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Life yard

luring visitors
to 'yard' life



Chilling out at Life Yard.

Life Yard luring visitors to 'yard' life

Paul H. Williams
Hospitality Jamaica Writer

TO SAY Life Yard, located in Kingston, is an oasis in the concrete-and-brick jungle of the Corporate Area, is to use a cliché. But, that is what it really is, a fertile spot, oozing life.

Surrounded by the din, the hustle and bustle of city life, it is nestled among the madding crowd, but as you enter through its gate, a palate-teasing aroma of 'ital' food might just pull you through faster, and a cool breeze gives you a welcoming embrace.

When you pass the cookshop, an ageing gingerbread house, and a juice bar made of board, you walk into a farm, and you get the feeling that you are in a rural setting in an urban space, a little piece of country in the heart of Kingston. There

are fruit trees, food trees, ground provisions and vegetable patches, part of the residents' philosophy of sustaining themselves. The crops are nourished by organic matters.

Around the property are several pieces of outdoor furniture, made of pallets, on which to relax. It is a sanctuary operated by inner-city youth, many of them Rastafarians who were born and bred right in the community where Life Yard is. The essence of the place is about life on The Rock – real life, nothing pretentious, nothing overstated, nothing sugar coated.

When **Hospitality Jamaica** visited recently, we spoke with Shane Morgan, the 'president' of the yard, and some of the other youth about what they are doing with the space, including the community tourism part of it.

By its very nature, Life Yard is a



Vegetable patch.

social enterprise, an entity that embarks up on entrepreneurial endeavours for the benefit of the community in which it is located.



Murals at the front of Life Yard, located on 44 Fleet Street, Kingston.

There is jewellery making, leather craft, and furniture making, among other income-earning ventures and social projects. Yet, it has also been luring people from abroad to experience what it is like to live a 'yard life' in Jamaica.

"Through community tourism, we have attracted over 2,000 people from 45 countries across the

world since 2014," Morgan said.

The yard started to get attention internationally because of its Paint Jamaica project, to change communities through art. Social media buzzed with the artwork that the youth were turning out in the inner cities and people went to see exactly what they were doing. The murals on the



From left: Shane Morgan, Sabuki, DJ Zim, and Ikuma posing with the Robert Nesta Marley Humanitarian Award that Life Yard received in June 2015 for the work that it is doing in the community.



A rustic scene in the heart of Kingston.

front of the property are as thought-provoking as they are inviting.

And when they realised people were really interested in the yard, they formally registered and regularised the concept. They

have had visitors who stayed in the community for weeks, and so the residential element is also up and running.

They believe that it is the energy of Rastafari 'livity that is pulling people towards Life Yard, as well as the entrepreneurial spirit of the youth, who took it upon themselves to conceptualise and manifest the enterprise.

"Nobody came here and empowered us," Morgan said, "We did this out of our own initiatives, our own pockets ... from nothing to something, this is the true definition of it. We rose from the concrete." And the rise is set to continue.

When asked about the safety concerns that people have because of the location of Life Yard, Morgan said, "Think of Life Yard, and Google it, then they will see how much of the world this has already impacted ... then one will say this is more than a safe haven."

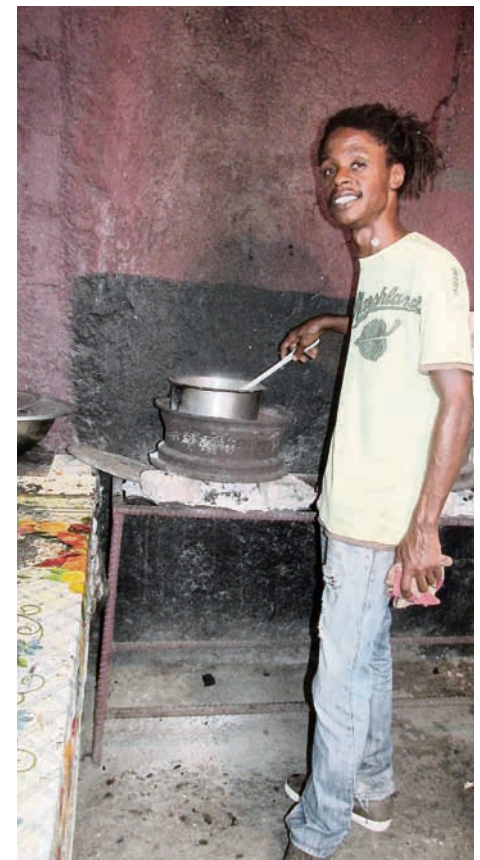
But, to what extent are members of the community sensitised to the importance of what Life Yard is doing for the community. "They are fully sensitised, as I am no longer called by my name. I am called Life Yard by the community, and so are other members, they see us now as the movement," Morgan revealed, "The community is pretty much involved in anything we are doing."



The entrance to Life Yard.



Some of the food trees at Life Yard.



Chef Ikuma cooking up a storm.

Tourism ministry to host first Falmouth Heritage Expo

FALMOUTH'S NOTED Georgian architecture and rich historical heritage will take centre stage today, with the inaugural staging of the Falmouth Heritage Exposition in Water Square.

The heritage expo aims to boost civic pride in Falmouth by highlighting its built and cultural heritage. It is also intended to foster a civic-minded community that values its heritage and works together to preserve its unique built environment as a distinct element of its tourism product.

The event is a collaborative effort of the Ministry of Tourism, Jamaica National Heritage Trust, the Tourism Product and Development Company, the Tourism Enhancement Fund and other stakeholders as part of the Sustainable Destination Alliance of the Americas (SDAA) initiative.

The Ministry of Tourism has collaborated with the Organization of American States, under the auspices of the SDAA initiative, to reposition Falmouth as a sustainable tourism destination. Under this initiative which started in 2015, a pro-



Water Square, Falmouth.

gramme of activities is being implemented to improve civic pride in Falmouth, as well as foster cultural and economic innovation.

Endorsing the expo, Minister of Tourism Edmund Bartlett said, "Falmouth's rich history, Georgian architecture and many attractions make it a major tourism asset. It has the potential to be one of the finest cruise destinations on the planet. For this reason, the Government will be leveraging the heritage experience in Falmouth to further develop the town as a tourist destination."

The heritage expo will include demonstrations and presentations on the town's built heritage as well as a site visit. A highlight of the expo will be the launch of an updated, more interactive heritage map of Jamaica – a comprehensive illustration of cultural and natural heritage sites across the island.

Talent from the parish will also be on display, with performances from several schools and the 2016 Parish Festival Queen, Kacia Whilby. During the day's activities, the winner of the Heritage Ambassador competition will also be announced.

Sangster Int'l Airport named C'bean's leading airport for ninth consecutive year

SANGSTER INTERNATIONAL Airport, Jamaica's primary gateway to the world, has been named the Caribbean's leading airport for the ninth consecutive year by World Travel Awards.

Operated by MBJ Airports Limited, the facility emerged as the winner from a pool of 11 Caribbean airports nominated for the prestigious award.

The accolade was first bestowed on Sangster in 2005. It won again in 2009 and has won the title again each year since.

"This is a tremendous achievement for Sangster International Airport and for Jamaica. It really reflects the dedication and professionalism of our entire staff, who work tirelessly to improve the traveller

experience," said MBJ Airports CEO Rafael Echevarne.

"We are pleased that our efforts to improve the physical infrastructure of the airport and create an authentically Jamaican experience for airline passengers are being recognised by World Travel Awards and the international travel community. This is yet another example of how Jamaica is setting the bar for the entire region," Echevarne added.

MBJ Airports has spearheaded a number of initiatives over the past two years to improve the passenger experience by reducing queues at security checkpoints, by displaying Jamaican art throughout the airport and by ensuring retail



Sangster Airport

concessionaires improve their product offering for the travelling public.

World Travel Awards was established in 1993 to recognise and reward excellence in

key segments of the tourism, travel and hospitality industries, thereby encouraging practitioners to continuously improve the standards of their product and service offering.

Kingston City Run donates \$3m to address homelessness in Kingston

KINGSTON CITY Run has donated \$3 million to five charities focused on addressing homelessness in the capital city.

The Open Arms Drop-in Centre, Missionaries of the Poor, Food For the Poor, the Marie Atkins Night Shelter, and the Alpha Boys Institute were recipients of \$600,000 each. The donation came from proceeds of the March 2017 staging of the annual run, organised by the Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association (JHTA) Kingston chapter.

Mevis Farquharson of the Marie Atkins Night Shelter noted, upon receiving the donation, that most of the times they have over 300 persons to feed.

“We feed them three times per day. Some come in just to sleep for security reasons, and we sleep up to 150 persons on some nights. I am so glad for the amount we have got. Now, we will be able to do some of the much-needed improvements we have wanted to do.”

Alfred McDonald of the Norman Manley International Airport (NMIA), sponsors of Kingston City Run, at the handover ceremony, stated:

“We ought to play our part as good corporate citizens in the community. When we saw the mayor and KSAMC (Kingston and St Andrew Municipal Corporation) doing



From left: In a jovial mood, Marsha Burrell Rose, development and marketing manager, Food For the Poor; Yvonne Grant, The Open Arms Drop-in Centre (recipient of \$600,000 donation from Kingston City Run); Nicola Madden-Greig, co-chair, Kingston City Run; and Sophia Lowe Pinnock, corporate communications and public affairs manager, Caribbean Cement Company Limited (sponsors of Kingston City Run).

their part, and the Kingston City Run team, we had to be a part and support them.”

He said he is calling on other companies

to join the effort, while at the same time committing that the NMIA will be on board yet again for the noble cause.

Past president of the JHTA, Nicola Madden-Greig, who co-chairs Kingston City Run, announced that the date of the 2018 staging would be March 16-18, called on all Kingstonians and Jamaicans to become “heroes” for the most vulnerable in the community.

Deputy Mayor of Kingston Winston Ennis commended the organising committee and the many sponsors, reiterating that “together, we can achieve so much for the city of Kingston, allowing it to truly become the pearl of the Caribbean”.

Christopher Jarrett, chairman, JHTA Kingston Chapter, extended a thank you to the many sponsors of the run and also extended thanks to the individuals and corporate teams that participated, noting that “without them, we would not be able to do what we do”.

The event incorporates three race events: a half Marathon and a 10K and 5K race/walk. The event attracts runners from the Caribbean, Ireland, the United Kingdom, the United States and Jamaica. This year, the run saw close to 5,000 persons traversing the scenic, cultural, and mystical assets of Kingston, while supporting the cause of bringing an end to homelessness in Kingston.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Camille Needham (left), executive director, JHTA, Nicola Madden-Greig (fifth left), co-chair, Kingston City Run, and Christopher Jarrett (sixth from right), chairman, share lens time with recipients, sponsors, and deputy mayor, Councillor Winston Ennis (centre) of the Kingston and St Andrew Municipal Corporation.

Winners and losers in changing US Cuba travel policy

David Jessop
*Hospitality Jamaica
Writer*

OVER THE last two and half years, the number of United States (US) visitors to Cuba has surged in response to changing US policy. According to Cuban statistics, while just 37,459 US citizens visited in 2014, some 285,000 did so in 2016.

This dramatic increase followed changes introduced by then President Obama, who in 2015 allowed US citizens to visit for one of 12 specified purposes through a tour operator, and then in 2016 permitted US citizens to book tickets for individual travel to Cuba by simply attesting they were in compliance with US Treasury rules.

The surge was facilitated by a broader dialogue with the Cuban government. This saw restrictions on scheduled air services removed, making it possible for major carriers such as American Airlines or United Airways to cater to the individual traveller, restrictions relaxed on cruise ships sailing out of US ports, and an easing of the use of the US dollar and US credit cards.

The consequences for Cuba were a boom in demand for hotel rooms, significantly increased prices at the best hotels in Havana, investments in new properties managed by major US hotel chains, and the rapid spread of accommodation, transport, and restaurants run by Cuba's one million-plus self-employed.

So rapid was the growth that in the rest of the Caribbean, expressions of concern about the likely impact became



DAVID JESSOP

commonplace, with governments and tourist boards discussing strategies to respond through, for example, the development of multi-destinations vacations that included Cuba.

This process was based around the Obama administration's political belief that people-to-people programmes, and the contact brought about by individual travel, can create change.

However, in June this year, US policy went into reverse. In a speech full of anti-Cuban political rhetoric, President Trump asserted that his administration would not hide from, excuse, or glamorize the actions of the Cuban government. Consequently, the US would, he said, revoke key aspects of his predecessor's policy of détente.

In relation to travel, he said that he would: introduce regulations banning, with some exemptions,



The Hotel Nacional de Cuba.

direct financial transactions with specifically identified bodies controlled by the Cuban military, which include many hotels and other tourism-related enterprises; end all individual self-certified travel; require all future US travel to be through formal groups or on cruise ships; ensure that the US' statutory ban on tourism to Cuba for US citizens is strictly enforced; and require that travellers' personal records of financial transactions and travel be subject to audit by the US Treasury Department.

Although the regulations have yet to appear, the effect has been to send a chill through all US travel to Cuba.

Since then, the overall climate has further deteriorated following mysterious sonic attacks on US diplomats in Havana.

In an announcement following the US administration's response, which was to withdraw more than half of the staff at its embassy in Havana, a travel warning, stated: because 'we are unable to identify the source of the attacks, we believe US citizens may also be at risk and warn them not to travel to Cuba'.

Later, unnamed officials

suggested that the Hotel Nacional and Hotel Capri were among the locations targeted.

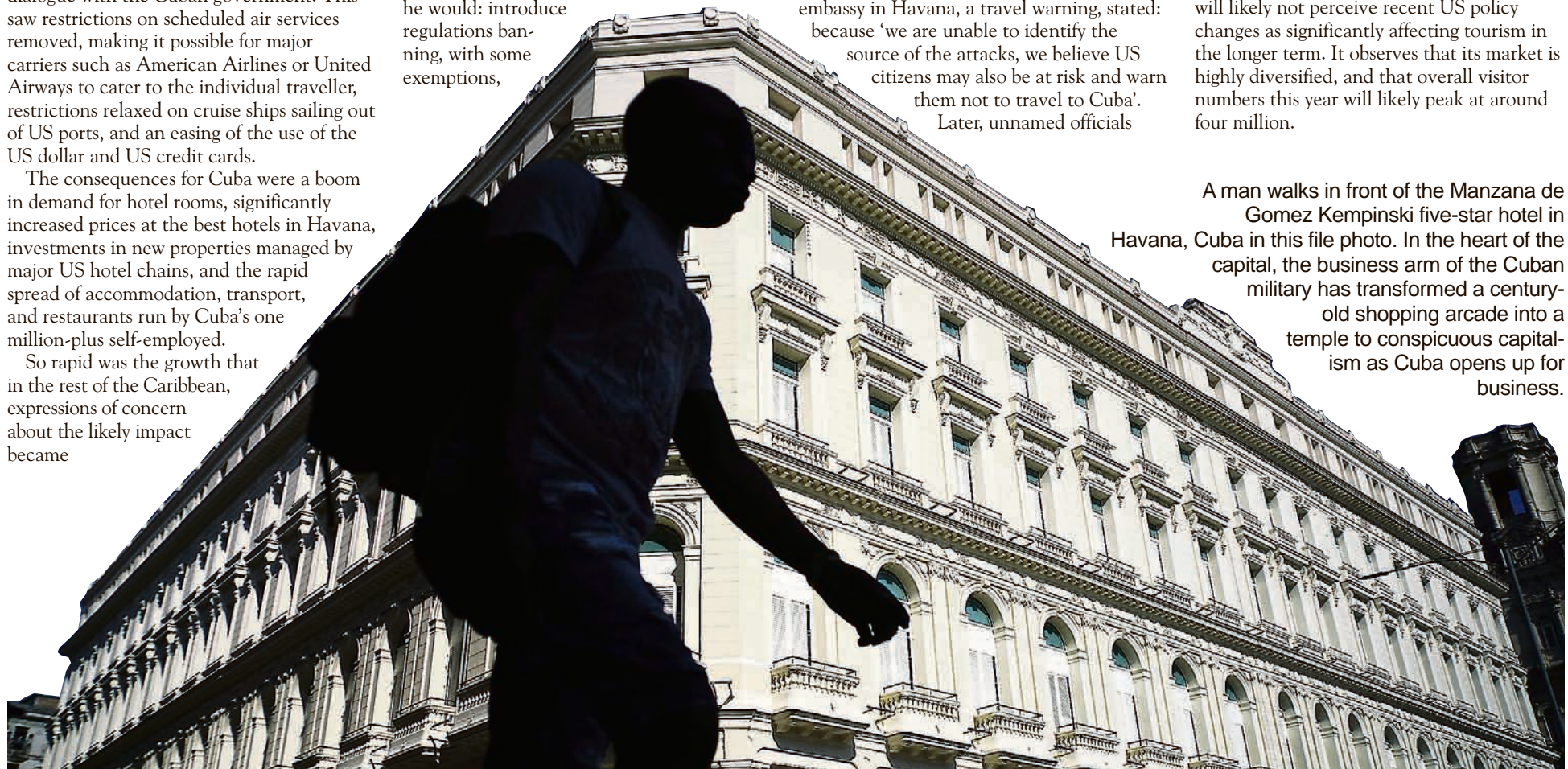
Taken together with the damage wrought by Hurricane Irma, these events will likely see US travel to Cuba decline significantly in the short term, creating winners and losers.

The winners will undoubtedly be the US-owned cruise lines, able to reap the rewards from those US travellers who still want to visit, and specialised tour operators. The losers, and those most likely to suffer, are Cuba's non-state taxi drivers, the self-employed small property or restaurant owners, and private suppliers of services, all of whom had begun to pose a challenge to the Cuban system.

As for the rest of the region, it will in the short term receive displaced visitors and in the medium term see cruise ships sailing in increasing numbers to and around Cuba.

In contrast, Cuba itself, while experiencing a setback in what it sees as a long struggle, will likely not perceive recent US policy changes as significantly affecting tourism in the longer term. It observes that its market is highly diversified, and that overall visitor numbers this year will likely peak at around four million.

A man walks in front of the Manzanera de Gomez Kempinski five-star hotel in Havana, Cuba in this file photo. In the heart of the capital, the business arm of the Cuban military has transformed a century-old shopping arcade into a temple to conspicuous capitalism as Cuba opens up for business.





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Bustling Sam Sharpe Square a HERITAGE HOTSPOT

Paul H. Williams
Hospitality Jamaica Writer

SAM SHARPE Square in Montego Bay is not the epicentre of life for St James only. It is the crossroads for all of western Jamaica and has always been like that, historically.

Though the British slave trade to the West Indies ended in 1807, the anti-slavery zeal in Britain did not begin to take root until about 1823-24 when there were rumours that the king had granted the enslaved their freedom.

The rumours were so strong that the king had to make a declaration to deny any such granting of freedom. The disquiet took a while to be defused, but a few years later, another such rumour surfaced. That time around, it stayed and frustrated the enslaved.

It was 1831, and a 31-year-old Baptist lay preacher named Samuel Sharpe after his owner was secretly agitating against the evils of slavery. Apparently, he, too, believed that freedom had been granted, but was being withheld, so he met after prayer meetings with his followers to organise a general strike in western Jamaica.

REMARKABLE MAN

Sharpe was a field slave on the Croydon Estate in St James but grew up in Montego Bay. He had a good relationship with his owners and was described by the Methodist, Reverend Bleby, as "the most intelligent and remarkable slave" he had ever met.

Of his physical attributes, Bleby said, "He is of the middle size. His fine sinewy frame was handsomely moulded, and his skin as perfect a jet, as can well be imagined. His forehead was high and broad, while his nose and lips exhibited the usual characteristics of the Negro race. He had teeth whose regularity and pearly whiteness a court beauty might have envied, and an eye whose brilliance was almost dazzling."

Sharpe used his influence and authority to get support from many enslaved people who were entitled to three days holidays every year after Christmas. He instructed the people not return to work after the



PHOTOS BY PAUL H. WILLIAMS

The Montego Bay Civic Centre, built on the spot where National Hero Sam Sharpe was hanged.



Another historical building in Sam Sharpe Square, Montego Bay, St James.

holidays in 1831. They were also told to fight for their freedom only if the planters refused to give it to them. But, he was pre-empted as

some of the enslaved started the flames before Sharpe was ready to and all hell broke loose. After the smoke and the fire

dissipated, and the bullets stopped flying, about 14 white and three coloured people lay dead, while approximately 186 enslaved people were killed and 31 wounded.

The surviving enslaved people were dragged to court and severely punished. Many were hanged. Sharpe himself was executed on May 23, 1832. In his cell, he told Bleby, "I would rather die upon yonder gallows than live in slavery."

He was hanged in the square in Montego Bay, which was called Charles Square up until 1976 when it was renamed Sam Sharpe Square. On October 16, 1983, the Sam Sharpe monument, designed by Kay Sullivan, was unveiled in Sam Sharpe Square. It consists of five bronze statues, including that of Sharpe, who holds a Bible while speaking with his followers.



This version of The Cage in Sam Sharpe Square, Montego Bay, was built in 1823, but it dates back to 1806. It was an overnight lock-up for vagrants and drunks.



The Sam Sharpe Monument in Sam Sharpe Square, Montego Bay, St James.

Romaine Meggo makes his mark at Sandals Negril

WHEN ROMAINE Meggo, a front-desk agent at Grand Pineapple Negril visited Sandals Negril in 2015, he had no idea that it would soon become his full-time stomping ground. He also didn't envision being named the Diamond Team Member after working at the revered resort for a mere 12 months.

The 23-year old is a past student of The Manning's School in Westmoreland and hails from Truro in the parish. Success is not new to him as in his community, Meggo is one who every mother's son strives to be like and every daughter hopes to introduce to her family.

Let's rewind.

From a tender age, great things were expected of him. In high school, he was a footballer who managed to successfully pass all his exams, a challenge for most boys who were actively involved in sports.

He started out at Sandals Negril in the Hospitality Training Programme in 2014, fervently trying to garner knowledge of the bar operations, but that stint was not too successful.

"That did not go too well, and I got somewhat derailed," he said.

But that didn't stop him. "My journey later took me to Grand Pineapple Negril in 2015. There, I found an extended family. I was loved, and I have so much love for the team members there as well," he stated.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

But there was one feeling that Meggo could not seem to shake.

"I just felt I had unfinished business at Sandals Negril and I just had to go back to get things done," he said.

"So I stopped by the resort one evening to visit my former trainer and to take another look at the place where I hoped to work again," Meggo added.

That day when Meggo entered the property, a wall at the entrance sparked a fire in him. It



CONTRIBUTED

Sandals Negril's Diamond Team Member of the Year Romaine Meggo (left) accepts the coveted award from General Manager David Latchimy at the resort's Annual Prestige Awards.

was the Wall of Fame, displaying images of outstanding team members and the awards they had won.

"It was at that moment that I told myself I wanted my picture on that wall," he recalled.

Then, one day in mid-December 2015, his dream became a reality when he was recommended to fill a vacant position at Sandals Negril as a front-office agent.

"As I walked through the entrance on my first day, I made a commitment to myself to work very hard, not only to be on that Wall of Fame, but because I wanted to be the best version of myself," Meggo stated.

Fast-forward to 2017.

His hard work certainly has paid off as he has won 12 awards and his image is boldly represented on the wall as Sandals Negril's Diamond

Team Member of the Year for 2016.

General manager for Sandals Negril David Latchimy added credence to Meggo's commendable work ethic: "Romaine is an example among his peers. He is way ahead of his time. His eye for detail and his zeal to get things done properly is admirable. I've watched him working and handling guest issues, and I am impressed every single time. He is everything that this awesome brand represents," Latchimy stated.

Meggo, who is now reading for his bachelor's degree in management studies, said that in the next five years, he would become the youngest general manager within the brand.

One would say that this is quite the ambition, but from what is known of this young man, his ambitions should never be taken lightly.

Celebrating World Tourism Day through the eyes of the TAC

JAMAICA TOURIST BOARD

CREATING HIGH fashion from newspaper and plastic bags, to using egg trays to make jewellery kits, and designing glasses frames from straws, the Tourism Action Club (TAC) Youth Forum was both exciting and educational.

The forum was held on World Tourism Day, September 27, at the Montego Bay Convention Centre.

Students from clubs across the island gathered to explore and expound on the topic 'Sustainable Tourism: A Tool for Development', the theme designated by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

"I am enthused about World Tourism Day as it is set aside for the world to see this thriving sector and what it is doing all over the world," said Jeheime Llewellyn, a student of Ferncourt High School. "To me, sustainable tourism means helping the sector to meet the needs of current and future generations," she added.

Each year, September 27 is used to highlight the role and importance of tourism, one of the world's largest industries.

This year's theme drilled down to what was really important to the industry – the promotion of responsible tourism through the preservation and protection of the industry for present and future generations. Data from the UNWTO show that tourism is the third-largest export industry in the world and produces 10 per cent of global GDP.

Jamaica is heavily dependent on the industry as the main source of foreign exchange and the second largest employer on the island, therefore, the theme of sustainability has relevance to the local sector.

PIVOTAL ROLE

As the organisation developed and spearheaded by the Jamaica Tourist Board to enhance students' knowledge about, and appreciation of, the tourism sector, the TAC plays a pivotal role in sensitising the next generation about its critical role in helping to preserve the industry. It was imperative for tourism principals to explore and



Moderator of the Tourism Action Club Youth Forum, Emprezz Golding, with a skipping rope made from recycled material.

probe the thoughts and minds of young Jamaicans about how they see the future of the sector. The forum was facilitated through a panel discussion, and the students also had the opportunity to display their creativity by using everyday items, depicting their knowledge of the concept of the three Rs – reduce, reuse and recycle. Utilising newspapers, plastic bags and egg trays, the students created products that demonstrated their knowledge of sustainability and continuity. They also displayed their musical aptitude in the creation of a tourism song.

The students and their teachers were stimulated by the activities. Aisha Lawrence-Reid, TAC adviser at Holland High School, explained, "The World Tourism Day theme helps students to understand how tourism impacts us as a people. That it creates employment and helps to lessen crime and violence, and provides for local farmers and entertainers."

Getting her students to engage in activities that are focused on sustainability is a year-round undertaking. Lawrence-Reid said, "Last year, our club participated in a recycling competition done by the Ministry of Tourism. We picked up plastic bottles on the streets and



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Students of Clarendon College at work creating an outfit using recycled material during the Tourism Action Club Youth Forum on September 27.

on the beaches. We won the first prize of \$2.5 million, as our collection weighed the heaviest. Even though the competition has ended, the TAC students have continued to clean up the environment."

The students at the forum also learned that creating a sustainable tourism sector isn't limited to taking care of the physical environment, but also extends to creating an industry that is inclusive and has longevity. This was highlighted by Simone Harris, senior tourism network strategist, Tourism Linkages Network.

She explained that through the Tourism Linkages Network, the Ministry of Tourism is building



Students of Montego Bay High School delivering the winning performance during the tourism song competition.

the capacity of Jamaicans, be it farmers, construction workers, painters, musicians, craftsmen or doctors, empowering them to

provide exclusive and enriching experiences for visitors, while retaining more of the tourism dollar in the local economy.

Jamaica a favourite for JetBlue passengers

JAMAICA IS a favourite destination for JetBlue passengers and the Caribbean and Latin America region now accounts for approximately one-third of the airline's network, Icema Gibbs, director of corporate social responsibility at JetBlue said.

She noted that the airline, which began service to Montego Bay in 2009 and later that year added Kingston, is now "the largest airline to fly from and within the Caribbean".

Currently providing daily service to Montego Bay and to Kingston from New York City, Gibbs said that "when you think of an exotic Caribbean vacation, you think of beautiful beaches and delicious cuisines, and Jamaica offers all this and more".

She said that JetBlue is committed to helping to preserve Jamaica's beauty, too. The airline

has worked with the US Fish & Wildlife Service to start dialogue about responsible tourism and educating travellers about how to 'buy informed' and travel smart to the Caribbean.

The airline produced public service announcements featuring local Caribbean conservation heroes to arm travellers with the right questions to ask when purchasing wildlife and plant-related products like coral and shells.

In Jamaica, airline representatives met with Wolde Kristos, founder of the Bluefields Bay Fishermen's Friendly Society, which focuses on sustainable fishing practices and coral reef cleaning.

JetBlue also supports local causes which benefit Jamaicans. They are sponsors of a number of initiatives, including a New York-based non-profit organisation



Icema Gibbs, director, corporate social responsibility, JetBlue.

dedicated to improving the health, education and general well-being of underprivileged children on the island – the

Children of Jamaica Outreach (COJO), which on September 13, presented US\$22,000 in tertiary education scholarships to five former wards of the State in Kingston.

Gibbs said: "We are excited to continue our support for COJO. Giving back is part of JetBlue's DNA and is core to our mission of inspiring humanity. We focus our efforts on the areas that are most important to our customers and crew members – community, youth/education and the environment.

"Our support for education focuses on providing access and opportunity to those who are traditionally underserved or overlooked." JetBlue, she said, is committed to helping to provide better educational opportunities for deserving children in Jamaica."

Bahia Principe signs deal with Expedia

THE EXPEDIA group and Bahia Principe Hotels & Resorts have announced a strategic technology partnership which will enable the global hotel chain to offer package bookings directly on www.bahiaprincipe.com.

Package bookings drive incremental demand for hotel partners, as package bookings typically have one and a half times the length of stay than a stand-alone hotel booking and half the cancellation rate.

Bahia Principe Hotels & Resorts boasts 26 properties spread across the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Jamaica, Canary Islands and the Balearics. It is part of the prestigious Grupo Piñero one of the largest companies in the Spanish tourism sector.

By using Expedia's best-in-class technology, the company's new package booking option will enable its consumers booking on Bahia Principe's US points of sale to combine their stay at a Bahia Principe hotel with a flight booking from one of more than 500 Expedia airline partners, driving incremental demand and revenue for the hotel group.

GOOD RELATIONSHIP

"We are always looking at new ways to grow our business. By using Expedia's technology, we can now attract longer length of stays which are booked further in advance and with lower cancellation rates. It is also proof of our good relationship with Expedia to be able to use them as a distributor and as a technology partner to benefit our business," said Juan Campins, e-commerce and direct sales corporate director, Bahia Principe Hotels & Resorts.

"The collaboration with Bahia Principe evidently shows that our heavy investment in technology innovation is paying off for our hotel partners. We see an increasing number of our chain partners looking to work with us on these groundbreaking initiatives which deliver value beyond distribution," said Luis Hurtado de Mendoza, senior director, key and distribution accounts, EMEA-LATAM, the Expedia group. "Our ambition is to use Expedia's strengths in technology, marketing and data to drive as much value as we can for our partners, such as Bahia Principe."

The package path is now live on Bahia Principe's US point of sale. This strategic technology partnership follows other hotel chains' announcements, including Expedia also powering Marriott International, Inc's 'Vacations by Marriott' site.



CONTRIBUTED

Gary Williams (centre), founder/chairman, Children of Jamaica Outreach (COJO), with 2017 scholarship awardees (from left) Nickorta Samuels, Golda-Mae Bullock, Shantanna Dixon, Chantell Campbell, Kareem Carr and Aaron Rowe. JetBlue is a sponsor of COJO programmes.



PHOTOS BY PAUL H. WILLIAMS

Rustic redtop at Alley, Clarendon.

THERE ARE many things I find enthralling in my travels around this country. The natural environment is a given. I have seen vistas that have nearly brought me to tears, scenes that made me get high because of the magic of nature, and sights that made me want to shout, “Yeah!”

And within the beauty of nature, there are man-made structures that are thought-provoking or simply arresting. But the buildings that really get me reflecting and filled with melancholia are rustic, old board houses, even the dilapidated ones that I can see were eye-catching in their glory days.

Every time I see one, something inside of me stirs, my mind going way back, wondering who lived within and what life must have been like at the time. Where are they now, apart from those who are no longer in the land of the living? Why were they built at those particular spots? Sometimes there are no other structures for miles around. And who is to tell whether their ghosts are not abiding within?

The style and architecture of these houses also say much about the social history and heritage of the places in which they are located. They carry stories of the lifestyles of



For the history, for the stories, who would buy this ageing beauty?

the occupants, their tastes, sensibilities, financial and social status, and are full of familial footprints of yesteryear.

So, taking pictures of old houses around the island is what I do every time I get a

chance. They are part of our heritage, an important part of our story. No social history lesson is complete without the story of these places of abode. They do have stories, and if only their ageing and decaying wooden walls



Two-storey gem at Borobridge, St Ann.

could talk.

And what about the things that people in these houses used to use? They are equally as fascinating as they, too, have their stories and can tell the stories of those who used to own them. Thus, collecting heirlooms and other social artefacts are the occupation of many people worldwide because of their historical value.

I regret not having my family’s personal



Lamps from the past. Where have all the flames gone?



Who used to bathe in this?



Old opulence.

objects of the past. We were never socialised to keep old stuff. They seemed to have no use to us after they had become aged. And as soon as we were finished with a clothes iron, a utensil, a chamber

pot, pictures, etc, they were thrown away.

We took, perhaps, hundreds of pictures because a photographer named Jolly lived in our community. He was a family friend,

so there were many free pictures. Yet, the great majority were, never saved, and pictures, they say are worth more than a thousand words. Some of our family stories by way of pictures are now lost forever.

My mother has an earthenware jug in which her grandparents used to keep water cool. I am laying claim to it. I am next in line to own it because apart from that, nothing in my family goes back to over 50 years. And I am the best person to own it.

I have started my own collection of old things. Everywhere I go, I try to find something to add to my stock. It is like I have to find something. Why? I do not know. Are they connecting me to a time and space long gone? And is that what they are doing to the owner of the Big Brown House in Woodside, St Mary?

In that board house, there are family stories jumping out of decades-old paraphernalia. They seem to have kept everything. The types of old things that are still in good condition are too numerous to mention. That place could be a museum where people could go to



The heat is gone. But life goes on.



Enamel objects of yesteryear.

learn about life in Jamaica, going back several decades.

Old houses and old things are part of our tangible heritage, and that did not die on me during Heritage

Week. I spent it cleaning my set of old enamel utensils. Who had eaten and drunk from them? While I pondered, from one of the cups hot chocolate 'tea' I sipped.

St Thomas to welcome return of Royal Caribbean on November 10

THE GOVERNMENT of the US Virgin Islands is welcoming the return of Royal Caribbean's *Adventure of the Seas* to the territory on Friday, November 10.

US Virgin Islands Governor Kenneth E. Mapp and Commissioner of Tourism Beverly Nicholson-Doty reported today that the cruise company would be the first to return to St Thomas following back-to-back Category 5 hurricanes that affected the territory last month.

The news follows last week's visit by Royal Caribbean executives to meet with the territory's public and private sector stakeholders and see first hand the island's port facilities, infrastructure, shopping areas, and attractions.

"As we move forward from September's historic storms, we are laser-focused on improving and enhancing the overall tourism product and creating an environment that stimulates economic growth and employment for our residents," commented Mapp as he thanked the executive team at Royal Caribbean for its confidence in the Government and people of the US Virgin Islands.

The line, which operated two mercy missions to the territory to assist with the



evacuation of affected visitors and residents and to bring much-needed humanitarian supplies, has been providing significant

resources to help with the restoration of world-famous Magens Bay, one of St Thomas' popular beaches. The clean-up

effort is being made possible with the support of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, the Department of Public Works, the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority, the Virgin Islands National Guard, and several private sector organisations.

"We are very excited to get back home to our friends in St Thomas. The Caribbean is our family, having cruised there for nearly 50 years, and the long-standing relationships created in all this time are unwavering," said Michael Bayley, president and CEO, Royal Caribbean International. "We are committed to doing everything we can to help and are proud to support the restoration of the iconic Magens Bay.

"Welcoming cruise visitors back to the US Virgin Islands is key to our economic recovery," Nicholson-Doty said, disclosing that cruise guests represent a significant share of overall visitors, supporting jobs both within and outside the tourism sector. The commissioner said that preparations for Royal Caribbean's arrival were ongoing and additional meetings with the business community were being planned.

US Virgin Islands getting back to business following September storms

THE US Virgin Islands is getting back to the business of welcoming visitors to its shores following Hurricanes Irma and Maria, which struck the territory last month.

Commissioner of Tourism Beverly Nicholson-Doty reported that the airports on St Croix and St Thomas are now open to commercial flights, and one of the flagship hotels on the island of St Croix, The Buccaneer, has announced that it is accepting reservations for leisure guests arriving on or after November 1, 2017.

The historic property received minimal damage to its infrastructure and has remained open to accommodate relief personnel. The resort team reports that while availability is limited due to many rooms being occupied by federal relief teams, the hotel will be fully operational and ready to welcome vacationers starting November 1. Key facilities and amenities, including Mermaid

Beach, the golf course, tennis courts, pool, the spa, and the Mermaid Restaurant will be available for guests.

Additionally, the resort will host the annual St Croix Coral Reef Swim on November 5. Now in its 22nd year, the race attracts fitness swimmers and world-class athletes who compete in various swim courses, culminating at The Buccaneer's Mermaid Beach.

As discussions with transportation partners continue, the Department of Tourism reports that JetBlue Airways has resumed commercial service to the territory. This service is in addition to American Airlines operations at both the Cyril E. King Airport on St Thomas and the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport on St Croix, as well as Delta Air Lines and Spirit Airlines service to and from St Thomas. Inter-island flights by Air Sunshine, Cape Air, and Seaborne Airlines are also operational. As conditions

improve, airline schedules are likely to normalise. In the interim, passengers are encouraged to check with their airlines for flight times.

"We are working closely with our airline partners to ensure there are commercial flight services to meet the needs of our residents, businesses, visitors, and the numerous professionals who are supporting the hurricane recovery," said Nicholson-Doty. "We will continue to advocate for expanded service as more of our hotel properties reopen and demand begins to grow in the marketplace," she said.

In order to assess overall readiness of the destination to welcome visitors, the Department of Tourism has met with business leaders in the St Croix and St Thomas/St John districts and is in the process of conducting an assessment of hotels, attractions, and other visitor-related businesses to determine the extent of damage, availability of power and water,

and anticipated reopening dates.

The storms' impact on the Territory's hotel inventory was not as extensive in St Croix as it was in St Thomas and St John. In addition to The Buccaneer, the Caravelle Hotel & Casino, and Tamarind Reef Resort in St Croix are currently housing relief workers.

Seaport facilities are open, and businesses and attractions are looking forward to welcoming cruise visitors in November.

While the clean-up process is under way in the town of Frederiksted on St Croix, many dining establishments, stores, and activities are up and running in Christiansted, on the eastern side of the island. Similarly, shops, restaurants, and attractions are ready to welcome customers in St Thomas. The downtown Charlotte Amalie shopping area, including businesses on Main Street and at the Havensight Mall, is ready to open, with power and water already



Beverly Nicholson-Doty, the new CTO chairman.

restored. On St John, efforts are ongoing to clear debris, restore infrastructure, and reopen the Virgin Islands National Park.

Many of the territory's beaches are getting set to reopen in the weeks ahead, pending the completion of water-quality testing by the Department of Planning and Natural Resources.

For further information, visit www.usviupdate.com.

The official website to donate to the US Virgin Islands recovery effort is www.usvirecovery.org.

Barbados reports stellar 2017 growth at SOTIC Grenada

BARBADOS REPORTED strong tourist arrivals, a successful year of sports, and a slew of new activities, attractions and accommodations on the horizon at the recent State of the Tourism Industry Conference (SOTIC 2017) in Grenada.

Addressing the media, Barbados Tourism Marketing Inc's William 'Billy' Griffith gave an overview of how the destination performed over the past year, and what's new for the island.

Year-to-date, the island is reporting growth in both arrival numbers and visitor expenditure. Arrivals to Barbados between January and August 2017 stood at 453,645, up 7.4 per cent over the same period in 2016, with visitors from the US and Canada recording the highest growth at 16.4 per cent

and 12.1 per cent, respectively.

"Meanwhile, cruise arrivals grew by 20.3 per cent between January and August compared to the same period in 2016, from a total of 323 cruise calls," Griffith told the gathering.

His report was bolstered by an exit survey done by the Caribbean Tourism Organisation, showing that visitor expenditure between January and June stood at US\$587.7 million, up 5.3 per cent compared to the same period in 2016.

AIRLIFT

These strong growth trends are expected to continue as several new services are added at the Grantley Adams International Airport. This December, a new twice-weekly Barbados-Heathrow direct service will be introduced through April



William 'Billy' Griffith

2018, as well as a new Thomas Cook direct weekly flight from London Gatwick airport.

In the US, JetBlue has also announced a new year-round Barbados-Boston service, and the carrier's Newark service will increase from eight to 24 rotations this winter.

NEW AND IMPROVED ACCOMMODATIONS

Visitors taking advantage of these new services this winter will have their pick of new and refurbished accommodations, from luxury to adults-only.

"Sandals Royal Barbados is slated to be opened on December 20, 2017. Elegant Hotels' The House and Treasure Beach are both undergoing extensive renovations to enhance guest

experience and are slated to open in October and November," Griffith revealed, adding that reopening this winter is the renowned Fairmont Royal Pavilion in November and Sea Breeze Hotel in December.

In addition to the new accommodations, the island will also welcome the world-acclaimed luxurious Nikki Beach at Port Ferdinand this winter, as well as the first-of-its kind Departure Beach by Virgin Holidays in May 2018.

WINTER MEANS LUXURY

"To promote the diverse and quality offerings in the pipeline, Barbados' winter campaign will focus on luxury," explained Griffith, noting that the campaign is geared towards promoting travel during the dominant travel period of December 2017 to March 2018.

"We are targeting the affluent traveller and will commence in all major markets in October."

He said a mix of traditional and digital marketing tools will showcase the effortless beauty and luxurious wonder destination Barbados has to offer.

Kingston City Run



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Deputy Mayor Winston Ennis (left), of Kingston and St Andrew Municipal Corporation and Christopher Jarrett, chairman, Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association Kingston Chapter, review plans for the March 18, 2018 staging of Kingston City Run.



From left: Deputy Mayor Winston Ennis of the Kingston and St Andrew Municipal Corporation; Christopher Jarrett, chairman, Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association Kingston Chapter and co-chairman, Kingston City Run; and Alfred McDonald, senior director, commercial development and planning, Airport Authority of Jamaica.



From left: Joshua Chamberlain, Alpha Boys Institute; Camille Needham, executive director, JHTA; Brother Charles Selridge and Father Hayden Augustine of Missionaries of the Poor.

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- Best All-inclusive Over 300 Rooms • Best Small Hotel/Bed & Breakfast
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- Best Business Hotel • Best European Plan Resort • Best Boutique Resort • Best in Cuisine • Best in Entertainment • Most Authentic Jamaican attraction • Best Purveyor
- Best Nightlife Experience



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*Voting Closes
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