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Hospitality Jamaica

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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24, 2018

**IT'S THE
EXPERIENCE**

**Andrew builds
a 'House'
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It's the experience...

Andrew builds a 'House' at FDR



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Andrew with his parents, Kim and Richard House.

Carl Gilchrist

Hospitality Jamaica Writer

IT'S AS if Andrew has built a house at Franklyn D. Resort and Spa (FDR) in Runaway Bay, St Ann.

Thanks to his family, Andrew House, an only child, literally grew up at the hotel, visiting every year from Teaneck, New Jersey, USA, for 21 years, dating back to 1996.

And he still comes every January.

When Kim and Richard House arrived at FDR for the first time in 1996 for a Jamaican vacation, Andrew was a mere year and six months old.

The Houses were impressed with the fact that the hotel had a nanny with every one of its 79 suites, so they had time for themselves.

A chance photo of Andrew at a shower close to the beach, washing the sand off his hands, was repeated

the following year January and repeated every January since then.

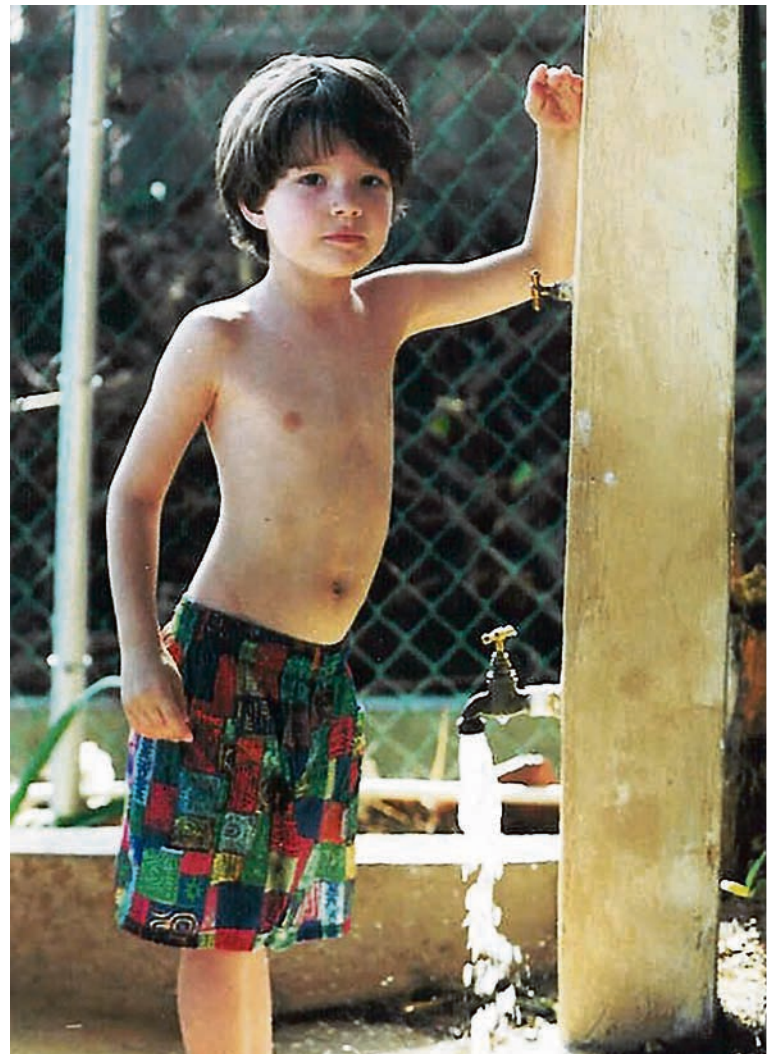
It was only in 2003, when Andrew was ill, that no photo was taken. The Houses' most recent trip was last week.

"Each year he comes, he takes a photograph by the same shower, which is to the entrance to the large beach that we share. He takes it in the same spot, in the same position every year," assistant sales manager Janique Johnson told **Hospitality Jamaica**.

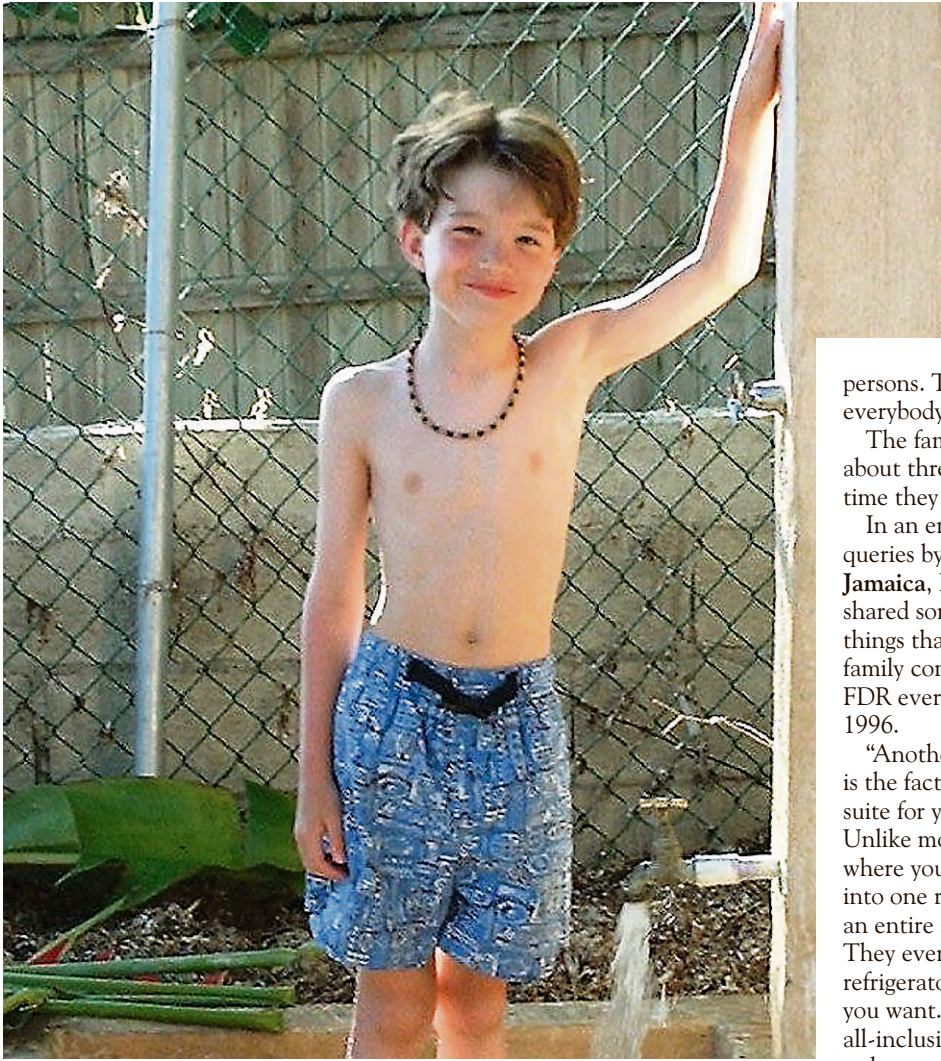
A collage of the shots is at the front desk of the hotel.

"They keep coming back because of how they're treated here. They're no strangers, they're family. They're always treated with courtesy, kindness and genuineness," Johnson pointed out.

"They come, they scuba dive – which they really enjoy – and they enjoy meeting people. They're people



Andrew House at age five.



Andrew at age seven.



Andrew at 12.

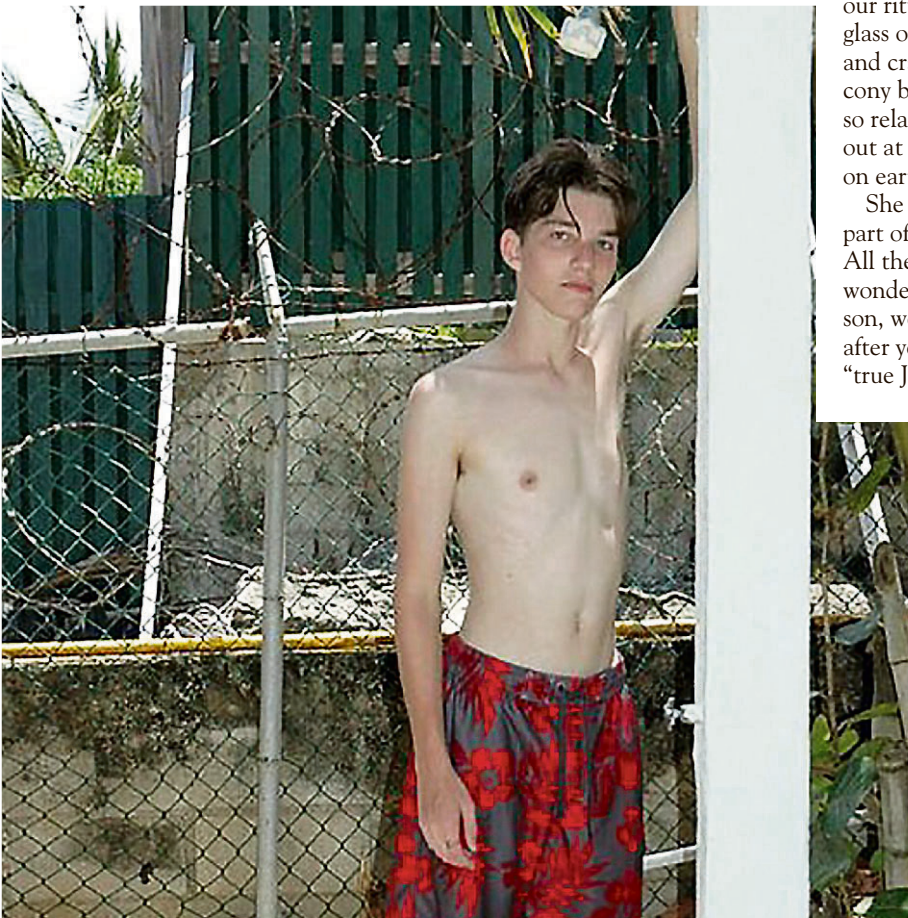
persons. They know everybody here.”

The family spends about three weeks each time they visit Jamaica.

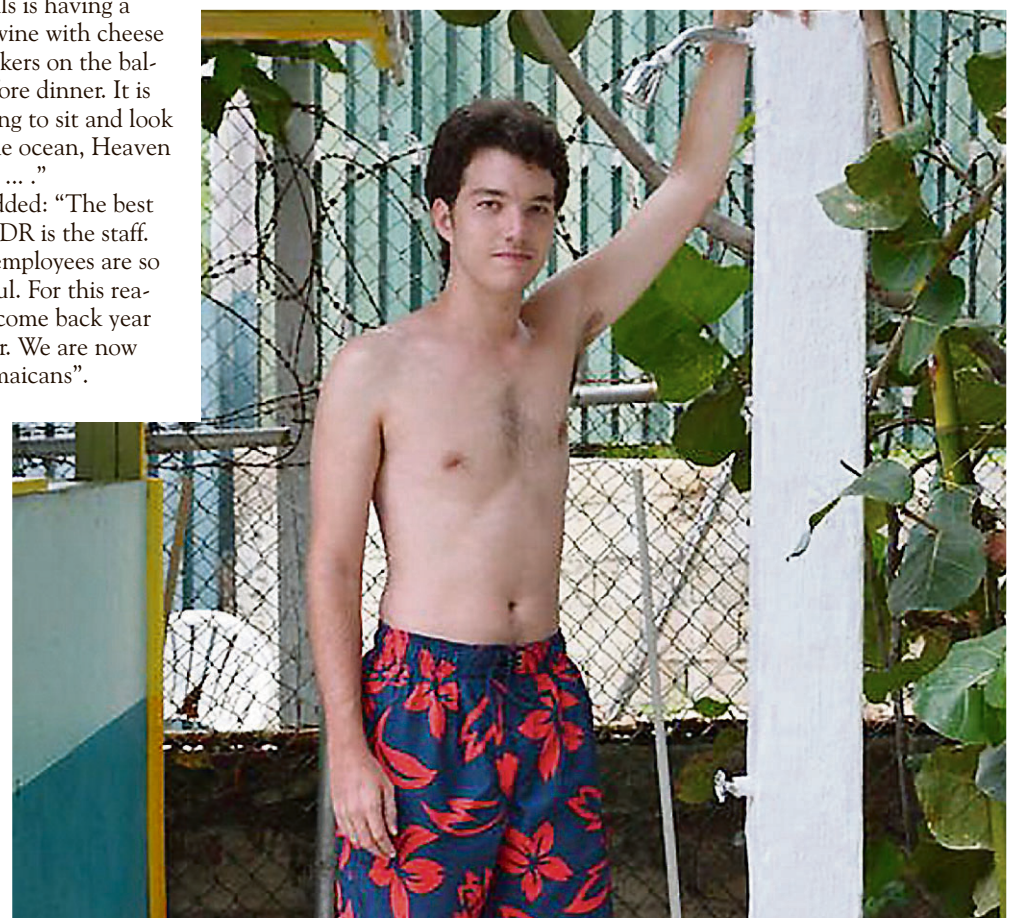
In an email reply to queries by **Hospitality Jamaica**, Kim House shared some of the other things that have kept the family coming back to FDR every January since 1996.

“Another great feature is the fact that you get a suite for your family. Unlike most hotels, where you are crammed into one room, you get an entire apartment. They even stock the refrigerator with anything you want. The resort is all-inclusive but it’s nice to have a few things in your apartment. One of our rituals is having a glass of wine with cheese and crackers on the balcony before dinner. It is so relaxing to sit and look out at the ocean, Heaven on earth ...”

She added: “The best part of FDR is the staff. All the employees are so wonderful. For this reason, we come back year after year. We are now “true Jamaicans”.



Andrew in 2011.



Andrew in 2016.

Michelle Sawyers is ... Superstar of the Year 2017

Janet Silvera

Hospitality Jamaica Coordinator

MICHELLE SAWYERS' dedication, willingness and commitment were among the attributes that won her 'Superstar of the Year 2017', during the Hyatt Ziva and Zilara Eminence Awards last Wednesday in Montego Bay.

Sawyers, a room attendant whose tenure at the resort is just under two years, outpaced 12 of her colleagues in the category, taking home the coveted title, plus prizes of a 55 inch television, a trip to Cancun, Mexico, or an option of \$200,000.

Twice during 2017 she was named Superstar of the Month, a title she said she achieved by acknowledging and treating her colleagues the same as she treats guests who vacation at the property.

Sawyers shared the spotlight with the likes of 'Leader of the Year' Dedra Brown, training and quality manager in the human resources department; Supervisors of the Year, Novella Gordon and Anthony Bailey and the General Manager's awardees, Thelma Cross and Elan Campbell.

A total of 20 recipients took home television sets, vacations and cash for their selfless contribution to the resort.

Brown, described as "coconut water" by director of human resources, Betty-Ann Brown, is involved in just about every activity that the hotel participates in. She plays cricket and leads the outstanding 'Granville School Initiative', which helps the innercity community. She is also the backbone behind the 'Intellect Your Style' project at the resort.

OUTSTANDING WORKERS

Both Gordon and Bailey tied for the supervisor award; because the executive committee was passionate about them. "Novella, because of her contribution to the Jamaican restaurant on-property and Anthony, who continues to save the company money by building the props used on the property," Betty-Ann Brown explained.

Cross was lauded for her honesty, having found money in the pocket of a guest while laundering his pants. She returned the money with a personalised note after cleaning the garment. That note made it as far as Playa corporate offices and has secured the hotel with future business.

In the case of Campbell, he rescued one of his colleagues, whose hairnet got caught in a hot box and was on fire. Without second thoughts, Campbell grabbed his colleague, ran with her and doused her with vinegar. His action prevented her from getting third degree burns.

"What our staff has done in guest satisfaction is nothing short of amazing and that is why we recognise them," general manager Omar Rivera.

He singled out the Granville school, noting that what has been done for that community shows heart, compassion and caring for doing what is right.

Some 144 staff nominated for Hyatt Ziva and Zilara Eminence Awards.

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PHOTOS BY ASLEY ANGUIN

The MVP Heart of the House award was presented by Mureen James, director of sales and marketing to Curtis Ramsingh at the Playa Hotels Resorts Eminence Awards on Wednesday.



Michelle Sawyers is cheered on by her colleagues from across divisions, as she is named Superstar of the Year for 2017, the highest award given to employees of Hyatt Ziva and Zilara at Playa's Eminence Award 2017.



Winston Jones shows excitement when announced the winner at the Playa Hotels Resorts Eminence Awards.



Senator Damian Crawford accepts a gift from Toni-Lee Lewin at the Playa Hotels Resorts Eminence Awards on Wednesday..

Eminence Awards winners and categories

Guest Helper Smile Award - Portia-Lee Johnson - Bar
 Demar Leiba - Culinary
Playa Culture Courtesy - Floyd Hall (Concierge)
 Ray Small (Landscaping)
Playa Friend of the Earth - Rawle Shortridge (Systems)
 Winston Gayle (Food & Beverage, Petit Pariz)
Most Reliable - Adrian Brown (Purchasing)
MVP Heart of the House - Curtis Ramsingh (Systems)
Most Improved - David Phillips (Engineering)
 Marcinne Paris (Sales and Marketing)
Service From the Heart - Pamella Keith (Food & Beverage, ChocieZ)
Most Social Media Mention - Winston Jones (Butler)
Superstar of the Month - Runner-up - Sheldon Taylor (Stewarding)
Winner - Michelle Sawyers (House-keeping)
Supervisors of the Month - Novella Gordon (Culinary)
 Anthony Bailey (Entertainment)
Leader of the Month - Runner-up - Anthony Smart (Food & Beverage)
 Winner - Dedra Brown (Human Resources/Training)
General Managers Award - Thelma Cross and Ellan Campbell (Laundry)



Novella Gordon from the Culinary team is awarded as one of two Supervisors of the Year by General Manager Omar Rivera.



From left: Vishal Daswani, hotel manager, Rooms, presents Pamella Keith with the Service of the Heart award at the Playa Hotels Resorts Eminence Awards on Wednesday.



Phillip Hazle, assistant director of engineering shows off his leadership award, a weekend for two and a gift basket.



Ashley AnguinOmar Rivera, general manager, presents the General Manager's Award for 2017 to Thelma Cross from the Laundry department.



Floyd Hall from Concierge lifts his hands to the heavens as he is crowned one of two winners for the Playa Culture Courtesy category.



Debra Brown, training and quality manager (right), is congratulated by Betty Ann Brown, HR director, while Paula Lewis, assistant HR director looks on.



Maria Fernanda (left), entertainment director, presents Portia-Lee Johnson from the Bar Department at the Playa Hotels and Resorts Annual Eminence Awards.

THE BUSINESS OF TOURISM

PROMOTING 'travel that ain't ordinary'

ONE OF the less written about aspects of last year's conference on sustainable tourism organised by the United Nation's World Tourism Organisation and the Jamaican Government were the sometimes inspiring mini-presentations made in sessions away from the main conference.

Although the event at the Montego Bay Conference Centre was intended to develop an agenda and a final declaration that would locate tourism and its ability to drive economic and social development within the UN's Sustainable Development Goal's, it also provided a wealth of detail on alternative visitor offerings.

Away from the conference's plenary sessions, in break-out rooms, sometimes with standing room only, panels featured small entrepreneurs talking about their own experience and the very different visitor-oriented personal businesses they had created.

One particularly memorable presentation came in a session entitled 'Micro, Small and Medium-Size Tourism Enterprises and the Future'. It was made by Noelle Nicolls, the Jamaican-Bahamian, owner of The Domestic Tourist,



DAVID JESSOP

which operates in The Bahamas.

Ms Nicolls has effectively created a visitor experience based around her family's Sunday brunch.

Explaining that Sunday brunch on her family's patio is a cherished family ritual that keeps generations of her family and friends connected she said that she realised that if she, quite literally, opened the door of her home to a small number of visitors, a very personal business opportunity existed.

Ms Nicolls decided to establish through her company, the

Domestic Tourist, 'Backyaad Brunch', entertaining visitors on what she calls her 'rainforest patio', providing not just genuine Jamaican-Bahamian hospitality, but also the opportunity to experience authentic home-cooking and to talk with her family and friends.

AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCE

The idea is that visitors – usually couples, singles, or small family groups – sign up online and for a fee, then travel away from New Providence's tourist areas to enjoy a lively conversation over a meal and an experience that is genuine and authentic, and which, hopefully enables her guests to understand more about the country they are visiting.

For those who want to know more, go to Noelle Nicolls' website <https://www.domestictourist.com> from which it is immediately evident that what she is also about is much more, including personal travel to less-known locations in the out-islands, and is developing a business around, "travel that aint ordinary".

Her approach is clearly not for most visitors, but is for the growing number of travellers who when visiting the Caribbean want to come



FILE

Visitors enjoy rafting on the Rio Grande in Portland.

away with the sense that they have experienced something that is real, and perhaps more important, have made a personal connection. It is for those who are culturally curious and who do not do tourism in the normal sense.

The concept is fascinating as not only is it replicable elsewhere in the region – assuming those providing the service have the same spirit, ability, and marketing skills – but it addresses in a practical way the type of individual experience that higher-spending visitors want.

It represents a growing but little-understood category of travel which, by definition, is not easy to package, and which seemingly requires visitors and one imagines, intermediaries, as unusual as the providers.

How destinations support such endeavours will require sensitivity. For a critical mass of experiences of

the kind Ms Nicolls has developed requires quality publicity, and most important, visitor and industry word of mouth and recommendations.

It needs also to be seen as separate from trends in some developing countries whereby very wealthy visitors want more than just the sense of where they are visiting, but as part of their vacation, are literally buying experiences such as visits alone to historic sites or even private meetings with politicians, writers or artists that only they and their companions can ever share.

What Ms Nicolls and others like her are doing in a small but important way is what last November's post-conference Montego Bay Declaration is all about: developing tourism in a sustainable, socially and environmentally aware manner, spreading its benefits more widely, while providing authentic experience.

three-night stays beginning Sunday, February 11.

The family-run Haitian hotel features stunning artwork by local artists and offers comfort and convenience with an outdoor pool, full-service restaurant, fitness room, business centre, and Internet access in all rooms and public areas.

Le Plaza is just a few minutes' drive from the iconic Mupanah (Musée du Panthéon National Haïtien), the National Museum of Art and Marché de Fer (a public market dating back to 1889), which guests are encouraged to visit.

To book the 'Kanaval 2018' package, call (877) 810-0975 or (305) 394-6984 or email reservations@plazahaiti.com.

For further information about Le Plaza, visit www.plazahaiti.com.

Le Plaza Hotel welcomes visitors to Carnival in Haiti

ONE OF Haiti's historic hotels is encouraging travellers to visit the Caribbean destination to celebrate Carnival 2018 next month.

Marc Pierre-Louis, general manager of Le Plaza Hotel, said this year's festival, the theme of which is 'Ayiti sou wout chanjman' (Haiti on the road to change), is "a celebration of who we are as a people. It is a time when the whole nation comes together. The music is transcending, the energy is pulsating ...

it's a much-needed break from the stresses of life for locals as well as for our guests. It is a remedy for the soul."

The national carnival, which returns to Port-au-Prince after three years, will take place in the capital from Sunday, February 11, to Tuesday, February 13, this year. Carnival is traditionally celebrated from Sunday to the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, which is observed through

Easter.

"Our hotel, which offers authentic Haitian hospitality, exceptionally high levels of guest service, and an organic ambience, is the only one located directly on the carnival parade route," Pierre-Louis pointed out, explaining that Le Plaza's carnival stand is accessible through the hotel gardens. "So we encourage visitors, including members of our diaspora, to make Le Plaza Hotel their home base," he added.

Le Plaza is offering its 'Kanaval 2018' package, which includes a three-night stay, a complimentary parking space per room, daily breakfast and buffet dinners, a keepsake T-shirt, and access to the official Le Plaza-catered stand featuring savoury Haitian bouillon – a hearty beef and vegetable soup.

Rates for the 'Kanaval 2018' package start at US\$200 per person, per night (double occupancy required) and are available for

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Cheers to Master Blender Joy Spence (centre).



J. Wray & Nephew's Regional Managers Tyrone Williams and Sophia Fairman take a quick pose for our lens.



Lilly-Marie Hall (left) poses with Fred Bogle and Charmaine Allen.

JOY SPENCE

Appleton's secret weapon

UNDETERRED BY the accepted norm of male dominance in the Master Blender positions at high-profile brands, Appleton's Joy Spence is today standing tall and in a league of her own.

Spence, who turns 67 this year and who has the distinction of being the spirits industry's first Master Blender, a position she has held at Appleton Estate Jamaica Rum since 1997, was on hand on Thursday for what she described as "a humbling experience" – the official opening of the Joy Spence Appleton Estate Rum Experience tour in Siloah, St Elizabeth.

Flanked by her Appleton family, including top executives from parent company Gruppo Campari, Spence was not only the toast of the occasion that bears her name, but was also lauded for her work ethic and professionalism and described as a "woman of extraordinary talent".

"A great Jamaican and one of our true icons," is how Tourism Minister Edmund Bartlett described the Master Blender. "In a

profession that is dominated by men, Joy has not only shown what is possible. She is undoubtedly one of the best in the game and the secret to the success of this iconic Appleton brand."

Bartlett added that it was only fitting that the Appleton Estate Rum Experience "is named after Joy Spence", adding that not only does Spence have "the distinction of being the world's first female Master Blender in the spirits industry", but "she has blessed us with many wonderful rum creations".

Bartlett's comments were echoed by Chairman of J. Wray & Nephew Limited Clement 'Jimmy' Lawrence. "Joy has indeed broken the proverbial glass ceiling," he declared. "She has shattered barriers and destroyed perceived norms by taking the Master Blender position to stratospheric heights. She is indeed our secret weapon and has been that way for over three decades."

Spence, who is also celebrating her 21st anniversary as Master Blender with Appleton, said that while she was happy with all

the attention and accolades, "I never imagined I would have so much fun doing something I truly love".

"Being the Master Blender means being in charge of selecting the barrels of rum that will go into the particular blend that we are making on any given day," Spence explains.

"Each of our blends has a secret formula, where we first select the barrels of rum that we are going to use based on the formula. We then 'nose' each barrel to ensure that it has aged to specification ... to how we want it to. The barrels are then blended together, and then we nose and taste the final blend. At the same time, we analyse the blend in the lab to make sure that it meets technical specifications such as alcoholic strength."

Spence points to a visit to the White House in Washington, United States, as well as to New Zealand during the filming of *Lords of the Ring* as some of the other highlights of her career, praising her bosses and colleagues "for their unwavering belief in my abilities".



Appleton Rum's Sean Hopkins (left) poses with Craig Edmondson, Kristopher Thompson, and Craig Lindsay.



PHOTOS BY ASHLEY ANGUIN
Kai Watson poses with Monique Spence.



From left: Taniki McClarthy-Alen, director of public affairs and sustainability, J. Wray & Nephew Limited, poses with Gafene Grandison, Nestlé public relations and digital manager and Gail Abrahams, CEO the American Chamber of Commerce (AMCHAM Jamaica).



From left: Selfie time for Jamaican media personality Fae Ellington (from left), Beth Hyde, Dr Freddie Clarke, and Glynn Manley (front), widow of Jamaica's late Prime Minister Michael Manley.

2017: a phenomenal year for Destination Ja

DESTINATION JAMAICA is riding a crescendo it has never before experienced as for the first time in a calendar year, the island welcomed four million visitors. With this incredible achievement, there is much to celebrate.

The secret of the island's success in the tourist industry is undergirded by a robust and effective marketing machinery, as well as fruitful relationships with local and international partners and stakeholders.

As the agency at the forefront of Jamaica's marketing thrust, the Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB) has been central to the success of Destination Jamaica. A closer look at the phenomenal year that was 2017 saw the JTB executing and participating in crucial international industry events such as ITB Berlin; the hosting of Jamaica Travel Market; and the JTB's own business-to-business tradeshow which targets tour operators and agents in the United Kingdom, Ireland, the Nordic and Scandinavian region, and other regions in Europe. The JTB also participated in a number of tradeshows that promoted the diversity of the island's tourism product such as its meetings and incentive travel portfolio, sports tourism capabilities, soft adventures menus, and music festival offerings.



A view of some of the many persons who visited the Experience Jamaica Village at the Trade Investment Convention in Trinidad and Tobago.

JAMAICA TOURIST BOARD



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Dian Holland (left), JTB Business Development Manager for the western region, accept the award from TravelAge West Senior Vice-President Bruce Shulman.

Marketplace activities included promotions in key source markets

such as Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany. These activities featured participation in trade shows, sales blitzes and pop-up shops. For example, during the IAAF World Athletics Championships, London was vibrant with the sights of Destination Jamaica as the JTB spread the Jamaican vibe across the city with 150 wrapped taxis featuring Jamaican themes. In New York City, the JTB launched its first interactive 'Feel the Vibe' pop-up shop, where visitors enjoyed exciting interactive Jamaican experiences, a promotion that was replicated in Vancouver.

In pursuit of increasing visitor arrivals from the Caribbean, the JTB, for the first time, took the Experience Jamaica campaign outside the borders of the island with an inaugural launch at the Trade Investment Convention (TIC) in Trinidad and Tobago. The result was extraordinary as of the 275



'Feel the Vibe' social media influencer Tim Landis at Kingston Waterfront enjoying the sunset.

exhibitors and 210 booths, the Experience Jamaica Village was voted the Best Booth in the large category, second only to Tobago.

Hosted record number of travel agents and media groups

The JTB also hosted a record number of travel agent and media groups on the island, which augmented the exposure the destination received in the international marketplace. Over 71 travel agent groups from Europe, Latin America, the United States, Asia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the Caribbean got intimate experiences of the island's offerings, which empowered them to better sell Jamaica to their clients.

There is heightened interest in Destination Jamaica and journalists from around the world are always excited to cover the rhythm and vibe of the island. This resulted in the JTB hosting almost 100 media press trips in 2017. The media outlets represented the wide gamut of the industry, with coverage from the likes of: *Billboard*, *Daily Telegraph* (United Kingdom), *Manchester Evening* (United Kingdom), *National Geographic Traveller* (Holland) and *Suddeutsche Zeitung* (Germany).

The 'Feel the Vibe' influencer social media campaign was yet another first for the JTB. During the campaign, selected social media influencers with large followings were invited to the island to explore and find their own 'vibe' in Jamaica. The campaign created waves and amplified Destination Jamaica on digital platforms.

Destination Jamaica again took the spotlight at international industry celebrations and copped numerous awards in 2017: Travvy Awards for Best Honeymoon Destination, Best Culinary Destination, Best

Tourism Board Overall and Best Tourism Board; Hospitality Sales & Marketing Association International (HSMAI) Adrian Awards for the JTB's marketing of the Jamaica House 2016 at the 31st Summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro.

Flight Network named Jamaica among the World's Top Honeymoon Destinations, and for the 12th consecutive year, the Jamaica Tourist Board was named Favourite Tourist Board in the coveted Baxter Travel Media's Agents' Choice Awards.

Also in 2017, TripAdvisor ranked Jamaica at #12 on the TripAdvisor Travelers' Choice Awards' 'World's Best Destinations' list, while the Jamaica Tourist Board received the 2017 TravelAge West WAVE Award in the category of 'International Tourism Board Providing the Best Travel Agent Support'.

World's Leading Cruise and Wedding Destination

To close out the year, Jamaica was voted World's Leading Cruise and Wedding Destination at the World Travel Awards (WTA) in December. Other winners at the WTAs included World's Leading All-Inclusive Company (Sandals Resorts International); World's Leading All-Inclusive Family Resort Brand (Beaches Resorts); World's Leading Caribbean Attraction Company (Island Routes Caribbean Adventures); World's Leading Luxury Hotel Villa (Ian Fleming Villa @ GoldenEye, Jamaica); and World's Leading Villa Resort (Round Hill Hotel & Villas).

The outlook for 2018 is even better as Destination Jamaica strives to keep the momentum for more successes while creating more enriching visitor experiences in the Home of All Right.

Silvera's Picks

FOR YEARS, former Bahamian minister of tourism and aviation and secretary general and chief executive officer of the Caribbean Tourism Organisation, Vincent Vanderpool-Wallace, has been touting the importance of “the experience”.

That is



CONTRIBUTED
PHOTOS
Janice Bennett



Janet Silvera

how he described what visitors to the Caribbean region were looking for. I always knew Vanderpool-Wallace was correct, because whenever I travel, the experience is what matters, and that is the deciding factor that determines return to a country, a resort, a restaurant or even the homes of my friends.

Two weeks ago, I had one of the most amazing experiences at the Couples Sans Souci Resort in Ocho Rios when a member of the dining room staff, who I am sure was not aware that I am a journalist, went the extra mile without even blinking.

Service obviously comes naturally for him.

I was wearing an Arsenal shirt, because that is the team I cheer for in the English Premier League, and as soon as the young man saw us (I had a friend with me) approaching the dining room, he said, “You guys want to watch the match?” Arsenal were playing Bournemouth at the time, and obviously he felt if we had to eat breakfast in the regular area, we would have missed the last 30 minutes of the game.

Let it be known, our server is a Manchester United fan, so he could have ignored us.

He prepared a room (looks like a games room), with a small table, dressed it with tablecloth, brought us cutlery, coffee, and I am sure if we wanted, he would have gone on the buffet line and taken up our breakfast. In an intimate setting, we had our own television, personalised service and a football fan

taking care of business, even while serving other guests close to the vicinity.

In fact, it felt like a romantic breakfast.

This is what guests who visit our country are looking for!

And if you think that was the only place that had me feeling like royalty two weekends ago, check out the dining room staff at Jewel Runaway Bay, who took the time to make us fresh pots of coffee when they felt what was there before we arrived at breakfast was not good enough.

To say that General Manager Scott Robins is doing a fantastic job at Jewel would be an understatement. Word on the street and on social media is that Robins has it ‘down pat’.

Who to watch in the industry

Former director of sales, Riu Hotels & Resorts, Angella Bennett, who resigned that post just over a year ago to join the Melia Hotels and Resort in a similar position for their Melia Braco Village property in Rio Bueno, Trelawny, is creating waves and is being touted as a game changer in the market.

Bennett, who has more than 20 years of experience in her area of expertise, has literally moved Melia Braco’s growth from single to double digits, with a balanced market share in each source market, putting the hotel in a very stable position.

Under her command, she was able to bring new markets from Europe and strengthened the existing markets with her expertise in tour operations.

Have you received great service? Let us know.

janet.silvera@gleanerjm.com



Gavin of
Couples
Sans
Souci.



PAUL H. WILLIAMS PHOTOS

Tapioca Village Retreat is located in the Devon Pen district of the Castleton region of St Mary.



The setting at Tapioca Village Retreat in St Mary is as rustic as rustic gets.

TAPIOCA VILLAGE RETREAT pulls you back to nature

Paul H. Williams
Hospitality Jamaica Writer

IT'S A village all right. However, it's not one of the typical villages where people live permanently or where familial roots are embedded. Tapioca Village Retreat is a place where people go to spend time, for peace and sobriety, privacy, and to make connections, business or otherwise.

Less than an hour from Kingston, through the storied Junction artery, it is nestled near the main road in the Devon Pen area of the Wag Water River watershed in St Mary. The location and the setting, at the foot of a hill, are ideal for the purposes for which it was created.

And as accessible as it is from the main road, it is an extremely quiet space. All around is greenery, with the spot being surrounded by a mountain

range which seems to touch the sky during misty and foggy moments. The vistas of the trees on the hillside through the mists are dreamlike – so near, yet so far.

LUSH SCENERY

Fruit trees and flowering plants are scattered around the well-kept grounds, where tame pigeons rest their wings and colourful village roosters strut their stuff. Warbling, crowing, chirping – cooing, and the chorus of nocturnal creatures – nature sounds – are what visitors are most likely to hear. Across the road the greenish Wag Water River meanders as the bamboos on the hillside wave and dance.

No wonder its tagline is 'We bring you back to nature', and according to Erroll Sinclair, managing director, and patriarch of the family-operated property; it is not just a place, it is an

experience.

Thus, guided hikes to the river and rafting can be arranged. There are also nature tours in which guests are educated about the variety of plants in the area. A standout is the annatto tree, which produces brown pods of seeds that are used for culinary purposes.

To support the rustic ambience of the reclusive place are various types of cosy accommodations offering different levels of occupancy. There are two dorms – one for males, one for females, each accommodating 25 people.

Multiple – occupancy guest rooms, as well as accommodations for individuals or couples are also available. While the catering is for mainly groups, it is not unusual to accommodate couples and individual guests.

Other features include gazebos, kitchens where guests may



Managing director of Tapioca Village Retreat name stands near a banner of one of his roosters that a guest from the United States created.

prepare their meals themselves, a games court, conference room, meeting space, a mango-shaped swimming pool, and a little shop. Every village must have one. They are also ideal for weddings and other special occasions.

Sinclair said that the property has been up and running since about 2008. According to him, only “bush” was on the spot when he acquired it in 1993. It evolved into a getaway for family and friends, who saw the hospitality potential that it had.

Moreover, there was no stay-over accommodation in the region, where the famous and popular Castleton Botanical Gardens is located. Sinclair thought a retreat would be a welcome business in the area and a natural complement for the botanical gardens.

Despite the gardens and the natural features, Sinclair, a well-known professional chef and caterer, believes the strongest pull for Tapioca is the authentic Jamaican food that it provides, with chocolate tea, ‘blue draws’, and sweet potato puddings being staples. And he still puts on his apron and hat to work some culinary magic.

Much of the food served comes from the farm nearby. Eating what they grow is a philosophy by which the business operates, and when **Hospitality Jamaica** visited, farm attendant Ewan Stamp arrived from the farm with a big bunch of green plantains on his head, and machete in hand. Jelly coconut, guava, June plum, sugar cane, passion fruits, and others are also in the village.

“It is the way to go,” Sinclair said.



One of the accommodation units at Tapioca Village Retreat in St Mary.



The management and staff at Tapioca Village Retreat. Front row from left: Romaine McKenzie, Meruel Sinclair, Errol Sinclair Sr, Melescia Sinclair, Errol Sinclair Jr and Beverly Wilson. Back row from left: Hubert Whitehorn, Andrew McKenzie, Sandrine Swaby, Garfield Ferguson and Howard Jenkins.

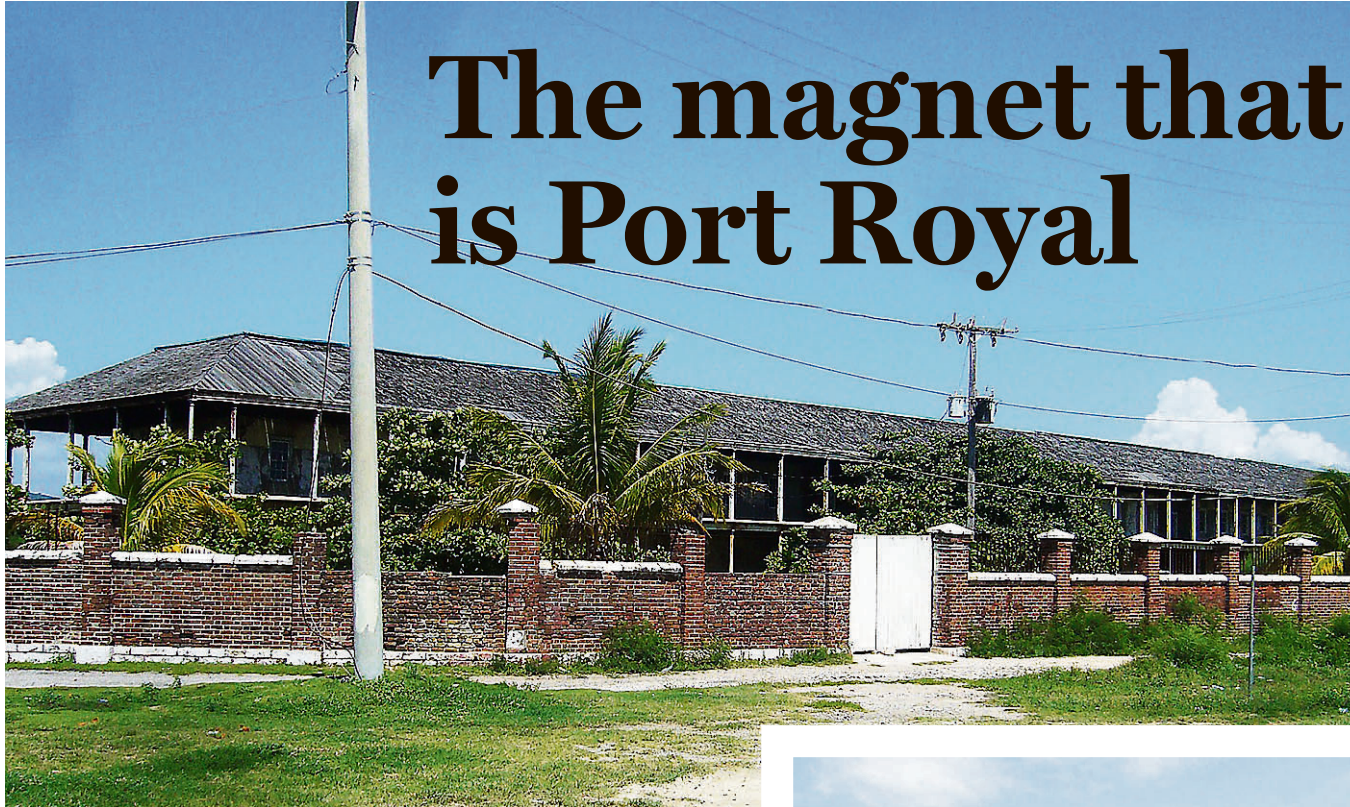


The food served at Tapioca Village Retreat is mostly authentic Jamaican.



Ewan Stamp returning from the farm with a newly cut bunch of plantains.

The magnet that is Port Royal



PAUL H. WILLIAMS PHOTOS

The Old Naval Hospital in Port Royal.

PORT ROYAL is a place I frequent not because of its seafood, not at all. And there is a reason why. I am excited by its history, ruins, and biodiversity.

But, I also go to its beaches to scavenge for the 'trophies' that the sea regurgitates, especially after heavy rains and stormy weather. Yes, I am a beachcomber who is on the beach, including the one along the Palisadoes stretch, where there are natural 'gems' for the taking.

The sun-drenched, grey sand on the southern side of the beach is popular with residents and some visitors. For pebble collectors, it is a treasure trove. On a clear day, cays are visible in the distance. Cargo ships laden with containers can also be seen slowly making their way to one of the world's largest harbours.

Along the Palisadoes, and at certain points along the coast of the town itself, I have seen people fishing, which seems to be a popular reason why they visit that storied place, whose biodiversity is very rich. There are many species of birds in the region, and a few years ago, I got the opportunity to tour the mangroves.

In addition to the exotic-looking birds, rats, crabs, fish, and the great abundance of oysters, which



The St Peter's Church at Port Royal was originally built in 1725.



The restored naval officers houses in Port Royal are now dorms for Caribbean Maritime Institute students.



The beach at Port Royal is popular with locals and visitors.



A section of the Old Naval Cemetery along the Palisadoes strip.



Clustered oysters in the Port Royal mangrove forest.

clustered on everything, including solid waste, there was much man-made refuse stifling the life of the place when I last visited. It was just unbelievable to see the great amount of non-biodegradable waste that people have allowed to enter this beautiful sanctuary.

Now, I wish the fuss over the development of Port Royal, or the lack thereof, would extend to the cleaning up of this important mangrove forest.

The brouhaha over Port Royal has been reignited over the past two weeks, and as much as I was tempted to add my voice to

the blame game, I kept quiet because I got the feeling that sooner rather than later the hot air would dissipate, and Port Royal continues to fester, as it has been doing since the morning of June 7, 1692.

After the British captured Jamaica from the Spaniards, they built a fort on the island of Cagway, which became a haunt for pirates. The fort that they built on Cagway was called Fort Cromwell but was renamed Fort Charles. Port Royal developed around that fort.

Armed soldiers manned these forts and participated, along with the buccaneers, in all manner of evil, earning the town the

unflattering moniker of the 'richest and wickedest city on Earth'.

That Mecca of debauchery was turned upside down on June 7 when a major earthquake, a tsunami, and several aftershocks flung two-thirds of the town with, 90 per cent of the buildings, into the sea. Over 2,000 people perished. And Port Royal was to face more disasters such as hurricanes, the 1704 fire, and another massive earthquake in 1907.

The ruins created by these disasters, the historic buildings, and the legend of the 1692 earthquake should have made Port Royal,

located up the road from Norman Manley International Airport, and on one side of Kingston Harbour, a tourist magnet, but for whatever reasons, it is not, thus the continual fuss.

And, last year, I was at a function when someone in authority said that things were being put in place for World Heritage Site status application for Port Royal. I am waiting, not with bated breath, for more announcements. Meanwhile, the romance of the Port Royal story, the gems on the beach and the mangrove forests will continue to magnetise me to that most idyllic place.



Birds teeming near Fort Charles in Port Royal.



A section of Fort Charles, Port Royal.

The Chukka Foundation and Hanover Charities target \$5m in fundraiser

The Chukka Foundation and Hanover Charities are hosting their annual polo charity event on Sunday, February 18, at the Sandy Bay Polo Field in Hanover.

As a premier fundraising event in the western region, Hanover Charities and The Chukka Foundation are aiming to raise \$5m to provide scholarships and implement community projects. The support of banks, insurance companies and local businesses will be anticipated as in previous years.

One of the event's main sponsors is the Jamaica Tourist Board.

The polo matches will begin at 2 p.m. with a match of Under-18 players, followed by the adults. A prize-giving will be held following each match. In addition, a DJ will play for the afternoon. Some of the other fun events will include a hat competition for the ladies, an entertaining photo booth with amusing props, and exciting auctions run by an auctioneer

extraordinaire.

Hanover Charities and Chukka Caribbean have hosted the polo match at the Chukka Polo Field in Sandy Bay for years. This partnership not only creates a one-of-a-kind social event in western Jamaica, but the funds raised at the Polo match will provide scholarships for a number of youth in Hanover and St James to pursue tertiary education.

PROSPECTED ATTENDEES

Over 500 people representing the local and international community are expected to attend the event. Combined with the Sugar Cane Ball activities hosted by the Round Hill Hotel & Villas each year, several of their guests are expected to attend the polo matches.

Now in its 61st year, the ball will be staged on Saturday, February 17.

The Chukka Foundation is dedicated to achieving immediate and lasting changes to

the lives of children, youth and families in their local communities by the beneficiaries empowerment through education, scholarships and improving lives, and offering their philanthropic support. The Chukka Foundation also promotes responsible and compassionate care towards animal welfare. In the past, The Chukka Foundation has assisted the Lucea Infant School, Chester Basic School, Sandy Bay Basic School, The Montego Bay Animal Haven, ICC Beach Clean-Up programmes and breast cancer awareness, to name a few.

The Hanover Charities is the largest non-profit organisation in western Jamaica. Hanover Charities, since its inception, has invested millions of dollars to the parish of Hanover. The charity provides help to a number of charitable efforts each year, including school, feeding programmes. The elderly or homeless are served over 600 hearty meals from the Cecile Clare Kitchen of Love.



ASHLEY ANGUIN/PHOTOGRAPHER

Evita's Eva Myers, winner of the Best Hat Competition in 2017.

Tourism stakeholders getting set for Carib Marketplace 2018

REGISTRATION FOR this month's Caribbean Travel Marketplace, to be held at the Puerto Rico Convention Center in San Juan, Puerto Rico, is strong.

Following a meeting with the host committee in San Juan this week, the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA) reported that demand among travel industry stakeholders to do business in the region was encouraging, given the continued interest and registration response for the annual event.

CHTA Director General Frank Comito said plans for Marketplace 2018, to be held from January 30 to February 1, were now in the advanced stages and the association was on track to eclipse the



Frank Comito

1,000-delegate mark before the start of the event. "This speaks not only to the resilience of the Caribbean's bread and butter tourism industry, but also to the

fortitude of the Caribbean's people," Comito remarked before returning to CHTA's headquarters in Miami.

READY TO HOST

Comito observed that Puerto Rico, which was among the islands impacted by September's two Category 5 hurricanes, is on the rebound and more than ready to host this year's edition of Caribbean Travel Marketplace. "It is remarkable what the good people at the Puerto Rico Convention Center District Authority, the Puerto Rico Tourism Company, Meet Puerto Rico, and the Puerto Rico Hotel and Tourism Association have been able to accomplish as they prepare to wel-

come this marquee event to their island," he said.

Close to 500 supplier delegates from more than 200 companies across 30 countries will join another 100-plus media representatives at this year's event.

More than 200 delegates from close to 100 buyer companies, 19 of which are new to the conference, including four new MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions) companies, have registered. Buyer companies hail from Argentina, The Bahamas, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States and Uruguay.

"And there's still more than a

week to register," said Comito, as he encouraged more attendees to leverage the networking opportunities at the event, where buyers (e.g., tour operators, online travel agents and MICE planners) are matched with Caribbean suppliers (e.g., hotels, tour companies and tourism departments) during a busy two-day programme featuring thousands of pre-scheduled appointments.

Caribbean Travel Marketplace is produced by CHTA in collaboration with the Puerto Rico Convention Center District Authority, the Puerto Rico Tourism Company, Meet Puerto Rico, and the Puerto Rico Hotel and Tourism Association.

The event opens on the evening of Tuesday, January 30 and is preceded by educational sessions earlier in the day. For more information, visit

www.chtamarketplace.com or call +1 305 443-3040. Details about registration can be found at <https://www.chtamarketplace.com/registration-fees>.