

The Gleaner
Hospitality Jamaica

KEEPING YOU CONNECTED TO THE BUSINESS OF TOURISM

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8, 2017



TSEP AWARDS TOURISM'S BEST

CONTRIBUTED
Minister of Tourism Edmund Bartlett (centre) with winners of the Tourism Excellence Service Programme 2016, National Organisation, Couples Sans Souci, represented by General Manager Pierre Battaglia, and National Individual winner, Simone Folkes of Sandals Royal Plantation during the awards ceremony at the Hyatt Ziva ballroom in Rose Hall last Saturday night.



Couples Negril staff, among the best in the Caribbean.

CONTRIBUTED

Couples Negril wins Apple Vacations' most coveted award

APPLÉ VACATIONS, America's favourite vacation company, has awarded Couples Negril their Crystal Award for Best Staff & Service Caribbean.

The award is presented to properties that transform a satisfactory vacation experience into an extraordinary one.

This is among the most coveted honours in the travel industry, chosen by hundreds of thousands of Apple vacationers who complete the Apple-provided vacation satisfaction questionnaire.

Recipients of the Crystal Award are known to be instrumental in raising the standards of the travel industry.

"We view the 2016 Apple Crystal Award as testament that our focus on delivering an authentic Jamaican

experience can yield tremendous benefits," said Wayne Williams, general manager of Couples Negril. "We are delighted to be the recipient of this award, and are now even more motivated to continue to build on a truly great Jamaican product."

RESORT GOAL

Couples Resorts' goal to provide a luxurious, romantic and unforgettable all-inclusive vacation is unwavering and unmatched. They have been honoured amongst the best hotels in the world for decades; however, it is their high level of guest satisfaction and extraordinary guest repeat rate that truly substantiate their acclaim.

Couples Resorts, headquartered in Montego Bay, Jamaica, owns and

operates four properties in Jamaica – Couples Tower Isle, Couples Sans Souci, Couples Swept Away and Couples Negril. Pioneered by the legendary Abe Issa, 'the father' of Jamaican tourism, each Couples property is an unsurpassed model of the all-inclusive resorts concept, boldly designed with local inspiration to create a harmonic sense of nature and authentic Caribbean spirit.

For more than 35 years, Couples has delighted guests and refined the Caribbean all-inclusive resort experience by providing unparalleled service, exceptional dining experiences and exclusive added-value inclusions.

For further information please visit <http://couples.com>.

CARICOM lauded heads for recognising tourism's critical contribution

CARICOM HEADS of Government have been lauded for taking the lead in recognising the critical contribution of tourism to the economies of member countries and for their commitment to advancing a regional tourism agenda.

The group was singled out for a special applaud by the region's tourism development agency, and the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA), the umbrella private-sector organisation, following a presentation by Caribbean Tourism Association (CTO) Secretary general Hugh Riley to the Caribbean leaders at their 28th intersessional in Guyana two weeks ago.

The Heads of Government supported the advancement of a series of steps addressing transportation and the facilitation of travel, human resource development, building the creative industries, and the marketing of the Caribbean brand.

They also invited CTO and CHTA to come forth with additional information to address the region's competitiveness and financing for the sustainability of tourism.

URGENT MEETING

They called for an urgent meeting of the Council for Trade and Development-Transportation to address air transport issues in particular, including those related to the tourism sector; and supported the establishment of an interim tourism working group to coordinate with regional public- and private-sector stakeholder groups the development of specific solutions which can be advanced in priority areas.

The group will comprise representation from the CARICOM Secretariat, the CTO and the CHTA and its mandate includes the preparation of a pilot region-



HUGH RILEY

wide public relations and marketing initiative for 2017-2018 for presentation to the heads at their 38th regular meeting in July.

The CARICOM leaders also agreed that public-private sector partnerships, guiding the development and marketing of tourism for the Caribbean, needed to be more effective and requested that the marketing of tourism encompass, in particular, the eco-tourism product of mainland member states of Belize, Guyana and Suriname.

The CHTA and the CTO firmly believe that tourism is a key driver of socio-economic progress, helping destinations and countries to quickly create jobs and businesses, generate tax revenues and support infrastructure improvements to the benefit of residents and visitor. It is a proven tool to lower unemployment, stimulate indigenous entrepreneurial activity, increase foreign exchange earnings, and grow tax revenues for our treasuries.

However, it is a fiercely competitive business, and we are facing the stark reality that we must find ways of maximising the collective strength of the Caribbean, if any and all of us are to truly succeed, said a joint statement from CTO and CHTA.



Red Cap porters are among the group of tourism workers that will benefit from the pension scheme.

BARTLETT

Janet Silvera

Hospitality Jamaica Coordinator

THE TOURISM Enhancement Fund (TEF) is to seed \$1 billion for the pension scheme for tourism workers.

Minister of Tourism Edmund Bartlett made the announcement at the Tourism Service Excellence Programme (TSEP) Awards Ceremony at the Hyatt Ziva Resort in Montego Bay last Saturday night.

“This means that for the first time, the workers of the tourism industry, not just those in the accommodation subsector, but all the workers in every category that contribute to the development of tourism in Jamaica, will have a plan.”

Red Cap porters, craft vendors, ground transportation operators and hotel workers will be this group of beneficiaries.

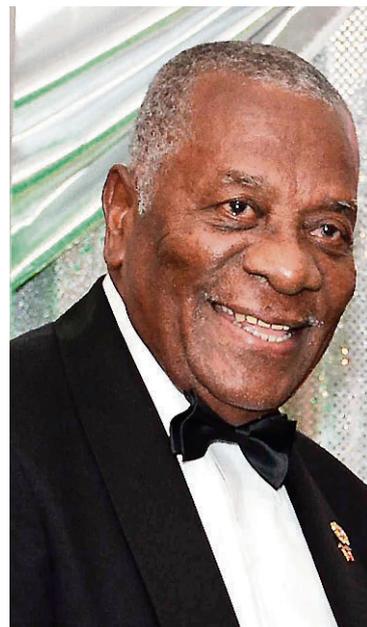
PENSION PLANS

Research shows that only six per cent of tourism workers have pension plans, while many are unable to qualify for National Housing Trust loans.

“Special care must be taken of those who have worked diligently to make the sector the great success that it is,” argued the tourism minister, pointing out that when these workers retire, they will now be able to cope financially.

Having received approval from the Cabinet, the pension scheme is scheduled to come on stream by September 2017. “We are

TEF to pump \$1b into pension scheme for hotel workers



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determined to ensure that all tourism workers feel a part of the vibrancy of the industry,” added Bartlett.

His comments were bolstered by chairman of the TEF, Godfrey Dyer, who lauded the minister for



Craft vendors are set to benefit from the pension scheme for tourism workers.

reintroducing the TSEP days after the organisation he chairs announced its commitment to developing human capital in the tourism industry.

Like the pension scheme that the TEF is investing in, the

organisation has been repositioned to drive the ministry’s mission to foster the growth and development of the industry’s human capital, Bartlett said last week.

TSEP is chief among the many TEF-funded initiatives being

undertaken to improve the welfare of tourism workers, Dyer said.

In his address to the awardees, he stated that the TEF has, through its programmes, started to work with youngsters from as early as the high-school level.

“We will also be playing a pivotal role in ensuring success of the soon-to-be-established Craft Development Institute (CDI) and the first-class Jamaica Centre for Tourism and Innovation that is coming on stream,” Dyer told the gathering.

HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

He said the CDI would support human capital development in areas such as culinary management, spa management and hospitality management.

Optimistic about the future, the TEF chairman said workers in the industry have much to look forward to.

The TEF was established on May 1, 2005, for the sole purpose of implementing the recommendations emanating from the Master Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development, 2002.

The Tourism Master Plan provides the framework in which TEF will fulfil its mandate of promoting growth and development in the tourism sector, encouraging better management of environmental resources in Jamaica, enhancing the country’s overall tourist experience, and providing for the sustainable development of the tourism sector.

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Employee of the Year Denholm Gooden (second right) accepts his prizes from his bosses, Deryk Meany (left), resident manager; Emilio Huhn (second left), area director, AMResorts and Luis Manuel Fernández, representative of the owners.



Human Resources director at Secrets Resorts Andrea Allie-Thorpe presents the Leader of the Quarter award to Kirk Baugh, IT manager, at the hotel's staff awards.

Secrets Resorts ... Surfing at Seven



Pace Band's Kareen Lamme (left) shares lens time with Secrets Resorts and Spa's Suzanne Lawton, preferred club manager at Secrets, during the resort's annual staff awards.

Janet Silvera
Hospitality Jamaica Coordinator

THE MEN outpaced their female counterparts recently copping the top awards at the Secrets Resorts Employee/Leader of the Year Awards Dinner.

Held under the theme, 'Surfing at Seven', Allaine Murray was named 'Leader of the Year', while Denholm Gooden won the coveted 'Employee of the Year' award. Both men representing the Food and Beverage department made their colleagues proud in their pursuit of excellence.

Their closest rivals were Renardo Quarrie, also from food and beverage and Khrishna Gaye-Green, who was recently promoted to laundry manager.

Challenging the waves head on, Gooden is renowned for responding to customer requests in a timely manner. "He is an effective communicator who values the hotel's guests and ensures that they are satisfied and that their needs are met and exceeded," said the hotel's management in a glowing tribute to him.

Gooden's superiors describe him as an above-average employee who is not motivated by money. "He leads by example, serving as a role model, and demonstrates



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Secrets Resorts' Marcia Smith, concierge manager, presents two gift baskets to 'resident' emcee François St Juste (left) and Godfrey Dyer, chairman of the Tourism Enhancement Fund during their annual staff awards.

appropriate behaviours."

His recognition comes weeks after he was promoted to supervise the bar at the new Breathless Resort and Spa, which is expected to be opened this month.

The man who shared the spotlight with him, Murray, a chef

at the resort, was described as ambitious and willing to go the extra mile to achieve both organisational and personal goals.

"He strongly yearns to advance not only his own career, but also that of other employees. With a go-getter attitude, his creativity is



PHOTOS BY JANET SILVERA

Managers giving the staff a treat at the Secrets Staff Awards.



Secrets Resorts staff performing at their annual staff awards.

never stifled," said the resort's management.

The hotel group noted that an employee could have all the talent in the world, but without integrity and authenticity, nothing great will be accomplished. "Even as the waves lap against his feet, he continues to dream, plan and execute," management added.

Focusing on the theme of surfing, guest speaker at the event, Godfrey Dyer, chairman of the Tourism Enhancement Fund (TEF), who address the ballroom packed with staff on behalf of Minister of Tourism Edmund Bartlett, said that the theme connotes the imagery of sport, wherein one rides a wave towards the shore. "Emphasising that your journey may not always have been without ebbs and flows, but you have mastered the art of riding the waves towards your ultimate goal

of providing excellent service."

He pointed out that it is in providing excellent service that makes just over 40 per cent of the island's visitors keep coming back year after year. "And it is excellent service that brings them to Secrets and will keep them coming back," stated the TEF chairman.

He warned them of the danger of complacency, suggesting that the high standard of service they are known for should never waver.

Others sharing the limelight at the awards ceremony included Suzanna Lawton, O'Neil Davis, and Kirk Baugh.

Venesa Blake of the entertainment department won the 'Loyalty Award', Shawya Jacobs-Bernard, for 'Team Spirit', Paul McKayle, 'Most Improved' and Chris Henry, 'Most Congenial'.

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Leader of the Year, Allaine Murray (second right) accepts his prizes from his bosses (from left): Deryk Meany, resident manager; Emilio Huhn, area director, AMResorts, and Luis Manuel Fernández, representative of the owners.



Krishna Gaye-Green, laundry manager, second-place Leader of the Year, with Emilio Huhn, area director for Jamaica, AMResorts.



Assistant Entertainment Director at Secrets Resorts Delrose Bahadure (right) and the resort's entertainment supervisor, Venessa Blake, at the hotel's annual staff awards.

THE BUSINESS OF TOURISM

Tourism an industry value to the whole region

David Jessop
Contributor

AS ODD as it may seem, in the past, tourism has not often been discussed in depth at the highest political levels of CARICOM; leaving the strong impression that the industry's economic centrality was either unwelcome or not understood.

However, last month, when CARICOM Heads of Government met in Guyana, they made clear in their communique for the first time that 'Tourism is a vital sector to the economies of Member States'.

Taken at face value the statement is unremarkable, even obvious; but the language chosen, its inclusion, and the accompanying recommendations made in relation to the challenges the industry now faces, suggest that tourism's significance has at last been formally recognised.

At the February 16-17 meeting, detailed proposals aimed at advancing a regional tourism agenda in a strategic way were presented by the Caribbean Tourism Organisation's (CTO) director general, Hugh Riley. His comments were based on a 13-page paper jointly developed by CTO and the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA) and supported by several heads of government and tourism ministers.

At their summit, the region's leadership embraced the multi-faceted nature of the industry.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

In an important new departure, they agreed also that public-private sector partnerships, guiding the development and marketing of tourism for the Caribbean, were needed, and such an approach was likely to prove more effective than present programmes.

To achieve this, they agreed to support the establishment of an Interim Tourism Working Group that will include the CARICOM Secretariat, CTO and the CHTA, and have as its mandate the co-ordination of all stakeholder groups to develop solutions to the challenges the industry faces.

They also called for the preparation of a pilot, region-wide public relations and marketing initiative for consideration when they next meet in Grenada in July; for air transport issues to be addressed as a matter of urgency, and for regional tourism

marketing to include the eco-tourism product of Belize, Guyana and Suriname.

A few days later, CTO revealed the industry's results for 2016 indicating the nature of the challenge the industry in the region faces.

Although the headline figures were positive, with stop-over arrivals increasing by 4.2 per cent to 29.3 million, and cruise passenger arrivals up by around 1.3 per cent, to approximately 26.3 million, it is clear from the detail that the industry and Caribbean heads were right to be concerned about the underlying trends.

UNEVEN GROWTH

In statements, CTO made clear that growth has been uneven. While Cuba, Turks and Caicos, Guyana and Belize did well, others in the Anglophone and Dutch-speaking Caribbean saw an average 20 per cent decline in their arrival figures. Added to this, the regional tourism body said that traditional markets such as Canada had weakened significantly, occupancy rates in hotels were in decline, there was increasing pressure from disruptors such as Airbnb to take hoteliers' market share, and inter-regional travel remained difficult and costly.

CTO also observed that hotels, which are among the region's most significant direct and indirect employers, saw a decline in their income in 2016 with revenue per available room contracting by 2.6 per cent, occupancy falling by 1.6 per cent to 66.7 per cent; and the average daily rate (ADR) falling by just under a dollar to US\$201.50.

These are worrying developments, especially if, as is now happening, increasing numbers of visitors decide not to stay in hotels at a time when the region's overall stock of hotel rooms is growing; the cruise industry's use of ever larger ships, enables them to out-compete land-based tourism because of the fixed costs and taxation hoteliers experience; and the overall regional arrival figures hide the fact that much of the recent positive growth is attributable to the surge in US arrivals to Cuba.

CARICOM Heads of Government next meet in July in Grenada. Their welcome understanding of the need to give greater priority to the industry, now needs to be rapidly translated into implementable region-wide marketing, training and other much needed programmes if the value the industry brings to the region is to be sustained.



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FILE

Two participants of the Reggae Marathon making a their strides in Negril in 2007.

Reggae Half Marathon among the world's best in 2016

AHEAD OF the mid-March launch of the international promotional campaign for this year's Reggae Marathon, Half Marathon and 10K, the race event has been selected among the Best Half Marathons around the world in 2016.

The award was the result of a survey among members of the 100 Half Marathons Club based in the USA. This is a racing club of members who have completed 100 lifetime half marathons and some members completing up to 300.

"This great news has come as we get ready to kick off a vigorous promotion of this year's sporting event at the Dallas Rock & Roll Marathon on March 17 and 18, with the support of the Jamaica Tourist Board and Reggae Runnerz," said Alfred 'Frano' Francis, race director of Reggae Marathon, Half Marathon and 10K.

Reggae Runnerz comprises runners from various running groups across the USA who come together to 'run ... where the sun meets the sea'.

Francis said during the upcoming promotion in the USA, a representative of the Reggae Marathon team will be at the Dallas Rock n Roll Marathon Expo,

together with the Dallas-based representative of the Jamaica Tourist Board and members of the Dallas-based Reggae Runnerz, who have attended the Jamaican annual race event in previous years.

REGISTRATION INCREASE

Since registration opened on January 1 for the 2017 Reggae Marathon, Half Marathon & 10K, the event has recorded an increase in registration over the 2016 numbers for February.

Last year, more than 2,300 persons from 37 countries registered for the event. Among the countries which sent delegations for the first time were: China, Malaysia, Turkey and Guadeloupe. There were also athletes from South Africa, Colombia, Denmark, Finland, Spain, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg and the Russian Federation, among others.

In 2016, the Reggae Runnerz group of the USA brought a contingent of 342, while first timers included Team Diabetes from Canada. Other notable teams came from China, USA, Japan and France.

Jamaican participants remain the largest supporters of the event, followed by the USA and Canada.



SIP INTO LUXURY

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with WINES



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

RJRGleaner Communications Group's Dervan Malcolm and Terri-Karelle Reid performing emcee duties at the Tourism Excellence Service Programme awards at the Hyatt Ziva Ballroom in Rose Hall last Saturday night.



Dan Durazo, director of communications of Allianz Global, accepts a gift from deputy director of tourism Marcia McLaughlin.



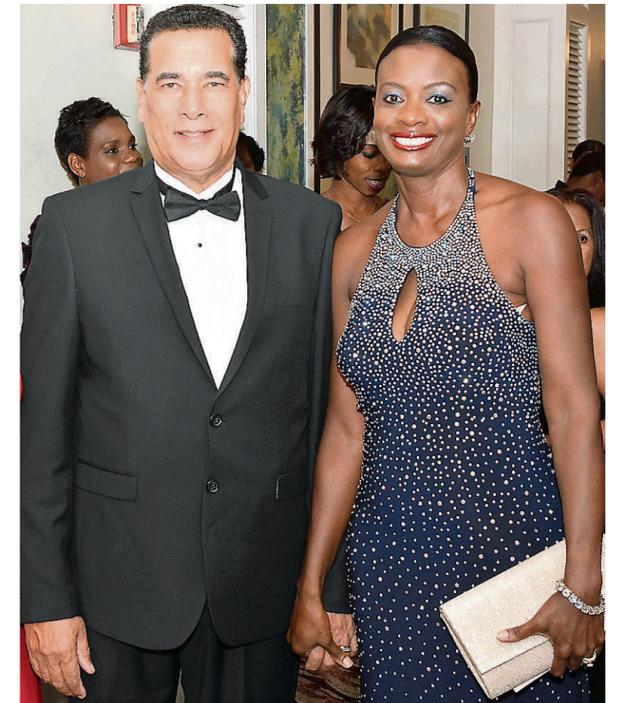
Minister of Tourism Edmund Bartlett with National Individual Tourism Service Excellence Programme winner, Simone Folkes.



National Organisation TSEP winner, Couples Sans Souci represented by General Manager Pierre Battaglia (left), poses with Minister of Tourism Edmund Bartlett.



TSEP regional winners and tourism stakeholders (from left): Wilfred Chambers, Bob Marley Museum; Winsome Wynter, Jamaica Customs Agency; Glenville Edwards, Negril Adventure Divers; Simone Folkes, Sandals Royal Plantation; Jennifer Griffiths, permanent secretary in the Ministry of Tourism; Arthur Thaxter, Trident Hotel; Minister of Tourism Edmund Bartlett; Debbiean Spence-Minott, Appleton Estate Rum Tour; Joy Roberts, acting executive director, Tourism Product Development Company; Lij Keith, Trident Hotel; Pierre Battaglia, Couples Sans Souci and Ricardo Esteban, VIP Attractions.



Mayor of Montego Bay Homer Davis and wife Dr Karlene Grant-Davis.

TSEP AWARD RETURNS WITH A BANG

MASSAGE THERAPIST, Simone Folkes of Sandals Royal Plantation in Ocho Rios, St Ann, was crowned the individual winner of the Tourism Services Excellence Programme (TSEP) award at the official ceremony held at Hyatt Ziva Resort, last Saturday night.

Meanwhile, Couples Sans Souci, renowned as the 'Jewel of Jamaica', copped the prize for the 2016 Champion Organisation.

Folkes came out ahead of Wilfred Chambers of Bob Marley Museum from the Kingston area; Granville Ed of Negril Adventures; hometown favourite, Winsome Wynter of Jamaica Customs Agency; and Troy Thaxter of Trident Hotel in Port Antonio. There were no individual nominees from the south coast.

The finalists for the organisation champion were The Jamaica Pegasus; VIP Attractions Montego Bay; Jakes Treasure Beach; Appleton Estate Rum

Tour; The Boardwalk Village; Sunset at the Palms; Leisure for Pleasure, and Franklyn D. Resorts.

TSEP is geared towards promoting performance excellence within Jamaica's tourism industry. Its strategic focus is on 'winning' every day in the marketplace with high-performing, high integrity, ethical workers and businesses.

WELCOME RETURN

Addressing the audience, Minister of Tourism Edmund Bartlett and Godfrey Dyer, chairman of the Tourism Enhancement Fund, welcomed the return of the programme, which was discontinued during the previous administration.

"I want to say how very pleased I am as the minister at this time to bring back the Tourism Service Excellence Programme to Jamaica," Bartlett said.

He added: "I make no comments about the period of hiatus as it coincided with my sabbatical."



President of the Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association, Omar Robinson addressing the audience at the Tourism Excellence Service Programme awards at the Hyatt Ziva Ballroom in Rose Hall last Saturday night.

"It is crucial that we maintain programmes such as TSEP which have been created to recognise excellence in the delivery of

service in all facets of the industry," Dyer corroborated.

Meanwhile, the tourism minister argued that the recognition of outstanding workers was important as it is the workers who are responsible for the visitor experience.

"I am satisfied that more than 60 per cent of the value of the experience of every visitor to this destination is about service and because I know that the most iconic attraction that Jamaica has is its people and because I am fully convinced that experience represents the new dimension of pull that brings visitors to destinations. That experience represents the real purpose for visits to destinations that people travel far and wide for an experience," the tourism minister remarked.

He attributed the more than 40 per cent visitor return to the destination as a direct result of the hospitality of the workers in the sector.



Tourism Enhancement Fund chairman, Godfrey Dyer, blows out candles on his birthday cake. Sharing in the occasion are Minister of Tourism Edmund Bartlett (standing); Dyer's wife, Odette; and Dr Karlene Grant-Davis, wife of the mayor of Montego Bay.



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Captain Mattocks (right) leads a walking tour through the Scott's Hall Maroon community. The activities include walking tours, ancestral drumming and dancing, time-honoured cooking techniques and cuisine, introduction to traditional herbal healing remedies and introduction to traditional craft techniques.

Destination Jamaica

Home of exciting community-based adventures

JEREMY TAYLOR said he went spelunking during his day trip with Cockpit Country Adventures Tours, a community tourism organisation. As this was his maiden exploration, he was eager to get the adventure started. At the end of his tour he exclaimed, "There are some things that you have to try, if even just once". His sentiments echo an emerging trend in the global travel industry, where travellers are journeying to far places to experience meaningful interactions with the culture and people of a destination.

Like Taylor, visitors are fascinated and intrigued by the stories behind the music, the people, the dance forms, the religious practices, the myriad of indigenous and endemic plants and animals, as well as the ecological sites. And community-based tourism organisations are making the experiences unforgettable.

There are several communities across the island that offer exclusive experiences, including culture, adventure, heritage and farm tours. Here is a sample of the community-induced adventure that awaits: Known as the home of community tourism, Treasure Beach offers a once-a-month farm-to-table dinner on the Saturday closest to the full moon, on-and-off-road cycling tours and community events through the Breds Foundation.

Visitors are captivated by the tour at the Rastafari Indigenous Village, as it gives

JAMAICA
TOURIST BOARD

firsthand experiences on the way of life of this religious group. Many persons are unaware of the treasures that abound in the Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park. The park is a UNESCO-designated World Heritage Site, and is famed for its rich natural habitat of endemic species, as well as a cultural heritage site of the Windward Maroons. Drum and dance ceremonies and the community-operated Maroon Museum attract visitors to the Charles Town Maroons. The Trench Town Culture Yard is a national treasure and was made a national heritage site. This community-based organisation chronicles the birth and history of Jamaica's music icons and their contributions to the development of Jamaica's music genres.

A key advantage of community-based tourism is that it fosters opportunities for Jamaicans, at the community level, to participate more fully in the tourism industry. In lauding the offerings of Jamaica's community tourism, Director of Tourism Paul Pennicook said, "Community tourism offers some of the most authentic interactions for



Participating in the Cockpit Country adventures tours in Trelawny. The Cockpit Country offers towering cliffs, limestone caves, underground rivers and waterfalls.

our visitors and community members. Visitors have the signal privilege to touch, hear, see and taste the heart and soul of Jamaica. With our rich and unique culture, we will always be in demand among the growing number of travellers who desire the *bona fide* community-based experiences we offer."

Community-based tourism is mutually beneficial as while it provides employment for community members, it is also an excellent medium that gives both hosts and guests a

unique opportunity for cultural exchange. As visitors share in the life of these communities, it is impossible for them not to feel at home in a friendly and intimate setting. Activities such as homestays, community tours, the sharing of folklore, and the authentic Jamaican meals, foster the sharing of ideas and information exchanges in which friendships are formed.

So for authentic Jamaican adventures, enjoy the offerings of community-based organisations, if even just once.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Regional public relations manager for Sandals, Beaches and Grand Pineapple Resorts in Negril Jervene Simpson presents to a group of debaters during the National Secondary Students' Council Debate Launch and Grand Social held at the Hanover Youth Information Centre recently.

AT RIGHT: Peta-Gaye Tain (right), training manager at Beaches Negril, responds to career questions from youngsters interested in the tourism industry at the Rhodes Hall High School Career Day.



Sandals, Ministry of Education seek to empower youngsters



Beaches Negril's Garde Manger Keigon Martin conducts a live fruit and vegetable carving demonstration at the Rhodes Hall High School Career Exposition. Looking on is Regional Public Relations Coordinator Renée Deleon.

SANDALS, BEACHES and Grand Pineapple Negril Resorts, through their fruitful partnership with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information, continue to engage adolescents in a series of life- and career-empowerment activities throughout western Jamaica.

The luxury-included resort chain is title sponsor of the third staging of the National Secondary Students' Council (NSSC) Debate. The event, put on by the Hanover-based Youth and Adolescents Policy Division within the ministry, involves 16 schools that will be exposed to topics aimed at increasing civic duties, youth participation, democracy, youth rights in decision making, and social issues affecting the young population.

During the NSSC debate launch and grand social, regional public relations manager for Sandals, Beaches and Grand Pineapple Resorts in Negril Jervene Simpson engaged debaters in an interesting discussion on presentation skills and overcoming the fear factor when speaking in a public forum and during life's inevitable challenges.

The close to 200 students spanning high schools throughout Westmoreland, Hanover, and St James also participated in a social put on by numerous government and privately owned corporations on the grounds of the Hanover Youth Information Centre. The youngsters and their educators were exposed to career and training opportunities within the hospitality and tourism industry and also provided career guidance and tips to the eager group.

"Students, teachers, and other stakeholders present expressed how much they benefited from the presentations. They received much clarity on techniques and strategies they needed to be more effective debaters and also used the actual

presentation as a benchmark when doing their own," shared Donmarie Latouche, youth empowerment officer at the Hanover Youth & Adolescents Policy Division.

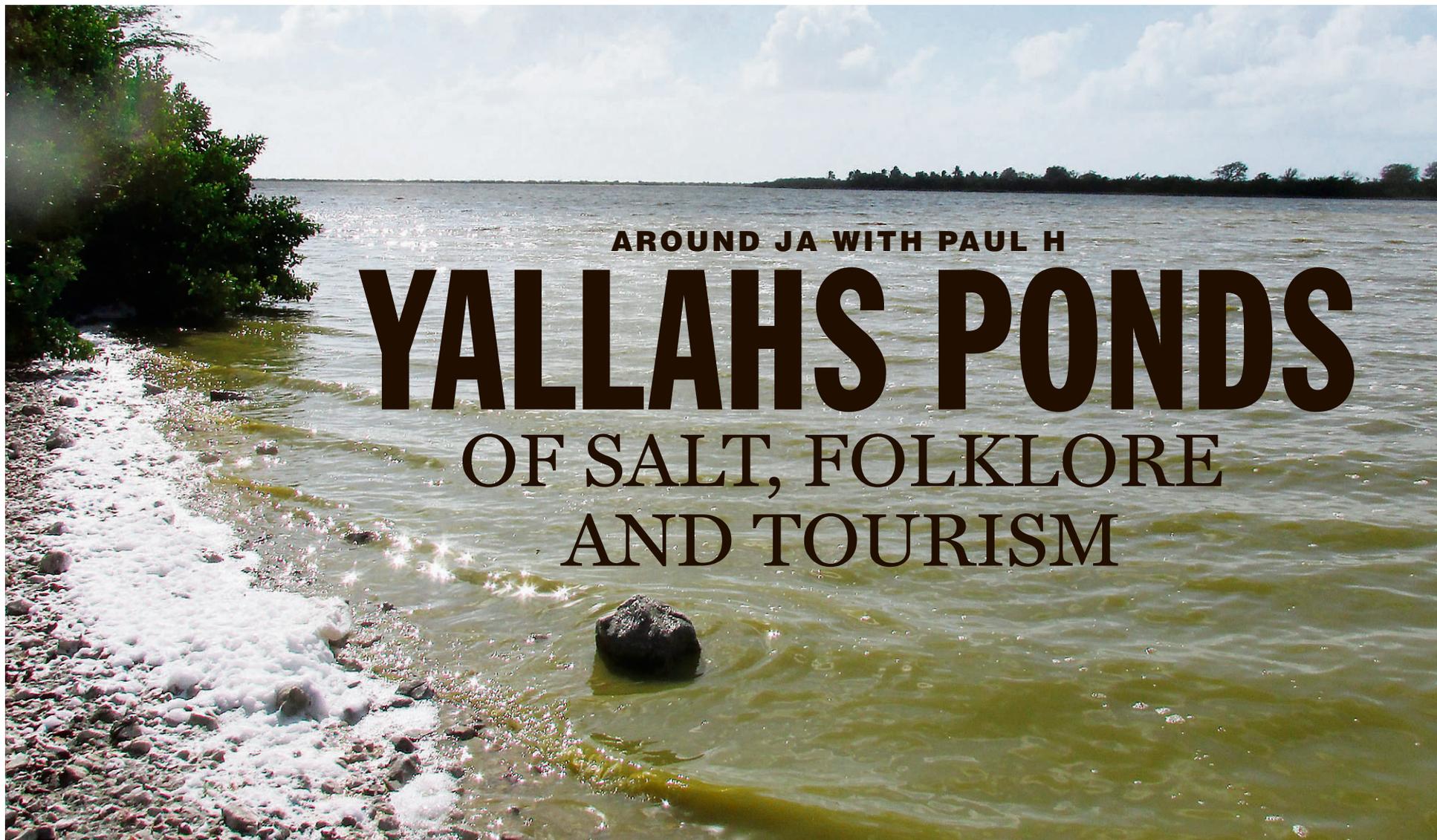
According to Frome Technical's Edward Waite, "The day's event did not only allow us to gather much-needed details on debate and presentation tactics, but through the social, we were able to interact with booth representatives who helped us with questions we had about life after school and what to do now to steer us towards our career goals."

FOCUS ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

In continuing the focus on youth development, the Negril resorts were also key partners in the Rhodes Hall High School's Career Day and Exposition. With the assistance of the resorts' public relations, training and development, and the food and beverage departments, students from grades seven-12 at the institution were given the opportunity to field questions and seek guidance on securing employment in the industry. Students were also able to apply for training opportunities in the hotels.

Youngsters particularly interested in the food and beverage department got a chance to interact with Beaches Negril's garde manger, Keigon Martin, who answered questions on his role in the kitchen and educational/training requirements for his post. Martin also did a live carving demonstration using fruits and vegetables, much to the pleasure of the students.

Camille Drummond, guidance counsellor at the institution, reiterated the importance of hosting career expos and inviting employers into the learning environment. "Many students are interested in a particular profession but do not get the opportunity to speak face-to-face with someone in the field who can answer specific questions," she said.



AROUND JAMAICA WITH PAUL H

YALLAHS PONDS

OF SALT, FOLKLORE AND TOURISM

It is said that the bigger pond at Yallahs in St Thomas is 10 times saltier than the sea.

PHOTOS BY PAUL H. WILLIAMS

TO THE southeast of the town of Yallahs in St Thomas are two ponds of briny water, one is much bigger than the other. They are well known as the Yallahs Ponds. Their existence, a source of great fascination for locals and visitors alike, is steeped in myths and folklore that some people actually believe. I have had a few heated arguments over them, and invariably I won. I actually love the romanticisation of the two-brother stories, but I am an eternal realist.

There is absolutely no truth to the stories of the two brothers who fought bitterly over inherited lands that sank below sea level, thus becoming ponds, so none of them inherited the lands. Another version of the legend is that one of the brothers had an affair with the other's wife while he was away in Kingston. Devastated by his brother's betrayal, he cried so hard that his tears turned into two ponds in which the offending brother and his wife drowned.

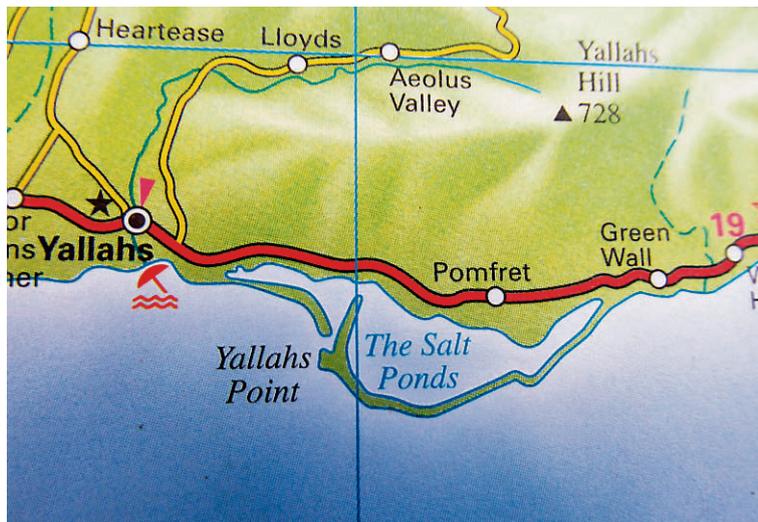
Yet another angle is that one

brother brutally chopped the other to death, thus the red colour that the ponds assume at times. But nothing could be farther from the truth. My research has revealed that the colours of the water, ranging from brownish, greenish, pinkish, yellowish, and reddish, depending on the saline and bacteria levels. So much for romance and symbolism. The most plausible explanation is the one that says the land where the ponds are sank during the 1692 earthquake. The two pockets of seawater then became super-saline because of evaporation.

The bigger one has a maximum depth of 14 feet, and is 10 times saltier than the sea, while the smaller has a maximum of four feet. It is not as salty as the sea on the surface, but after three feet it is. Their ecology is very complex and unusual. Only certain creatures can live within them. They are replete with fascinating organisms, such as the *archaeobacteria*. In 2011, The University of the West Indies operated a microscopic brine shrimp pilot



Froth at the edge of the small pond at Yallahs Point in St Thomas.



The Yallahs Ponds are to be found at Yallahs Point, southeast of the town of Yallahs in St Thomas.

project in the ponds.

They were originally two detached bodies of water, separated from the sea by a narrow strip of land called a berm, but in October 1902, they emitted an overpowering stench that wafted all the way to Kingston. It was eventually found that hydrogen sulphide in the big pond, created by a species of bacteria that proliferates in rain water, was the cause of the malodorous air. To release the stagnant water from the big pond, a channel was created between it and the smaller one, and another between the smaller one and the sea. Since then, they have not been two ponds independent of each other.

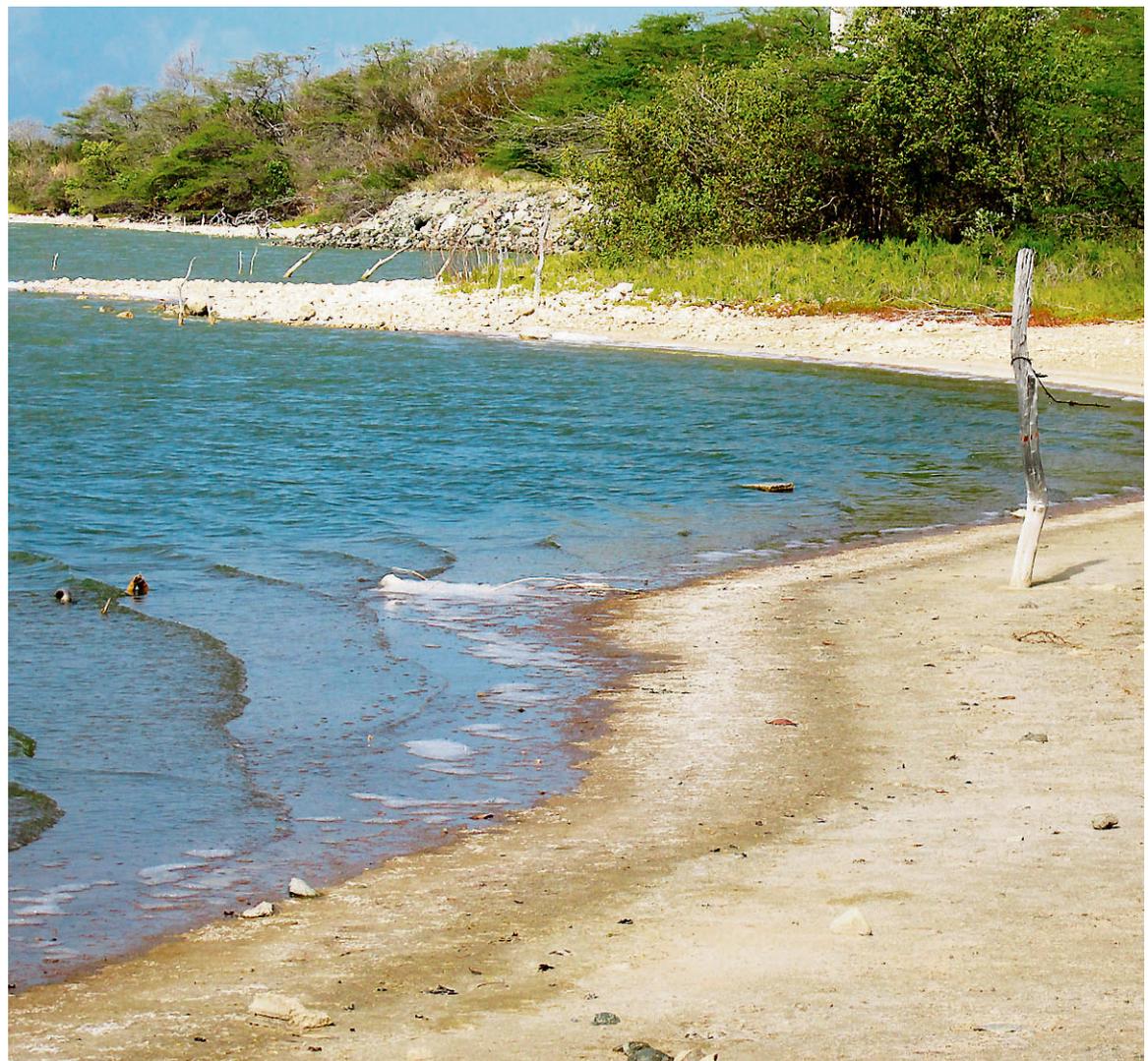
In 2013, when another nauseating odour permeated the Corporate Area, it was found that a build-up of hydrogen sulphide, just like in 1902, was the cause. Apparently, the gap between the small section and the sea was blocked by sand and debris, thus preventing seawater from flowing into the ponds to 'purify' it. In the dry season, when the water level is

low, the water becomes saltier, because of evaporation. The excessive growth of algae in the ponds causes the manufacturing of hydrogen sulphide, which escapes into the air.

SMALLER POND

When I visited recently, the smaller pond had a dark yellowish shade, white, sud-like substances were frothing at the edge of the water, and millions of salt crystals glistened on the ground. Under the clear foreshore water, man-made objects are partially embedded in a flat, smooth expanse of rock. How did they get into the rock, which seems to grow around them?

And with all the legends, folklore, and fascination ecology of flora and fauna, and the natural beauty of the brother's ponds, why are they not marketed as a tourist attraction in St Thomas? This question must not be taken with a grain of salt as I did with the salty folklore surrounding the Yallahs Ponds.



Salt crystals glisten on a beach of the small pond at Yallahs, St Thomas.



A section of the berm that separates the Yallahs Ponds from the sea.



PHOTOS BY PAUL H. WILLIAMS

At the foreshore of the small pond at Yallahs there is a smooth, flat piece of rock in which man-made objects are partially embedded.

When I visited recently, the smaller pond had a dark yellowish shade, white, sud-like substances were frothing at the edge of the water, and millions of salt crystals glistened on the ground.



It is said that the colours of the salt ponds at Yallahs in St Thomas vary according to their saline and bacterial levels.



For nature-loving tourists, these two villas say it all. It is a real jungle out there.

PHOTOS BY PAUL H. WILLIAMS

KANOPI HOUSE

A CHIC JUNGLE EXPERIENCE

Paul H. Williams
Hospitality Jamaica Writer

ON THE eastern hillside overlooking the Blue Lagoon and the Caribbean Sea, there is a jungle of a massive variety of plants. Tall trees – including 100-foot banyans and bamboos – compete for the sunlight, lianas wrap and embrace tree trunks studded with epiphytes, aerial roots dangle from limbs, and parasitic and symbiotic plants co-exist within the place where

magenta ginger lilies thrive. Through the breaks in the thick foliage, mesmerising vistas of parts of the Blue Lagoon, the sea, and Princess Nina Island are visible.

TEEMING WITH WILDLIFE

The expansive cluster of plants seems virginal. In them, ring-tail pigeons and other winged creatures teem, feasting on an abundance of seeds. And in the jungle, concrete steps meander up and down the slopes leading to six fabulous bungalows, nestled among the

greenery. Together they are called Kanopi House, located on the Cognosanti coast near Zion Hill in the ultra-green parish of Portland.

Because of the eco-friendly essence of the place, nature is well preserved. Some of the units are deliberately constructed to be integrated with the trees. General Manager Timothy Blake said though the jungle is managed, it is not maintained, thus retaining its authenticity. The pathways are free of encumbrances and hazards,



One of the mesmerizing vistas to be seen from the dining deck at Kanopi House.



Service with a smile. Chereika Chambers serves a guest at the bar.

bearing in mind the safety of guests.

The mostly board structures are exquisitely designed, decorated and furnished with handcrafted piece – truly jungle chic. It is the best of both worlds, elegance in the heart of the rustic. And no two villas are alike, some are even named for the wood from which they are made, such as ‘Sweetwood’, ‘Almond’ and ‘Spanish Elm’. The others are ‘Hibiscus’, ‘Hummingbird’ and ‘Upper Deck’, which is the most elevated.

They all have a veranda from which you see the tops of trees. Inside the Great Room, with its wall-length wooden jalousie windows, you feel like you are also outside, especially with this ‘huge’ wooden crocodile lurking beside your luxurious bed, on which you can lie, with eyes closed, as you listen to raindrops falling on leaves. Heavenly!

The bungalows are all firmly perched on columns because of the steep topography of the land, making them appearing to be atop the trees, thus Kanopi (canopy) House. Each has hot water, air-conditioning, fans, a fully stocked kitchen, a refrigerator, and a coffee brewer, and Bose Sound equipment and an iPod loaded with international music. In terms of accommodation, there are one- and



General Manager of Kanopi House Timothy Blake says the stay at Kanopi House is a ‘cultural experience’.

two-bedroom units with flexible bed spaces.

Other features are a nature trail that loops around the villas, a restaurant and bar that has a lounge area and an elevated dining terrace, a yoga deck and a gazebo near the edge of the Blue Lagoon, around which guests may be taken by two boats, *Boxer* and *Daniel*. And from the boats, some of the villas can be partially seen among the lush vegetation.

The stay at Kanopi House, according to Blake, is a cultural experience, which includes Jamaican and continental breakfasts. The food served is from the market to the table. And in the kitchen at Kanopi House, overlooking the sea, seafood is a staple. It is the ultimate tree house experience.



Weston Panton is one of the people who keeps the grounds of Kanopi House in tip-top shape.



Inside of one of the villas at Kanopi House.

PHOTOS BY PAUL H. WILLIAMS



Inside this villa you get the feeling that you are also outside.



The dining deck at Kanopi House rises above, and are surrounded by, trees.



Karolin Troubetzkoy



Richard Kahn

FILE

Applications open for CHTAEF Tourism Scholarship

THE CARIBBEAN Hotel and Tourism Association Education Foundation (CHTAEF) has advised the application deadline for its scholarship programme is Thursday, March 30.

Scholarships are open to Caribbean students and industry professionals pursuing higher education or professional development in the hospitality and tourism field and are awarded with support from CHTAEF sponsors and supporters.

In a joint statement, CHTAEF chairman Richard Kahn and Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA) president Karolin Troubetzkoy stated: "We are extremely grateful for the support we received from hotels over the past year for the Education Foundation. We wish to particularly single out corporate partners Interval International and Virgin Holidays for their unstinting commitment to Caribbean education."

APPLICATIONS

Applications, which are available from local hotel associations throughout the Caribbean or via www.caribbeanhotelandtourism.com/about-the-foundation/apply-for-scholarship, must be submitted with the approval of the applicant's local hotel association in order to be considered.

Past recipients have attended accredited colleges and universities throughout the United States, the Caribbean and around the world, with

a concentration on tourism and hospitality-related studies. The foundation also has partner arrangements with a number of schools, including Johnson & Wales University, Monroe College and Florida International University, where students may be eligible to receive additional scholarship support, based upon their award through the Foundation. Scholarships are also available for industry professionals, including those pursuing internationally recognised certifications.

TRANSCRIPTS

Reapplying scholarship recipients who are continuing their education and received a CHTAEF scholarship in 2016 need to provide a copy of their most recent transcripts to verify their academic progress. The school transcripts can be emailed to foundation@caribbeanhotelandtourism.com.

In 2016, CHTAEF awarded 28 scholarships to Caribbean-based students for a total of US\$130,352 in funding. This enabled Caribbean nationals to pursue higher education in hospitality and tourism fields.

CHTAEF provides academic, professional development, tourism and hospitality teachers, work experience placements and internship awards to Caribbean nationals who demonstrate a strong commitment to the industry. Scholarships range, on average, from US\$500 to \$5,000 and are exclusively used towards tuition costs.

Barbados celebrates 2017: The Year of Sports

ON THE heels of a successful Run Barbados in December, comes 2017: The Year of Sports. This designation is one of the pillars of the Barbados Tourism Marketing Inc (BTMI)'s comprehensive three-year sports tourism plan.

In keeping with current tourism trends, and a growing traveller appetite for adventure and activity, the BTMI has identified key events aimed at capitalising on available infrastructure and resources to generate additional business for Barbados.

The Year of Sports 2017 will feature a blend of established calendar favourites, and new, carefully-crafted events, covering interests from watersports to cricket and beach tennis. These new events include the OK Dinghy World Championships, the Golden Oldies World Cricket Festival, Barbados Pro World Surf League 3000QS, the Barbados Beach Tennis Open, Barbados Beach Wellness Festival, the Barbados Festival of Cycling, Dragon World Championships 2017 and the Barbados Open Club Championship.

OK DINGHY WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS (MAY 25-31) AND FINN WORLD MASTERS CHAMPIONSHIP (JUNE 3-9)

The OK Dinghy International Association (OKDIA) is the world organisation for the OK-Dinghy class. OK Class Worlds travels to various destinations around the world each year and it is expected that this event will attract at least 100 of the world's best sailors to compete against each other.

GOLDEN OLDIES WORLD CRICKET FESTIVAL (MAY 7-14)

Following a successful bid in 2014, Barbados was announced as the host venue for the 2017 edition of the Golden Oldies World Cricket Festival. Held every two years, the competition is geared towards those over the age of 35 from around the world, who love the game of cricket. To date there are 32 overseas teams registered for the event.

BARBADOS PRO WORLD SURF LEAGUE 3000 QS (APRIL 16-21)

The World Surf League qualifying world tour is a combination of events which take place at various locations

around the world to pick the top finisher to join the elite Samsung Galaxy Championship Tour. The 3,000 events are among some of the highest rated qualifying events throughout the year.

Scheduled to be contested in both the men's and women's divisions over an eight-day period, this will be a major ground-breaking event for Barbados and presents a massive opportunity to further promote the island as a world-class surfing destination.

THE BARBADOS BEACH TENNIS OPEN (JUNE 26-JULY 2)

This invitational beach tennis tournament capitalises on what is essentially a relatively new sport that is growing rapidly in the European and South American regions, namely Brazil. Beach tennis combines physical elements of tennis and beach volleyball with a fun, party atmosphere.

The Barbados Beach Tennis Open is expected to feature some of the world's best male and female beach tennis players, competing in both doubles and mix-doubles.

DRAGON WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS 2017 (OCTOBER 28-30)

The popularity of Stand Up Paddle (SUP) Boarding continues to rise. Utilising inflatable SUPs developed by the Red Paddle Co, this event will be the first of its kind to be staged in the region. The Dragon World Series will see teams from around the world competing to have the chance to take part in the first dedicated team World Championships in Barbados and be crowned the first Dragon World Champions.

THE BARBADOS BEACH WELLNESS FESTIVAL (SEPTEMBER 2-3)

Global trends continue to show an increased level of participation in health and wellness activities. Travel for health and wellness as the primary motivation is also on the increase. In response to these trends, Barbados will be hosting a wellness festival over a two-day period this September. The festival will feature yoga sessions from beginner to expert level, including SUP yoga, Thai yoga bodywork, tai chi and capoeira.