

The Gleaner
Hospitality Jamaica

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Interactive TV to revolutionise hotel industry

C&W Business launches
Hospitality Interactive TV





CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Cedric Gooden (right), group information technology, Jewel Resorts, highlights the in-room viewing capabilities that Hospitality Interactive TV offers, while Dwayne Bennett looks on.

Interactive TV to **REVOLUTIONISE** hotel industry

C&W Business launches Hospitality Interactive TV

VISITORS TO Jamaica will experience a revolutionised in-room entertainment experience made possible by the newly launched C&W Business Next Generation Hospitality Interactive TV.

The new interactive system provides guests with the ability to record their favourite shows via a personal video recorder; access popular streaming services such as

Netflix, Hulu and Pandora; control in-room TVs from smartphones; and take their content on the go with their iOS and Android mobile devices as they enjoy the best of Jamaica.

Interactive TV is the latest in the line-up of ICT solutions introduced by C&W Business to support the Jamaican tourism industry. Commenting on the importance of the product in

meeting the needs of the 2.2-million-plus stopover visitors that visit the island yearly, Donovan White, vice-president of C&W Business Jamaica stated, "Interactive TV delivers what today's travellers have come to expect, which is the same high-quality TV experience while vacationing as they enjoy at home."

He continued, "Tourism is the lifeblood of the Jamaican economy

and at C&W Business, we have consistently proven ourselves as a partner to the industry."

The state-of-the-art Interactive TV solution gives hoteliers improved and differentiated services with a larger selection of high definition (HD) channels, updated channel line-ups (including up to 80 channels) and an easy-to-use programme guide to help guests find their favourite TV



SINCLAIR

channel or discover specific hotel information, such as restaurants, bars and local attractions, right from their TV.

Jewel Grande Montego Bay Resort and Spa, having recently installed the new Interactive TV solution, has already expressed praise for its smooth deployment, seamless integration with the property management system and improved guest experience.

“We are extremely pleased with the Hospitality Interactive TV solution. The solution interacts seamlessly with our property management system, allowing us to send personalised information to one guest, a group or even a block of rooms in real time. This is particularly useful when welcoming guests to the property for holidays or the celebration of important milestones, such as anniversaries and birthdays,” stated Cedric Gooden, group information technology manager at Jewel Resorts.

“After all, who wouldn’t want to enter their room and be greeted by a personalised message welcoming

them to the property, wishing them a great holiday and an even better anniversary celebration? Further, the ability for our guests to continue accessing their preferred television programmes on their smartphones offers a wow factor that, we believe, has exceeded our guests’ expectations.”

ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY

Gooden added that Interactive TV is also useful in streamlining the resorts, thrust as an environmentally friendly organisation.

“It reduces the need for paper as we send daily schedules of activities, restaurant information and spa deals directly to guests via the television in their rooms.”

The new solution is a commercial-grade TV service that is specifically designed to meet the needs of hotels, resorts and guest-house operators to deliver a superior, connected guest experience. It can therefore be deployed across any type of infrastructure, eliminating the need for hoteliers



WHITE

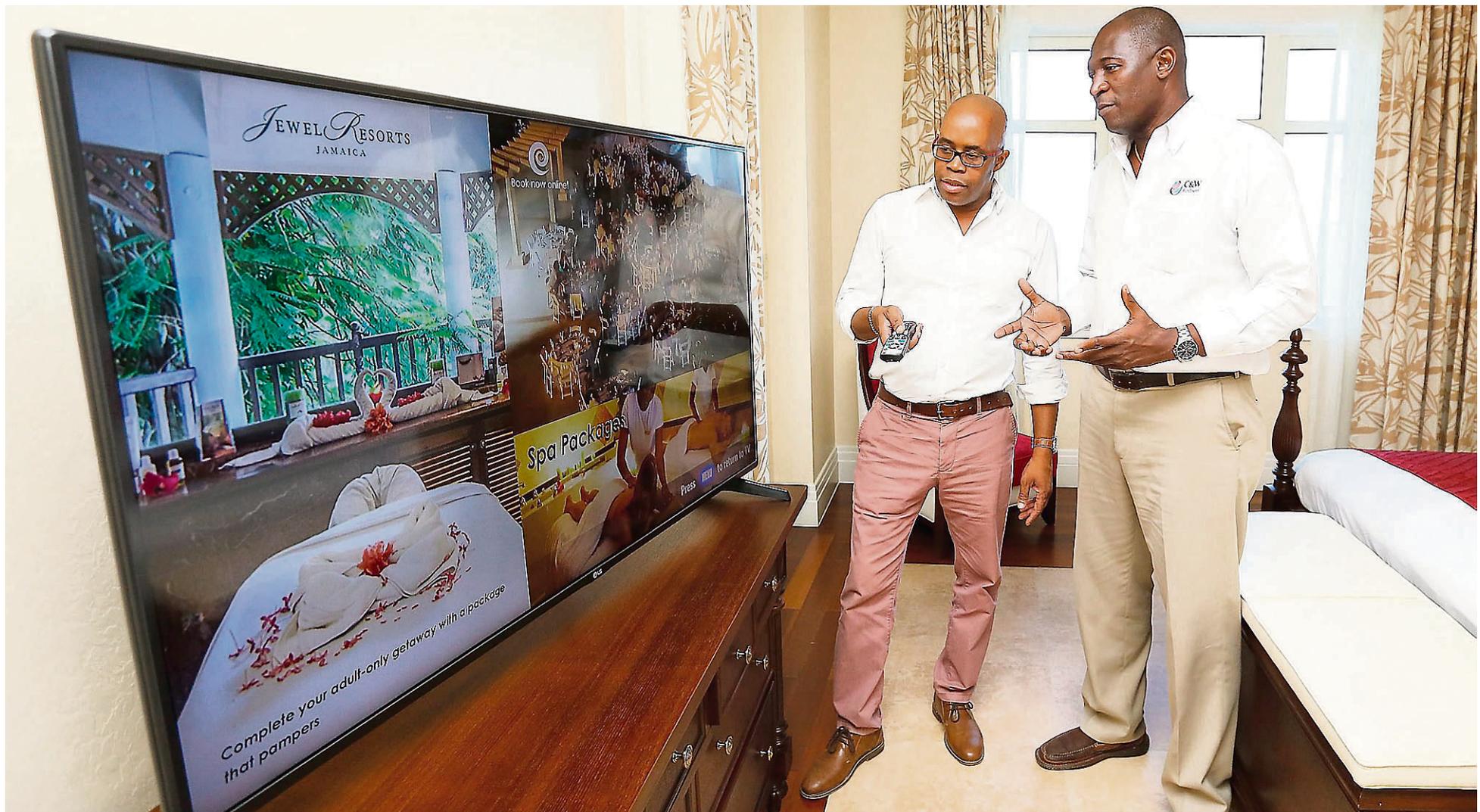
to reinvest in re-cabling or shutting down rooms for time-consuming renovations.

“We continue to innovate and

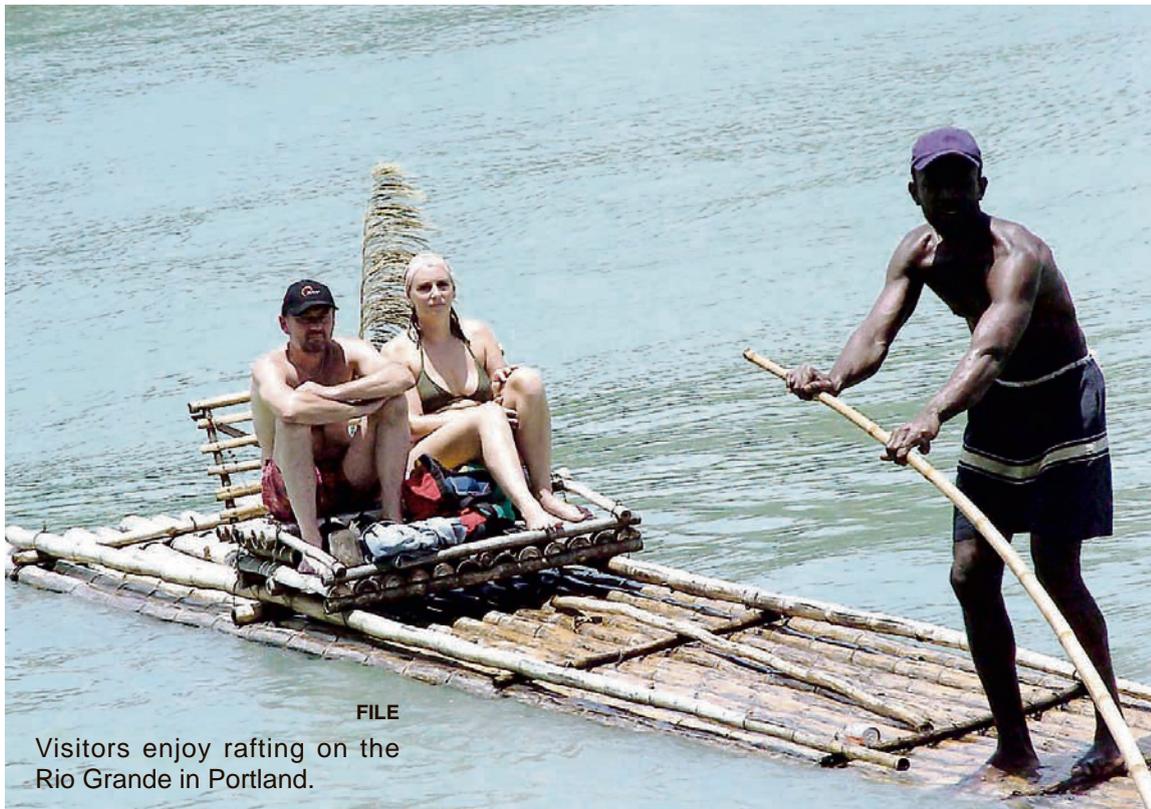
invest in leading-edge technology so that we can provide products and services to enable hotels in the region to enhance their guests’

experiences and attract more customers, allowing them to compete in the global tourism sector,” said Garfield Sinclair, C&W Communications’ president of its Caribbean Business. “With more channels, in HD, higher-quality services and enhanced monitoring capabilities, this IPTV solution will help hotels to greatly differentiate their proposition.”

There are two basic packages available to hotel and resort operators - C&W TV Lite (29 channels) and C&W TV Plus (67 channels), as well as a range of add-on packs, including Movie Pass, Kids Pass, Global News Pass, Sports Pass and Fox Pass. One of the most significant benefits for hoteliers, though, will be the ability to create a dedicated hotel channel that allows for the seamless communication of a variety of offsite and onsite programmes to their guests. This unique differentiator is made possible by the smooth integration of C&W Business’ digital signage and interactive TV solutions.



Cedric Gooden (left), group information technology, Jewel Resorts, gives a taste of the upgraded in-room guest experience that Hospitality Interactive TV provides as he flips through information on spa packages at Jewel Grande, while Dwyane Bennett, account manager at C&W Business, discusses the additional capabilities of the system.



FILE

Visitors enjoy rafting on the Rio Grande in Portland.

New route available for rafting on the Rio Grande

THE TOURISM Product Development Company Limited, the agency with responsibility for managing the Rio Grande Attraction in Portland, has implemented a new 90-minute rafting trip on the world-famous Rio Grande River.

This complements the current legacy trip of two or three hours.

The new route, which became available on September 18, is for individuals who wish to enjoy a shorter version of the sought-after experience.

The new, short route will begin at Rafter's Rest and end at Shotover. This new starting point will eliminate the need for persons to be escorted from Rafter's Rest to the previous starting point at Berrydale.

Rio Grande, which is known as the birthplace of rafting in Jamaica, has maintained its status as a premier rafting experience for visitors and locals to Portland. Located approximately 108 kilometres or two hours

and 15 minutes from either Ocho Rios or Kingston, an excursion of this nature offers a relaxing and tranquil contrast to the hustle and bustle of the city.

The slow, scenic tour of the Rio Grande is led by licensed raft captains who are trained in first aid and CPR, and possess excellent swimming capabilities. Additionally, the River Rafting Authority and other government agencies ensure that all laws and regulations are observed for a seamless and exhilarating experience.

Refreshments and craft items are also on sale at Rafter's Rest.

■ **For further information and bookings, visit the Rio Grande Attraction at Rafter's Rest in St Margaret's Bay, Portland. Tel: (876) 993-5778 or Email: rgrande@cwjamaica.com**

'Overtourism' for debate at WTM London

THE UNWTO and WTM Ministers' Summit will debate the so-called 'overtourism' at WTM London on Tuesday, November 7.

The so-called Overtourism has become a hot topic in the news in recent months, with reports from around the world speaking of 'tourism-phobia' and showing pictures of citizens protesting against the 'invasion of tourists' and the expulsion of locals by tourism businesses.

"Managing the growing number of visitors to many popular areas of our planet, including cities, is crucial for both hosts and visitors, both international and domestic. Growth is not the enemy. Growing numbers are not the enemy. Growth is the eternal story of mankind. Tourism growth can and should lead to economic prosperity, jobs and resources to fund environmental protection and cultural preservation, as well as community development and progress needs, which would otherwise not be available," says UNWTO Secretary General Taleb Rifai.

He adds that tourism is an enriching experience for visitors and hosts alike, demands strong, sustainable tourism policies, practices, and the engagement of national, as well as local governments and administrations, private-sector companies, local communities and tourists themselves.

The topic will also be the key theme of World Responsible Tourism Day – the largest day of responsible tourism action in the world – on Wednesday, November 8, and will feature throughout the responsible tourism programme across all three days of WTM London.

CENTRAL TO ECONOMIES

More than 1.2 billion international tourists crossed the globe in 2016 and this is expected to grow to 1.8 billion by 2030. Tourism generates 10 per cent of the world's gross domestic product, is responsible for one in every 10 jobs and 30 per cent of world trade in services, making it central to many countries' economies and people's livelihoods.

Furthermore, 2017 is the United Nation's International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. A sustainable tourism sector is one that promotes environmental



UNWTO Secretary General Taleb Rifai.

preservation and protection of tangible and intangible cultural heritage and promotes the engagement, commitment and respect for local communities.

The Summit will discuss how managing the growth of visitors to many popular destinations is critical for both hosts and visitors. It will look at how tourism growth and sustainability can and should go hand in hand.

WTM London Senior Director Simon Press said: "The so-called overtourism is the key issue in the industry at the moment, so it is right that ministers and senior private-sector leaders debate the topic as part of the UNWTO and WTM Ministers' Summit.

"In previous years, the summits have offered insights into issues such as terrorism, crisis management, seamless travel, social media, branding and the legacy of mega-events such as the World Cup and Olympics.

"This year's summit will discuss the so-called overtourism, the impact it is having on both tourists, destinations and local residents, and look for solutions to help minimise the problem.

"WTM London is the only forum offering so many ministers, alongside senior industry leaders, the opportunity to discuss the big issues affecting the global tourism business."

THE VIEW FROM EUROPE

Learning lessons from Irma

David Jessop

Hospitality Gleaner Writer

FROM EARLY on September 6, to late on September 10, Hurricane Irma raged at speeds of up to 185mph across the Caribbean. It caused at least 43 deaths, extensive damage to homes, livelihoods, and infrastructure, and seriously set back the Caribbean tourist economy, especially in some of the worst-hit islands.

Barbuda, the British Virgin Islands, St Thomas and St John in the US Virgin Islands, both sides of the Dutch/French-speaking island of St Maarten/St Martin, and Cuba's northeast coast, all experienced significant structural damage, as all were at or close to the eye of the storm. Also hit were Anguilla; St Barthelemy; the Turks and Caicos Islands; and the southern end of The Bahamas chain of islands, with many other countries away from Irma's epicentre experiencing damaging sea surges and extended periods of heavy rainfall.

Speaking about the implications of this for tourism at the launch of an industry post-hurricane recovery fund, Karolin Troubetzkoy, the president of the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA), said that the aim is to have the affected areas of the Caribbean ready to receive tourists by the spring and summer seasons of 2018, if not sooner, while stressing the importance of now strengthening the resilience of the sector.

"Our nations and territories are dependent on tourism and they will need help to bounce back," she said, adding that tourism is the quickest way to "rebound an economy, put people back to work, and generate badly needed tax revenues to support reconstruction".

Subsequently, in a second message, Mrs Troubetzkoy said that there is an urgent short-term need to make clear to travellers that much of the rest of the region is unaffected and is open for business.

Caribbean Travel Update website created

TO THIS end, CHTA has created a website, 'Caribbean Travel Update', which makes clear which islands are open for business and which are on the path to recovery. The approach also involves the creation of a YouTube channel with new video footage that will showcase properties and destinations as they become ready to receive guests.

Both are vital short-term responses, but there is much more to be done in the longer term.

First, climate change is real, likely to be



AP

Damaged buildings and fallen trees litter downtown Marigot on the island of St Martin after the passing of Hurricane Irma on Saturday, September 9. On the Dutch side of St Marteen, an estimated 70 per cent of the homes were destroyed by Irma, according to the Dutch government.



David Jessop

lasting, and the Caribbean is particularly vulnerable. As an industry dependent on both the built and natural environment, tourism needs to make clear that its economic contribution requires resilience in infrastructure and along coastlines, and that this requires investment and external support.

UN climate change funding for adaptation critical

IT IS therefore in the interests of the industry to add its voice to those, reminding other countries, including the US and China, about the importance of the region being an early recipient of UN climate change funding for adaptation and mitigation. It is also important that international support is increased for the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility, the segregated company linked to the Caribbean Development Bank.

Second, in future, in the aftermath of any major storm, there is a need to consider short-medium- and long-term messaging priorities. There are many examples after Hurricane Irma struck, where governments were stressing damage to the domestic economy and the hardships suffered, while, in contrast, the tourism sector and individual hotels, for commercial reasons, were saying all was well and they would be opening as normal for the coming season.

Third, there is a need to address the

damaging impression of the region brought about by those countries and tour operators that did not airlift out their visitors before the storm hit, or were unable to provide immediate consular support after the hurricane has passed. The industry, with Caribbean governments, needs to engage jointly their overseas counterparts in all source markets to develop time-lined protocols in ways that avoid destinations having to address the problem of thousands of stranded visitors at a time of domestic hardship.

And fourth, it should be more widely recognised that visitor perception and messaging have become a critical component of the future success of the regional economy. Throughout Hurricane Irma's course, visitors' use of social media drove the international news agenda, downgraded the far greater suffering of islanders, and, rightly or wrongly, created concerns about the long-term security of some destinations.

While the immediate need is for financial support – let us hope those who profit from the region, including the cruise lines, the airlines, tour operators and industry suppliers, all give generously – there is a strong case for the industry and Caribbean governments to initiate a dialogue that enables Irma's lessons to be learned.

China's exploding outbound travel and Jamaica's position for growth – Part 2

David L. Shields
Contributor

JAMAICA, SINCE 2005, has played an active role in introducing its tourism offerings to the Chinese market, and, through a number of engagements and activities, continues to build the appetite for the destination as a long-haul, quality, exotic and culturally rich vacation destination.

The opening of the Embassy of Jamaica in Beijing in 2005, and the importance placed on the tourism promotion within the country

played a major role to fulfil the commitment of the early Approved Destination Status (ADS) agreement. The joint promotional work with Jamaica Trade & Invest/JAMPRO provided enormous value to the overall awareness of Jamaica. The visit to Jamaica in 2006 of then chairman of the Chinese National Tourism Administration, He Guan Wei, played a major role in demonstrating the priority placed on Jamaica as a leader in stimulating long-haul outbound travel to the Caribbean.

The 2008 Beijing Olympics and

the outstanding performance of Jamaica in those events added historic significance to the event, and was also crucial for Brand Jamaica, creating awareness to the over 1.3 billion Chinese.

China today is the largest outbound travel market with its people exploring the world in large numbers. At the end of 2016, the total number of Chinese travelling outside of China was 135 million. It is very important to note that over 70 per cent of the international departures are to the Special Administrative Region of Hong

Kong and Macau. While organised packaged tours are still preferred, there is an increasing demand for independent travel, especially among the young.

This has been facilitated, in large part, by the explosion of online travel agencies and the use of social media. While the destinations visited are generally common to both the packaged groups and the free independent traveller, the USA is extremely popular among the growing independent traveller. Other popular destinations are Thailand, Japan, South Korea,



David Shields

Indonesia, Vietnam, Singapore and some long-haul destinations such as France, Italy, UK and Australia.

It is evident that the growth in

PLEASE SEE **CHINA**, 11

THE TOURISM Product Development Company Limited (TPDCo) has again successfully implemented the Spruce Up Jamaica Tourism Summer Internship Programme (TSIP).

Under the programme, more than 600 high-school and tertiary students between the ages 16 and 25 received work experience in areas of tourism and hospitality over the summer months of July and August.

The programme's objectives, which included exposing young academics to the tourism industry, as well as the provision of an economic opportunity and mutual value, were met.

Prior to their placements, the participants received a one-day training session in areas of tourism awareness, cultural and security awareness, marketing of Brand Jamaica, customer service and professional etiquette.

The programme integrated students in sectors of the tourism industry, tourism organisations, as well as establishments with linkages in the tourism sector. The students were placed in entities across the island, particularly the resort areas of Negril, Port Antonio, Montego Bay, Ocho Rios, Kingston, and the south coast.

The participants commended the high level of engagement by staff of the various organisations, as some were given the opportunity to visit many of Jamaica's heritage sites and received lessons on Jamaica's history and culture.

Heritage studies graduate student at the University of the West Indies, Mona, Adrian Reid, said, "The experience was enlightening. I visited many of Jamaica's hidden gems and learnt about our rich history and culture. The staff were warm, welcoming,

More than 600 students benefit from TPDCo's tourism programme



CONTRIBUTED

The Interns smile brightly for the camera during the last day of their internship at TPDCo. Over 600 high-school and tertiary students benefited from another successful implementation of the TSIP. Funding for the programme was provided by TEF to the tune of \$25 million. From left are Richard Gordon, Stashauna Burnett, Adrian Reid, Dejonique Thomas, Sheri-Kaye Smikle, Nicolas Sylvester and Shree Walker.

and the stay worthwhile."

Sixth-form student at St George's College, Nicolas Sylvester described his experience as

memorable. "I explored Jamaica, formed many friendships and improved my interpersonal skills," he said.

The TSIP completed its 10th year with a total of \$25 million allocated by the Tourism Enhancement Fund for its implementation.

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PHOTOS BY ASHLEY ANGUIN

Michoyan Brown (left) and Saneika Kelly of VIP Attractions at Whitehouse in Montego Bay last Saturday.

Team Sangster cleans up MoBay coastline

LAST SATURDAY Team Sangster, comprising companies operating at the Sangster International Airport, participated in Ocean Conservancy International Coastal Clean-up 2017.

Some 108 members of the airport team and their families were out cleaning the coastline.

In total, the group collected more than 45 bags of trash from the one-kilometre distance cleared along Kent Avenue in Montego Bay.

The oddest items picked up was a refrigerator door and tyres, while the most frequently found items were plastic bottles.

"Each year, MBJ Airports Limited coordinates the activity and invites operators of the airport and other stakeholders," says Sharon Hislop, manager, commercial business development and marketing.

According her, partners JetBlue Airlines donated two round-trip tickets, and a raffle was conducted at the end of the day. The winners were a staff member of Dufry, the main duty-free operator at the airport; and a student of UWI Western Jamaica Campus.

PARTICIPATING COMPANIES

- MJB – CEO Rafael Echevarne, Sharon Hislop-Holt, Audley Gyles
- VIP Attractions – Director of Operations Julian Henry and Deputy Director Nicola Thomas with 18 staff members
- Amstar
- Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association's president – Omar Robinson
- Viking Productions
- Jamaica Tours
- Tourism Action Club
- University of the West Indies WJC
- FimiShotz
- Dufry
- Global Exchange
- Ministry of Agriculture
- JetBlue
- Hertz
- Express Catering
- Nexus – Andrew Smith
- LS Travel
- Jamaica Tourist Board



Members of the International Coastal Clean-up team.



From left: Shanique Collins shares lens time with Yaneke Sailsman, Nikeshia Gayle and Clarence Ramsay of Jamaica Tours Limited at Whitehouse in Montego Bay last Saturday during the International Coastal Clean-up Day activities.



From left: Margaritaville Caribbean's Mark Adlam, Dennis Ladley, and Stephen Russell.



From left: Nicola Thomas, deputy director of airport operations, VIP, and Sharon Hislop-Holt from (MBJ Airports Ltd).



Jason Facey and Ruthann Gray of World Duty-Free.



JetBlue team with their loot of garbage that was strewn all over Whitehouse in Montego Bay.



CONTRIBUTED

Minister of Tourism Edmund Bartlett (third right) and Elizabeth Fox (second right), Jamaica Tourist Board's regional director UK/Northern Europe, pose with awardees at the 2016 Jamaica Travel Market Gala.

JTB set to host another successful trade show

FOLLOWING THE success of last year's inaugural event, the Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB) will again host the Jamaica Travel Market (JTM), the destination's business-to-business trade show. The event will take place from September 28-29 at the Luton Hoo Hotel, Golf and Spa in London.

In addition to the British tour operators and agents that participated last year, this year's trade show has expanded to include Irish and Nordic tour operators and agents who will meet with Jamaican suppliers directly. This has generated a buzz with heightened interest in this year's staging as 23 Jamaican supplier companies, 40 tour operators/buyers from the UK, Scandinavia and other parts of Europe, along with 20 travel agent specialists will be in attendance. The Jamaican contingent will have representatives from the accommodation,

JAMAICA TOURIST BOARD

destination-management companies, and ground transportation sectors.

Jamaican tourism officials will use the opportunity to meet with the delegates and share exciting resort developments and new offerings.

There have been noteworthy improvements in Jamaica's tourism product, since JTM's inaugural staging in 2016. Over the first half of 2017, rooms have been added to the island's stock, to include private villas, boutique properties and luxury accommodations, with additional properties expected to come on stream. This increase in Jamaica's accommodation portfolio has made the destination even more attractive, especially among



Scene of the meeting place during Jamaica Travel Market 2016 in London.

Europeans who are familiar with the new brands. There is also an increase in airlift, particularly with charter flights such as Oberst Airline out of Portugal, and

Evelop Airlines from Spain. Against this backdrop, the execution of JTM is significant, as the opportunity allows Jamaica's industry stakeholders to engage

leading wholesalers in the marketplace to negotiate, network, and book travel for the upcoming winter season and beyond.

"When we embarked on hosting the Jamaica Travel Market, we had a vision of capitalising on Jamaica's reputation and presence in the marketplace," said Donnie Dawson, interim director of tourism. "The feedback from last year's inaugural staging was beyond our expectations, and we anticipate great success this time around. As a destination, we have performed well for the first half of 2017, and I know that this trade show will promote the destination to an even larger audience."

Following the business-to-business sessions, the trade show will culminate with the JTB hosting a gala awards dinner, where over 110 delegates, media and guests are expected to attend.

Jewel Paradise Cove staff support *International Coastal Clean-up Day*



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

International Coastal Clean-up day was supported by the Jewel Paradise Cove team, who came out in their numbers to clear the beach area at Flavours, Runaway Bay.



Shaniquia Gordon, food and beverage administration assistant of Jewel Paradise Cove, carries her bag of garbage during the International Coastal Clean-up day at Flavours in Runaway Bay, St Ann.

CHINA

CONTINUED FROM 6

outbound travel has been supported by the expansion of the aviation industry in China, with massive growth and expansion of airports, runways, and especially the significant increase in international flights between China and a number of the ADS markets. Additionally, the relaxation of visa requirements for Chinese visitors to many of the destinations, the relative strength and stability of the Chinese currency, and greater access

to foreign currency have all assisted in supporting the drive for growth. Jamaica, in February 2016, changed its policy requiring visas for Chinese travelling for leisure.

Jamaica has led the region in the promotion of its destination in China, having participated in a number of programmes in many of the important gateway cities. Jamaica has also been active at all the major outbound travel shows, including, but not limited to, the China Outbound Travel & Tourism Market, Sichuan International Travel Expo and a number of food, music and cultural events. Efforts have been made in negotiations with

China National Travel Service Group, the world's largest travel group, and other initiatives with regional travel networks who are securing flights and packages to the Caribbean.

Recent developments have seen an ease in visa restrictions, the expansion in room inventory, ease of air travel to Jamaica from China (especially via the USA), sensitisation to the demands of the Chinese travellers for food, improved shopping and high quality presentation of our cultural and heritage sites. These factors, as well the promotional work being done in China by the Jamaica Tourist

Board and its Chinese representative company, have established the brand and separated Jamaica within the travel trade in China. There, however, remain significant limitations which restrict the realisation of the well-needed explosive growth from China to Jamaica, with air access being the primary factor.

■ **David Shields is a former deputy director of tourism, in charge of marketing. He is now vice president, sales, Island Routes. Email: hospitalityjamaica@gleanerjm.com**



PHOTOS BY PAUL H. WILLIAMS

A bamboo cabin at Ambassabeth Eco-Lodge.



A view of Corn Puss Gap, where the John Crow Mountain meets the Blue Mountains.

Ambassabeth Eco-Lodge is the perfect getaway

Paul H. Williams

Hospitality Jamaica Writer

AMBASSABETH ECO-LODGE is located at Bowden Pen, St Thomas, far away in the upper Rio Grande Valley. It is situated on a gentle slope of the Blue Mountains from where a majestic piece of a John Crow Mountain range can be seen.

The Rio Grande, from which morning mists rise, meanders around the interlocking spurs of these two mountains creating the border between them.

Needless to say, the eco-friendly retreat is nestled in the pristine heart of nature. The vegetation is diverse, green and luxuriant, and the property itself is managed with the preservation of the environment in mind. There are many flowering plants thereon.

No doubt, an eco-tourist destination.

Not far from it are the spectacular Bernard Spring waterfalls, the historic Cunha Cunha Pass, and the Corn Puss Gap nature trails. It is the perfect getaway from which the lullaby of the rushing Rio Grande can be heard. Traditional Jamaican food is served in the main dining area, where guests can relax and chill out.

At night, the orchestra of insects and



From left: Latoya Francis, Heather (Peace Corps) volunteer, Damion Walker, Barbara Douglas, Eric 'Worries' McCurbin, and Linton Anderson – Some of the hard-working staff at Ambassabeth Eco-Lodge at Bowden Pen, St Thomas.



Guests having a traditional Jamaican breakfast.

birds plays on and on, and fireflies criss-cross and dart in the dark. When it rains, the soothing sounds of water droplets falling upon leaves and the roofs put weary souls to sleep in five cabins. There is also a small fishing pool in which several species of fish laze around.

The cabins are made mainly of bamboo and wood, and are equipped with clean, modern bathroom and toilet facilities. Different types of sleeping arrangements are in the house – single, bunk and double beds. And while different groups or individuals can be in the house at the same time, the entire accommodation can be booked by just one group.

Ambassabeth Eco-Lodge is the main income-earning endeavour of the Bowden Pen Farmer's Association (BPFA), whose

work includes natural resources management, heritage preservation, reforestation of denuded lands and educational campaigns.

Eric 'Worries' McCurbin, the president of the BPFA, told **Hospitality Jamaica** that the farmers take care of the place, on and off the property, which is popular among Jamaicans and overseas visitors alike.

Ambassabeth Eco-Lodge is truly a place very far from the maddening crowd, but guests can still keep in touch with the rest of the world through telephone signals.

It is a standout among the greenery, representing the lion, Ambassabeth, whose name it has adopted. The lion is the king of the forest, and Ambassabeth Eco-Lodge is the quintessential getaway in the forested Blue Mountains.

Jamaica's World Heritage Site hosts international volunteers

Paul H. Williams
Hospitality Jamaica Writer

SINCE MONDAY, September 11, eight World Heritage Volunteers of the World Heritage Volunteer Initiative have been in the island participating in an action project in the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park (BJMNP), which was officially inscribed to UNESCO'S World Heritage List on July 3, 2015.

The 26,000-hectare site is Jamaica's first World Heritage Site, and the Caribbean's first World Heritage Mixed Site because of its outstanding universal cultural and natural value. The region is known

for its rich biodiversity and has a high level of endemic plant species, and the Maroons strategically used the features of the extremely rugged and forested mountains in their resistance against the British.

The volunteers are here as part of the World Heritage Volunteers 2017 Campaign – Heritage in Our Hands – in the framework of the UNESCO World Heritage Education Programme, which “aims at increasing awareness and reinforcing the involvement of youths at the local and global levels in the implementation of the 1972 Convention Concerning The Protection of the World's Cultural

and Natural Heritage”.

“The project's objective is to establish a corps of youth ambassadors gaining knowledge and skills about the promotion, values and the importance of the Blue and John Crow Mountains. The activities aim to show young people around the world the outstanding universal value of the site and the importance of its management,” the Jamaica Conservation and Development Trust said.

The volunteers are expected to learn basic techniques about natural and heritage conservation. Their activities include the removal of invasive plant species, and they are to plant natural species under the guidance of national park rangers.

RAISING AWARENESS

They are involved in raising-awareness activities, such as designing exhibits for tourists, and educational activities about natural and cultural heritage targeting local youth. They are also taking part in a variety of cultural and heritage activities, including hiking, music and cooking, in Maroon communities.

Hospitality Jamaica was present to witness the volunteers enjoying the warm Jamaican hospitality in the Portland Maroon community of Charles Town, and at Ambassabeth Eco-Lodge in St Thomas, where they stayed for two nights, and were joined by Jamaica National Heritage Trust's Doric Grey and Selvenious Walters, who did much of the work in Jamaica's bid for the BJMNP's inscription on the World Heritage List.

Also in the party were Symerna Blake, marketing and tourism coordinator at the Jamaica Conservation Development Trust, the managers of the BJMNP; Cheree Morris, Jamaica Tourist Board's corporate public relations officer, and Dr Susan Otuokon, executive director at the JCDT, who explained why she approached UNESCO to implement the action project in the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park.

“I thought it was a good idea to involve some international young



PHOTOS BY PAUL H. WILLIAMS

Rodney Rose (right), of the Charles Town Maroons, explaining to World Heritage volunteers how calabash cups are made.



Margareth Anderson-Smith serving traditional Jamaican food to World Heritage volunteers.



The Acting Colonel of the Charles Town Maroons explaining to World Heritage volunteers the significance of the Sankofa bird on the door of the Charles Town Maroon Museum.



Wayne Sampson (left), of the Charles Town Maroons showing two World Heritage volunteers how to catch 'janga'.

people because it is very important for young people to be involved in learning about the importance of heritage, and helping to promote it,” Dr Otuokon said, among other things.

On the promotional side of the equation, Blake is responsible for creating awareness of the activities going on the national park.

“The designation of a world heritage site in Jamaica is an opportunity for us to attract more visitors here,” she said. Thus, it is Blake's duty to tell the world about this particular project in the continued effort to get support for the conservation activities going on in the park.

Hospitality Jamaica also spoke with three of the volunteers including Necky van Kerrenbroek of Bruges, Belgium. She is an art history graduate who wants to know more about natural, cultural and intangible heritage and the management of national parks.

The lone male volunteer, Jamaican Bryan Hamilton, a finalising business management master's student at The University of the West Indies, Mona campus, said he is interested in why the park is not being promoted to Jamaicans, and he opted to be a volunteer to see whether he could use his training to help with the management of the park.

Still in the Caribbean, Guyanese Lauren Grant-Williams works with the National Trust, the agency responsible for the heritage sites in Guyana. She has a background in architecture and is interested in the aesthetic of the designs of heritage sites.

From her participation in the action project, she wants to learn how to advocate for the preservation of natural sites to make them more user-friendly with the view to reapply to get sites in Guyana on the World Heritage List.

AROUND JA WITH PAUL H. WILLIAMS

Cunha Cunha Pass at last

Paul H. Williams
Hospitality Jamaica Writer

THE WINDWARD Maroons used their knowledge of the geography of the region now known as the Blue and John Crow Mountains to outwit and outlast the antagonistic British militia.

They created escape trails and hide-aways in places unimaginable, and are widely regarded as the first guerilla strategists in the Western Hemisphere.

The most historic of the Maroon trails is Cunha Cunha Pass, which is 5.5 miles long. It extends from Hayfield to Bowden Pen in St Thomas, near the upper Rio Grande Valley in Portland. Many a war has been fought in the area between the determined Maroons and the unrelenting British.

Activities on the trail have been dormant for years, but in 2002, the Bowden Pen Farmers' Association cleared and restored it, with funding from the Environmental Foundation of Jamaica, and assistance from the Blue and John Crow Mountain National Park (BJMNP) rangers and the Jamaica Conservation Development Trust, the managers of the BJMNP.

It has been designated by the Jamaica National Heritage Trust as a national monument, and so, hiking that trail has long been on my list of things to do. When the opportunity came for me to do so recently, I quickly jumped on to the bandwagon.

I went expecting to have a great time, hoping to see the endemic giant swallowtail butterfly, the largest



Dr Susan Otuokon, executive director at the Jamaica Conservation Development Trust, pointing out some features of a plan to World Heritage volunteers.

butterfly in the Western Hemisphere. The group I travelled with included World Heritage Volunteers who are in the island for a World Heritage Volunteer Campaign 2017 action project.

The trek started at Ambassabeth Eco-Lodge on Saturday, and as I trudged over the slippery incline of Rose Apple Trail, I was wary that most of the path would be like that. Everywhere was wet from Friday night and

Saturday night's rain.

With the little piece of bamboo in my right hand, I made it up to where Rose Apple Trail meets Cunha Cunha Pass Trail. That was where our guide, Eric 'Worries' McCurbin, stopped to tell us about what to expect and the story of the trails.

After the briefing, the real journey began. And as soon as the walk started, McCurbin went into his informative mode. We were shown medicinal and cosmetic plants like the soap bush that made suds when it was rubbed in his palms.

The trail, most of which is along the side of the mountain, is gently sloping. I was going up, but I did not feel the rigour of climbing. Good! Sweat oozed, dampening my shirt, and it felt good. There were points where I did not feel comfortable, where the slippery path was too near the ledge.

Crystal-clear brooks crossed the path, and we stopped at Three Finger Jack Falls reflecting on the story of the legendary runaway slave. And by the time I knew it, we were at the first rest stop, at Contingent.

The story of the place is that the

PHOTOS BY PAUL H. WILLIAMS

A view of a section of the John Crow Mountain range from Cunha Cunha Pass.



The fronds of a tree fern.

Queen gave a substantial amount of land in the area to World War I veterans, who actually accepted the rugged lands and lived there.

And I imagined how remote the place must have been at the time, and asked myself, "Why give land to these men way in the bushes and hills of the Rio Grande Valley?" Obviously, the queen had absolutely no idea what the land was like.

I was enjoying the forest, the cool weather and the stories, but shortly after leaving Contingent, I had this burning desire to turn back. I had some urgent matters, including poor telephone signals, to take care of.

Back at the cabins I watched from my



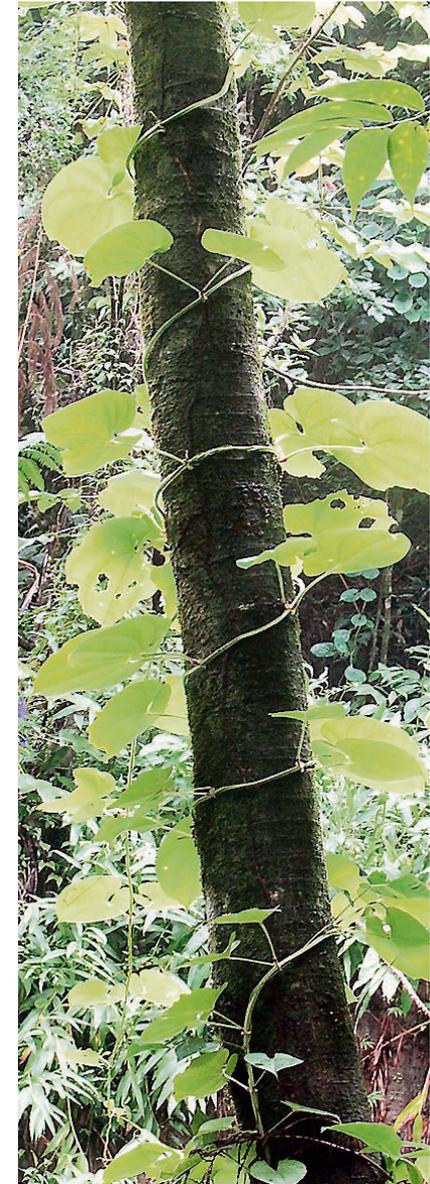
Eric McCurbin showing World Heritage Volunteer Lauren Grant-Williams of the National Trust in Guyana a medicinal plant while other volunteers look on.



The soap bush that suds is one of the many cosmetic and medicinal plants in the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park.

veranda John crows hovering against the backdrop of the John Crow Mountain before attending to my urgent matters.

And when night came, I reflected on my abbreviated journey along my ancestral path.



'Old Yam' vine spiralling around the trunk of a tree fern.



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