courts Unicomer placing third.

This is the second year the furniture and appliance giant is sponsoring the event in a big way.

The other hotels that participated in the charity event aimed at providing scholarships for students

enrolled in four institutions in western Jamaica included Royalton White Sands, Holiday Inn, Round Hill Hotel and Villas, Tryall Club, Iberostar, Sunset Beach Resort, Secrets Resorts and Coyaba Beach Resort.

The tourism players were complemented by several business operators, including Lloyd's Department Store, Caribbean Producers Jamaica, Rainforest Seafoods, one of the many sponsors that provided mini-breakfasts for the event, Scotiabank, National Commercial and First Global banks.

The event was sponsored by the Jamaica Tourist Board, Courts Unicomer, Wata, Bigga, The Gleaner, Power 106 FM, Billy Craig Insurance Brokers, Harley Davidson, Ward's Power Tools, Guardsman Group, Last Resort, John Swaby, Dwight Troupe, Cover Me Up Tents, ATL, Rosh Marketing, Royalton White Sands and Holiday Inn. Organisers hope to raise \$4 million this year.



Outgoing director of the University of the West Indies, Mona, Western Jamaica Campus, Dr Luz Longworth, presents the Fastest Foreigner prize to international journalist, David Alm.



The largest corporate team, RIU Resorts, at the MoBay City Run.



Second-place corporate team, Sandals Resorts, pose for the camera at MoBay City Run.



The Courts Unicomer team, which received the third-place corporate prize at the MoBay City Run.



Team RIU Supreme, all of 521 strong.



The Royalton team in a celebratory mood at the second staging of the MoBay City Run at the Old Hospital Park in Montego Bay on Sunday.



Twenty-one travel agents from Canada participated in the MoBay City Run. Here, there are posing with the Jamaica Tourist Board's Marjorie Cunningham (left) and Dan Hamilton (hidden in the back, third right).



The dance group Har-H-Mony performing at the MoBay City Run post-race ceremony.



Children of the Drums dancers perform at the MoBay City Run pre-race pasta party at the Doctor's Cave Beach on Saturday night.



Mayor of Montego Bay, Councillor Glendon Harris presents the First Runner-up 10K Female prize to Allison Sutherland of Rainforest Seafoods.



The Jamaica Tourist Board's regional director, Janice Allen, in a good mood at the MoBay City Run finish line at the Old Hospital Park in Montego Bay on Sunday morning.



The CPJ team makes its way to the finish line during the MoBay City Run.



Children of the Drums drummers drumming away at the MoBay City Run pre-race pasta party at the Doctor's Cave Beach.

THE JAMAICA Tourist Board (JTB) kicked off its domestic campaign, Experience Jamaica, with a travel trade show at The Jamaica Pegasus hotel on April 30. The day began with a live outside broadcast from the JTB's Kingston office and featured interviews with the organisation's representatives and tourism partners heralding the benefits of vacationing at home. The Experience Jamaica promotion encourages Jamaicans to taste, see, feel and enjoy the island's tourism product. The Grand Ballroom at The Jamaica Pegasus hotel was transformed into an exhibition hall with over 60 tourist stakeholders offering significantly discounted products and services which will also be available throughout the campaign.

The summer months provide excellent opportunities for persons to reconnect and rekindle deep family and friendship bonds. The Experience Jamaica campaign is a call to action inviting Jamaicans and persons living in Jamaica to go out and enjoy Destination Jamaica.

In this, the JTB's 60th anniversary, tourism partners have committed to providing Experience Jamaica discounts of 20 per cent to 60 per cent. The offerings by hotels, attraction companies, tour operators and transportation companies available during The Experience Jamaica campaign afford a rich menu from which persons can create an exciting, relaxing and culturally engaging staycation. These are available across the island's six resort areas of Ocho Rios, the South Coast, Montego Bay, Negril, Port Antonio and Kingston.

LOCAL MARKET IMPORTANT

"The domestic market is hugely important for the tourist industry. We continue to capitalise on any opportunity that we get to encourage Jamaicans to vacation at home," said Paul Pennicook, director of tourism.

"The Experience Jamaica campaign presents a unique opportunity for Jamaicans to enjoy the best of our tourism products at a fraction of the cost. There are no visa requirements or foreign-exchange needs, or waiting in long lines to enjoy a truly memorable vacation. The trade show is bringing many of our partners together so persons can see the wide options available for their on-island vacation," he added.

Major industry partners are on board this year are: Hyatt Ziva Rosehall, Royalton White Sands, Half Moon, A RockResort; Sandals Resort International, RIU Hotel,

Experience Jamaica 2015 kicks off with trade show

JTB ramps up domestic campaign for 60th anniversary



Director of Tourism Paul Pennicook officially launches Experience Jamaica 2015 campaign.

The Spanish Court, The Jamaica Pegasus, The Knutsford Court Hotel, Goblin Hill Villas, Coco-La-Palm and The Cardiff Hotel & Spa. Participating attraction companies include: Dolphin Cove, Island Routes, Green Grotto Caves, Devon House Heritage Site, Chukka Caribbean Adventures Limited and Blue Mountain Bicycle Tours Limited. Transportation partners comprise interCaribbean Airways and Island Car Rentals.

Patrons can start benefiting from great deals from now through June

30, and from August 15 through November 15.

This is not the only opportunity that the public will have to interact with tourism partners, as there will be upcoming Experience Jamaica roadshows in Montego Bay on August 15 and in Mandeville on August 29.

With over 80 participating partners in this year's campaign, a truly Jamaican adventure awaits. Persons can view the list of participating companies at: www.visitjamaica.com/experiencejamaica.

JAMAICA

TOURIST BOARD



Director Pennicook (centre) speaks with Georgette McCallum of Chukka Caribbean Adventures, one of the partners in the Experience Jamaica 2015 campaign.



Patrons visit booths on the trade show floor at the Experience Jamaica campaign launch at The Jamaica Pegasus hotel.

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Plans unveiled for Trelawny's Meliá Braco Village

Janet Silvera

Hospitality Jamaica Coordinator

MELIÁ, AN international leader in resort management, has expanded its footprints to Jamaica.

The Spanish group two Fridays ago unveiled plans for the new Meliá Braco Village in Trelawny. The 226-room hotel is owned by the National Insurance Fund (NIF).

Speaking at the ground-breaking ceremony, the hotel's general manager, Dimitris Kosvogiannis, told the large gathering that Jamaica was a long-awaited destination for Meliá Hotels International.

In fact, the English-speaking island has been a major focus of the hotel group's global expansion strategy.

"Meliá, as an international leader, is expanding in the region,

in addition to the Islands of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, South-east Asia and, of course, the Mediterranean."

Excited about the prospects of providing hundreds of jobs to Jamaicans, Kosvogiannis is boasting of an all-Jamaican team of contractors.

The colonial-style property, formerly operated by SuperClubs, is home to the most stunning beaches in the Caribbean, and features several restaurants and a variety of bars, pools and spas.

The property will undergo a comprehensive renovation.

"Once it is adapted to the high standards of the Meliá brand and the newly heightened quality of the destination, the property will be managed as an upscale Meliá International all-inclusive hotel," said Kosvogiannis.

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From left: Opposition Spokesman on Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade Edmund Bartlett shares lens time with president of the Private Sector Organisation of Jamaica, William Mahfood, and Island Routes' David Shields.



They are the most dapper in the tourist industry and they both know it. Royalton White Sands' general manager, Armando Puzzuti (left), and Secrets Resorts' Emilio Huhn at the ground-breaking ceremony for the Meliá Braco Village.



General manager of the Meliá Braco Village, Dimitris Kosvogiannis and Anushca-Mai Walton.



Three the hard way. From left: William Craig, Philipp Hofer and Carlos Moleon.

Sandals Annual Prestige Award winners 2014

THE FOLLOWING is a pictorial of the Sandals Montego Bay region's Annual Prestige Awards. Sandals hotels in this region include Sandals Montego Bay, Sandals

Royal Caribbean and Sandals Carlyle. The award winners represent some of the very best in the hospitality industry. Congratulations on your performance!



Team members from the kitchen are caught on camera in a celebratory mood after being awarded the 2014 Department of the Year for Sandals Royal Caribbean at the resort's Annual Prestige Awards ceremony, recently held on Sandals' private island.



Shanetta Bloomfield (centre) from Weddings at Sandals is all smiles as she humbly accepts the Team Member of the Year award from general manager, Carl Beviere and a beaming Doreen Allen, Shanetta's former manager, at the resort's annual Prestige Awards ceremony, held recently at the resort under the theme, I Am Sandals – Striving for Excellence.

Minister of State in the Ministry of Tourism and Entertainment Damion Crawford (standing left); Sandals Royal Caribbean general manager, Gerald Christ (standing right), and hotel manager, Brett Castleman (second left), share a photo moment with some of the Prestige Awardees from Sandals Royal Caribbean. Front row, from left: Andre Hamilton, Team Member of the Year; Chad Gabbidon, Supervisor of the Year; Jean-Pierre Brown, Most Improved Team Member; Tamara Wallace, the General Manager's Award recipient; Dezreen Reid-Stewart, Manager of the Year; and Jevon Down, Most Guest-Nominated Team Member. (Back row, standing from third left) are Joseph James, Smile and Courtesy Award recipient; Levor Ricketts, Top Revenue Earner; Matthew Haughton, Sandals Foundation Community Spirit Awardee; and Gregory Headley, Hotel Manager's Heart of the House Awardee. Missing from the photo are Andrew Cole, Runner-up Team Member of the Year; Boysie Blake, Sandals Earthguard Awardee; and Ann-Marie Gayle, recipient of the Financial Controller's Award.



Words could not express just how excited the Dining Room team of Sandals Montego Bay were when they were announced as the resort's Department of the Year for 2014. Making the presentation and sharing in the excitement is resort human resources manager, Shirleene Armstrong (left).



Sandals Montego Bay Prestige Team Member of the Year, Andrea Henry (second left); and Runner-up Team Member of the Year, Michael Smith (right), proudly display their awards following the Sandals flagship resort's Annual Prestige Awards held recently. Sharing in the moment are resort general manager, Carl Beviere, and hotel manager, Dawn Smith.



Sandals Carlyle's recently held Prestige Awards will be long remembered by the resort's engineering department, which won the 2014 Department of the Year Award. Here, some members pause for a photo moment at the awards ceremony. Sharing in the moment is resort general manager Carl Beviere (second right), as well as chief engineer Errol Reid (second left), who was also awarded the coveted 2014 Manager of the Year.



AROUND JA WITH PAUL H.



A breathtaking view of the cloud-covered valley as seen from Fyahplace, Rock Hall, St Andrew.



A view of the cloud-covered valley as seen from the Fyahplace at Rock Hall, St Andrew.

The view from Fyahplace

“THERE WERE chills up my spine, and some thrills I can’t define,” are two lines from a George Gershwin tune called **How Long Has This Been Going On**. In it, the writer sings about rediscovering kissing, after detesting it when he was a tot. It’s one of my favourite Sarah Vaughan’s songs, and that line aptly describes how I felt when I saw the most enchanting view ever.

It was from Fyahplace, an Afrocentric creative space perched on a hill at Rock Hall on the border between St Catherine and St Andrew. I had gone there to ‘create and connect’. There were two workshops going on, clay pottery and basket-making. I chose to participate in the former because I was always fascinated by the process of moulding earth into works of art.

Making objects from clay is one of the oldest creative activities, and I was thrilled to get the opportunity. After a brief introduction by the tutor called Marlon, it was time to get down and dirty. It was Marlon who wet the dark brown deposit and mixed it, making sure to eliminate air pockets.

LEARNING POTTERY

The wet clay was then rolled and pounded in a sort of dough. It was from this big piece of dough that we, the participants, tore portions to fashion our own magnificent works of art. The dough reminded me of making dumplings. I rolled, twisted, flattened, and balled my piece while deciding what I would do with it. And it was definitely not going to be a pot, which I watched Marlon shape with much dexterity.



Sunset over Rock Hall, as seen from Fyahplace.

A candleholder was the first thing I decided to make, and it was not going to be anything like the fancy brass ones which I own. I was thinking outside of the box, and so I created a square object looking like a box. But it wasn’t neat, so I got a piece of board to flatten the sides. Then I used a cylindrical piece of stick to make two holes in it. And there it was, my clay candleholder!

Impressed by my candleholder, and

inspired by what other participants were making, I embarked upon my second piece, a platter. It was really challenging, but with patience, I ended up with something similar to a platter. From the platter I moved to a heart-shaped mould, which I crammed with the dough. That was the easiest part. Getting the ‘heart’ out was a bit testing.

Nearby the hive of activities was a kiln in which several pots were being baked, and



Clay objects created by Hospitality Jamaica writer, Paul H. Williams.

from time to time, Marlon would go to poke some firewood through three apertures at the base of the kiln. In this oven, our objects would also be baked, but before that, they would have to be dried. I was anxious to see how mine turned out.

From the pottery workshop, I lumbered up a hill to see what was going on with the basket-making. ‘Class’ was in session, ‘teacher’ and ‘students’ were laying the foundation for the baskets. I stuck around for a while, but I was not prepared for the intricacy of basket-making.

Absorbing the unbelievably captivating view of the valley and yonder mountains and hills, I spent some time doing. Everything



Another idyllic view from the Fyahplace, Rock Hall, St Andrew.

was so near yet so far, far away to St Mary, and Portland, perhaps. It changed from clear, to hazy, to shadowy, eerie if you will.

When evening came, the sun took up position over the western hills, and flirted with white, grey and black clouds, playing hide-and-seek, masking itself, and then reappearing with a burst of heavenly glory.

BEAUTIFUL SUNSET

Then it slowly slid behind the hills, illuminating the sky with its afterglow, and heralding the onset of twilight, in whose misty charm, a Catholic church, also perched on hill, stood in solitude. The worshippers had long gone. And when night finally came, the fireside was set ablaze in the Fyahplace.

And what happens when creative people are in a creative space? We create! A jam session of sort, we transformed the space into. While Everan Whyte and a student were completing a basket, Jahanigh, a rising singer with a unique style, got the connection going.

We sang, drummed, danced, recited, played the guitar, gave jokes, drank 'engine oil', and laughed uproariously until we were tired, drained and dazed. After the hugs and good-byes, those of us who camped out soon collapsed, and rolled into repose.

When morning came, I rose to hear birds sing and to feel the cool air on my tired face. I stepped outside to speak with Jahanigh, and was brought to my knees upon seeing what the huge expanse of valley was offering me.

It was a scene I had never seen in my entire life. It was like looking down upon clouds in a sort of wonderland, a river of milk. All the hills had disappeared, only their dark tops were visible above the clouds in the morning twilight.

It was a transformation that only nature could create, and I bit myself to prove that I was still alive. And then the outlines of the eastern hills were highlighted by the glare of the rising sun, creating a light-and-shadow effect on nature's palette. I watched as the fury of the morning stared from the behind the hills, and in a few minutes it showed me its golden rays as I stood and looked at the valley of cotton candy, from the Fyahplace.



Rising singer, the talented Jahanigh, performing during a 'jam session' at the Fyahplace.



Tutor, Everan Whyte (second left), looks on as his students perform a task during a basket-making workshop at the Fyahplace.



Participants in a clay pottery workshop at the Fyahplace.

SCU principal receives international award

PRINCIPAL OF the Sandals Corporate University (SCU), Dr Phillip Brown, was among six persons recently honoured by the American Hotel & Lodging Educational Institute (AHLEI) for outstanding leadership in hospitality training and education.

Dr Brown, who is also the group director, training standards at Sandals Resorts International (SRI), received the AHLEI's coveted Lamp of Knowledge Award for Outstanding International Educator. The awards were presented on Tuesday, April 14 at the American Hotel & Lodging Association's Stars of the Industry Awards Brunch held in Washington, DC.

The AHLEI is considered the preferred provider of quality resources to educate, develop and certify hospitality professionals worldwide and works with the lodging industry, hospitality schools and related hospitality industries.

The Lamp of Knowledge Awards are given to individuals who demonstrate extraordinary commit-



Dr Phillip Brown

ment to advancing the quality of professionalism and education in the hospitality industry.

Dr Brown has played a leading role in the implementation of the SCU, which was launched in March 2012 and represents the first university of its kind within the hospitality sector. Among the SCU's mandate is to provide scholarships, training, education and certification opportunities to the over 13,000 employees at all Sandals, Beaches and Grand Pineapple resorts across the region.

HUMBLER AND PLEASED

In acknowledging the award, Dr Brown said, "The partnership with the AHLEI has allowed our team members to grow and develop in amazing ways. I am pleased to be a part of this process of transformation and development and humbled to have been honoured by this esteemed organisation."

Adam Stewart, SRI's chief executive officer, said the award was testament to Dr Brown's outstanding work with the SCU and added that

the company remained committed to developing its human resources.

He said, "Investing in the education and development of our staff remains one of our top priorities. As important as infrastructure is to our business, the real heart and soul of our company is our team members. Providing opportunities to enhance their skills and facilitate their development is, therefore, of paramount importance to us as the success of our team members is the success of our brand."

Under Brown's leadership, the SCU has become one of the largest users of AHLEI's professional certifications, from line-level and guest service through supervisory, managerial, and executive designations. Through his efforts, Beaches Turks and Caicos became the first Caribbean property to earn the designation of Certified Guest Service Property. The SCU has enjoyed a relationship with the AHLEI since late 2012 when it became a Global Academic Partner and the first ever corporate university to sign such an agreement with the AHLEI.

New direct service from Toronto this summer

For the first time ever, Canadians can travel direct to Curaçao from Toronto via Air Canada during the summer season. Air Canada flies non-stop to Curaçao on Fridays with an 8 a.m. departure from Toronto and a 3:15 p.m. return flight from Curaçao. For more information, visit vacations.aircanada.com/Curaçao.

Curaçao Unveils new winery

Located near Hato International Airport, Curaçao recently opened the island's first-ever winery and vineyard. Run by the Visscher family, the vineyard has over 2,000 plants on two acres of land, which will eventually be expanded to 25 acres. The wine will be harvested from the island's soil and will be available to bottle and sell next year. In the meantime, visitors can enjoy tastings and special events at the winery, open everyday from 10 a.m.-8 p.m. with Happy Hour Fridays at 5 p.m.

What's new in Curaçao

New shopping centre opening in May

Slated to open in May 2015 and located between Willemstad and Curaçao International Airport, is an upscale shopping centre being built and operated by the Sambil Group. The new shopping centre, designed in a fish-shape, encompasses over 100,000 square feet and will feature 180 establishments, including 156 shops, eight movie theatres, four restaurants, and a food court offering a variety of local and international cuisines. For more information, visit www.sambilmall.com/Curaçao.

IGLTA awards Curaçao with Destination Pioneer honour

The International Gay & Lesbian Travel Association (IGLTA) recently awarded the Curaçao Tourist Board with its prestigious Destination Pioneer award for its exceptional efforts in developing the island into an all-welcoming destination for travellers. Curaçao boasts a substantial number of hotels and attractions

with IGLTA memberships, which reflects the island's 'Live and Let Live' philosophy to embrace all travellers. The awards ceremony took place in Los Angeles at IGLTA's 32nd Annual Global Convention, where the island was honored alongside influential LGBT advocates. For more information on LGBT travel in Curaçao, visit www.gaycuracao.com.

HOTEL NEWS

New Courtyard by Marriott to open in Curaçao

Marriott International has announced plans to open the first Courtyard by Marriott hotel in Willemstad. The hotel, set to open in 2017, will feature 177 rooms and will be situated just a few blocks from the existing cruise ship terminal. The property will be part of a mixed-used development that will include retail space, an entertainment area, three restaurants and a casino. The hotel will feature the brand's signature business lobby, a

coffee shop, an outdoor pool, fitness centre and flexible meeting area.

Baoase Luxury Resort debuts new villa-style suites

The island's five-star upscale property, Baoase Luxury Resort, has unveiled 10 new exclusive suites. The new villa-style suites include a private infinity pool and garden with a spectacular view over the Caribbean Sea as well as either direct access to a private beach or the resort's beach. Constructed out of natural stone, these secluded one-level luxury suites offer the perfect amount of privacy with unparalleled luxury offerings. For more information, visit www.baoase.com.

Hilton Curaçao undergoes second phase of its renovation

Following refurbishments to its hotel rooms in 2013, Hilton Curaçao recently began the second

phase of renovations to its lobby and hotel bar. The property's entrance signage and Bligh's Bar will also be entirely refurbished to reflect a more contemporary look and feel, and are expected to be completed in Spring 2015.

Additional renovations will also take place in the third quarter of this year and will include the property's restaurants and gym facilities. For more information, visit www.hiltoncuracaoresort.com.

Renaissance Curaçao launches new dining experience

Renaissance Curaçao, located in downtown Willemstad, has given its CRU Steakhouse & Wine Bar a makeover, transforming it into Xquisit, a dining experience with a new modern concept. Xquisit will offer a three-course prix fixe menu of appetizers, main dishes, and desserts along with a separate steak and wine menu. Menus will be changed seasonally, with sample dishes such as Beef Tenderloin Carpaccio with Truffle Oil, Stuffed Pork Loin with Brie cheese, and Ratatouille. For more information, visit www.renaissancecuracao.com.