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WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2019

Water park, new rooms highlight RIU Ocho Rios'

J\$11.22B UPGRADE

'We treat Jamaicans as royals'

Sunset at the Palms celebrates 15th anniversary

Caribbean's largest tourism marketing event on track for The Bahamas



Water park, new rooms highlight RIU Ocho Rios' **J\$11.22B UPGRADE**



New adult water park at RIU Ocho Rios
PHOTO BY ASHLEY ANGUIN



A family room with two double beds at the recently renovated RIU Ocho Rios in St Ann.



Niurka Garcia-Linton, director of sales.
PHOTO BY CARL GILCHRIST

CARL GILCHRIST

Hospitality Jamaica Writer

A SPANKING new water park and 45 new rooms that bring the room stock to 901, are the main features of the J\$11.22-billion refurbishing exercise recently completed at RIU Ocho Rios.

Additionally, though, there has been a complete renovation of the rooms and other areas of the hotel as the brand pushes the property for a greater share of the family vacation business.

The hotel reopened September 21, after being closed for the refurbishing exercise on April 29, and now boasts 901 rooms.

Niurka Garcia-Linton, director of sales for RIU Hotels in Jamaica, says the amount spent on the refurbishing is equivalent to what is spent to construct a new hotel and

shows that RIU has a lot of confidence in the Jamaican market.

“Jamaica is a key destination for RIU,” she told **Hospitality Jamaica**. “RIU came into the island in 2001 and 18 years later we have six hotels, we have over 3,000 rooms

inventory in the destination, and we believe this is a destination with great potential and this is why.”

The total cost of the renovation is close to US\$85m, which usually would be the cost

PLEASE SEE **UPGRADE**, 3



New pool bar at the RIU Ocho Rios. PHOTO BY CARL GILCHRIST

UPGRADE

CONTINUED FROM 2

of a brand new hotel, and the fact that this is just a renovation speaks not only to the investment, but the trust that we have on the destination.”

According to Garcia-Linton:

“One of the most important announcements that we have to make which has us very, very excited, is that now we have the first RIU water park, the Splash; and it has waterslides for adults, it has the section for kids. We also have close to that area the Riuland that hosts and takes care of children between the ages of four and 12; and one of our new



The children section of the new water park at RIU Ocho Rios. PHOTO BY ASHLEY ANGUIN

features is the Riu4U, which actually is for teenagers; which is a segment of the market that usually wanders around the hotel without much to do and not knowing what can be done. So now we have activities for children, we have activities for adults and teenagers as well.”

The new-room additions features two-bedroom family rooms capable of accommodating six persons.

Restaurants have been upgraded with the Mandalay restaurant, which serves Asian cuisine, expanded to facilitate 108 seats.

“For those that have been here before, you would be amazed to

see how the property looks now, it is a complete and full renovation,” Garcia-Linton said. “We have changes in all the rooms in terms of all the floors, the furniture, the features on the walls, everywhere you look, basically, it is a completely new, fresh look that the property has.”

‘We treat Jamaicans as ROYALS’

RIU hails impact of the local market on its business

Carl Gilchrist
Hospitality Jamaica Writer

WITH SIX hotels and over 3,000 rooms available locally, RIU Hotel

caters to the major tourism markets across the world, the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

The brand, however, has maintained its interest in the local



Sections of the recently renovated RIU Ocho Rios. PHOTOS BY ASHLEY ANGUIN

market and is arguably the leading hotel brand catering to Jamaicans both at home and those living in the diaspora.

After being closed for five months for refurbishing, RIU Ocho Rios, with 901 rooms, reopened on September 21 with a 60 per cent occupancy. Half of those were Jamaicans, Niurka Garcia-Linton, director of sales for RIU Hotels in Jamaica, confirmed, adding that it was not unusual.

“Our local market is one of our most important markets. They have



A view from one of the top floors of the RIU Ocho Rios.



Children's play area.

PLEASE SEE **ROYALS**, 4

RIU MoBay to close April for renovation

To reopen as adults-only property

CARL GILCHRIST

Hospitality Jamaica Writer

RIU MONTEGO Bay will close in April 2020 for a refurbishing exercise and reopen in September as an adults-only property, according to Niurka Garcia-Linton, director of sales for RIU Hotels in Jamaica.

The closure is similar to what took place at

RIU Ocho Rios earlier this year to facilitate a US\$85m upgrade. However, the amount to be spent on the Montego Bay property has not been disclosed.

“Once we close RIU Montego Bay for renovation next year April and open in September, we can safely say that the entire RIU line in Jamaica is going to be either fully renovated or brand new,”

Garcia-Linton explained.

“One of the main things that will be happening when we close RIU Montego Bay is that up to the moment of closure that hotel has always been a family hotel; however, when it opens, it’s going to open as an adults-only.”

RIU has two main brands in Jamaica, the Classic brand and the Palace brand, which

is the high-end hotel with suites and junior suites and 24-hour room service.

The Palace brand includes RIU Palace Tropical Bay in Negril and Palace Jamaica in Montego Bay. The Classic is the family brand that includes RIU Negril, RIU Ocho Rios and RIU Montego Bay. There is also the Classic adults-only property, RIU Reggae in Montego Bay.



New pool bar at RIU Ocho Rios. CONTRIBUTED

ROYALS

CONTINUED FROM 3

been very loyal since Riu came into the destination in 2001 and Ocho Rios, because of the proximity to Kingston, is actually their favourite,” Garcia-Linton told **Hospitality Jamaica**.

“The local market is among the top five markets that we host in Jamaica and it is really incredible to see the support that the local market has given us through the years, and we do appreciate that support. We believe that RIU is one of those chains where value for money is really real. I believe,

also, that we have made it possible for Jamaicans to vacation in their backyard, this is why we have very aggressive (vacation) packages all year round.”

RIU Ocho Rios has extended a hand to local travel agents who toured the newly renovated property last week to see the upgrade firsthand and to get tips on how to sell the product to Jamaicans. Traditionally, local travel agents provide a lot of local business for the hotel.

“We have a very good relationship with the local travel agents and we respect that channel,” Garcia-Linton noted.

Among the facilities that the hotel has put in place to make Jamaicans feel comfortable when vacationing there is the cuisine that features local



Riu dancers showcasing the rich Jamaican culture.

food and fruits across breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

“We treat Jamaicans as royals, which they are, and everywhere they go we have Jamaican corners here;

from breakfast, lunch and dinner, you can get a piece of Jamaica.

“I have been in Jamaica 21 years, I’m from Cuba and I have been in the hospitality industry since

I came to Jamaica in 1998, and I didn’t see at the buffet dasheen, guineps and star apple until I came to work for RIU,” Garcia-Linton explained.



Sunset at the Palms 15th anniversary awardees share lens time with Minister of Tourism Edmund Bartlett (centre); President of the Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association (JHTA), Omar Robinson (left); Ian Kerr, managing director (second right); and Hotel Manager Sharon Powell (third right). PHOTOS BY ASHLEY ANGUIN

Sunset at the Palms celebrates *15th anniversary*



Sunset at the Palms' Sharon Powell and Andre Dhanpaul.

MINISTER OF Tourism Edmund Bartlett, in highlighting what he called tourism's "unprecedented growth in arrivals and earnings," said this could not be done without the sector's "dedicated workers" who remain the key ingredient in the continued success of the sector.

Bartlett was speaking at the 15th anniversary celebration of the Sunset at the Palms in Negril recently.

Lauding the dedicated employees who were recognised for long service and outstanding contribution to the sector, the minister announced that the country has welcomed 700,000 more visitors over the last three years and is set to earn US\$3.7 billion by the end of the year, representing an almost doubling of foreign exchange over the same period.

"We have been targeting five million visitors and earning US\$5 billion by 2021, and we are already at 4.5 million visitors of the five million and US\$3.7 billion of the US\$5 billion," Bartlett noted.

"The growth in our arrivals and earnings is

PLEASE SEE **PALMS**, 6



Tobian Brooks looks stunning in an African caftan.



From left: Minister of Tourism Edmund Bartlett; Sunset at the Palms' Manager Sharon Powell; and the resort's managing director, Ian Kerr.

PALMS

CONTINUED FROM 5

underpinned by strategic targets set in my 5x5x5 plan. In 2016, our target was to bring in that 5 billion in earnings by 2021."

Current data from the Jamaica Tourist Board has forecast growth in stopover arrivals for September to December at seven per cent, or 807,796, which would end calendar year 2019 with 2.68 million arrivals, or an 8.4 per cent increase over 2018. The earnings from the full year of stopover arrivals is estimated at US\$3.49 billion, or a 12 per cent increase over 2018, Bartlett shared.

"Based on these figures, tourism has become the leading contributor to the growth in GDP [gross domestic product] in Jamaica. We recognise also that with this growth comes an even greater responsibility to ensure safety, security and seamlessness in the destination, and we remain committed to keeping our enviable record of visitor safety," he added.

Sunset at the Palms resort was the first in the world to receive certification for environmentally sustainable tourism by the UK's Green Globe. The resort has also won the prestigious Governor General's Award for overall architectural design, among many others. The management of the hotel, led by Ian Kerr and Sharon Powell, recognised several members of staff for their years of service to the hotel.



From left: Jamaica Hotel & Tourist Association (JHTA) President Omar Robinson, Jamaica Tourist Board Regional Manager Odette Dyer, Carol Slee, vice-president of sales, Sunset Palms, and Godfrey Dyer, chairman of the Tourism Enhancement Fund.



ABOVE: From left: Lisa Gardner, Sam Wates and wife Laura.

LEFT: A fabulous Kyla Angel at the Sunset at the Palms 15th anniversary celebration.



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A view from the upper floor.
PHOTOS BY JANET SILVERA



AS NEGRIL celebrated the opening of Jamaica's first medical cannabis wellness resort last Friday, one government minister is suggesting that it is not far-fetched the country could become the medical cannabis treatment tourism capital of the world.

The facility, Doc's Place Wellness Centre and Apollon Formularies Jamaica, is located at West End Negril and is directed by medical doctor and cannabis clinician, Dr Stephen Bamhill.

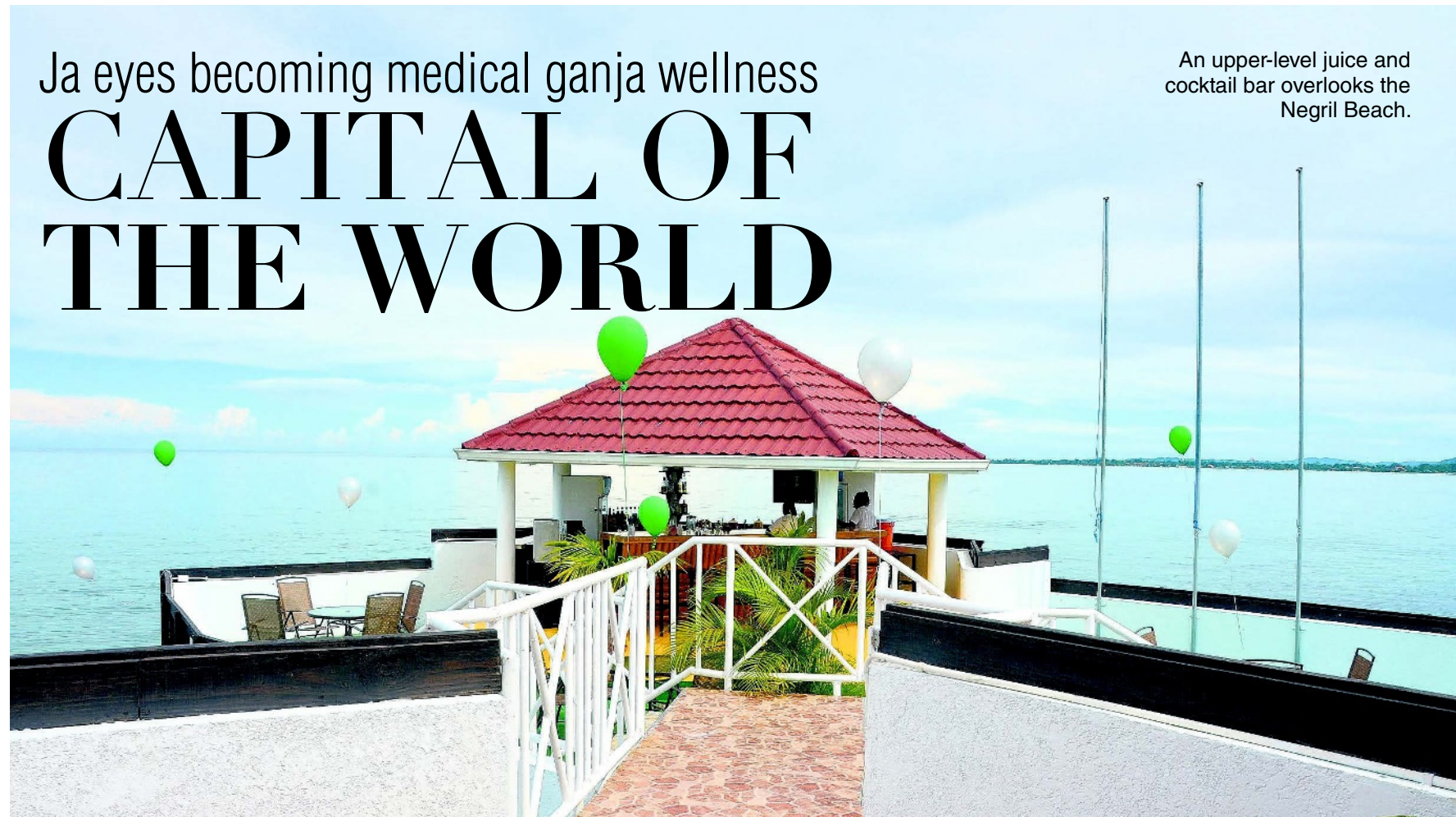
It is regarded as a Global Centre of excellence for medical cannabis therapy. Speaking at the opening, state minister in the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries (MICAF), Floyd Green, said Jamaica would be unbeatable as a cannabis treatment destination, due to the quality of its medical cannabis formulations and its distinct advantage in tourism, as the island is ranked among the best tourist destinations in the world.



The seawater infinity pool at the facility overlooks the ocean.

Ja eyes becoming medical ganja wellness CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

An upper-level juice and cocktail bar overlooks the Negril Beach.



The Doc's Place Wellness Centre and Apollon Formularies at West End Road in Negril.

"You can't beat us in relation to our services industry; you can't beat us in relation to the quality of our ganja. Now, when we are able to develop places such as Doc's Place, where people can come to the best part of the world, they can be treated for all the things that we now know, without a doubt, cannabis is best at treating," he said.

According to him, the reality dictates that instead of having treatment dispensed in a cold, dreary part of the world, which does not aid in the wellness process, coming to Jamaica and getting a full wellness package is the better option. "That is what is on offer here today and this is our natural competitive advantage. It cannot be recreated anywhere else in the world," he added.

Green said the cannabis research and development component attached to the facility, sends a clear signal that this is the direction in which Jamaica needs to go in terms of continuing to develop its strains, among other things.

"We want to encourage more investors to look at this end of the industry. Yes, we understand, we want to see dispensaries; we want to see herb houses; but where we need to make our international mark is research and development," he stated.

He asserted that all of that feeds into

wellness. "The food that you will eat and the medications that we would develop right here from our local strains ... This is what will ensure that all over the world will continue to call the name of Jamaica in relation to ganja; but that Jamaica will be known as the medical marijuana centre of the entire world. That has to be our vision and our direction," Green added.

In his address, Dr Barnhill said the six-bedroom inn will accommodate people from across Jamaica and the globe; who want to be treated with medical cannabis, and will also enable the seven connected Jamaican doctors to be able to make house calls.

"This is a facility that is unique in the world. It is a medical cannabis wellness resort; it is a combination facility. We treat patients here; we are not a dispensary. We have seven doctors on our staff, well-respected doctors on the island of Jamaica. Everybody is licensed and every single person that is treated in this facility gets a prescription for their treatment," he explained.

Members of the medical support team include neurosurgeon Dr Anthony Hall, Dr Marjorie Vassell, Dr Dingle Spence, Dr Woodworth Wilson and Dr Alfred Dawes; and according to Dr Barnhill, the treatment they will offer is holistic.

"The treatment here includes all of the food, because we change your diet to a healthy diet; we change your water; we change a lot of things about your entire body. It's not just about medical cannabis. It's about the overall well-being of the patient," he explained.

The facility includes a cannabis wellness massage therapy room with cannabis oil yoga as a part of the healing process; a saltwater infinity pool and seawater Jacuzzi with water pumped from the sea, as well as its processing and extraction facility and laboratory.

Dr Barnhill said the facility is expected to begin clinical trials for prostate and



State Minister in the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries, Floyd Green (front right), and head of the Doc's Place Wellness Centre and Apollon Formularies, Dr Stephen Barnhill (front left), cut the ribbon, marking the official opening of the centre. Other stakeholders, including Member of Parliament Dr Wykeham McNeill share in the occasion. CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Rastafarians serve guests italo food at the Doc's Place Wellness Centre and Apollon Formularies opening. A healthy diet will be a key component of the therapy offered at the facility.

breast cancer, and chronic inflammation, as soon as the Ministry of Health gives the go-ahead. He said his company will, as part of its humanitarian outreach, establish a process whereby indigent persons from Jamaica can apply to be treated cost-free.

"We will have a committee set up [and comprised] of Jamaican people, and people can apply to that committee if they can't afford treatment, and they will be able to be treated," he said.



One of the six rooms available for guests who come for cannabis therapy at the Doc's Place Wellness Centre.

Port Antonio welcomes Scenic Eclipse luxury discovery yacht

The 'Scenic Eclipse' luxury discovery yacht docks at the Errol Flynn Marina in Port Antonio. This is the first vessel Port Antonio received to jump-start the 2019 cruise season. **CONTRIBUTED**

THE *SCENIC Eclipse* luxury discovery vessel from Scenic Cruises out of Europe made its maiden visit to Port Antonio earlier this month. The six-star, ultra-luxury mega yacht is claimed to be the world's safest and most technologically advanced discovery yacht.



Montego Bay serves as backdrop for the Jersey Mike's Jamaica classic

JAMAICA'S TOURIST capital, Montego Bay, will once again host the third staging of the Jersey Mike's Jamaica Classic. One of the top college basketball pre-conference season events, the weekend tournament will take place from Friday, November 22, to Sunday, November 24, at the Montego Bay Convention Centre.

This year's tournament, which will be headlined by Southeastern Conference powerhouse Louisiana State, has also attracted the likes of Mountain West Conference leader Utah State, Conference USA title contender North Texas, and Rhode Island.



Action from last year's Jersey Mike's Jamaica Classic preseason conference tournament at the Montego Bay Convention Centre. **CONTRIBUTED**



St Maarten hosted a successful CHTAEF training. CONTRIBUTED

More Caribbean professionals complete hospitality training

HUNDREDS OF Caribbean tourism professionals are honing their skills in cutting-edge customer service training sessions presented by the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association Education Foundation (CHTAEF).

The foundation provides people throughout the region with an awareness of the industry's varied career options as well as technical and professional development opportunities for those already in the tourism sector.

Following its successful training sessions in St Lucia and St Maarten, CHTAEF's next round of training is being held in Grenada

and Tobago this week.

CHTAEF Chairperson Karolin Troubetzkoy said the workshops recognised the natural hospitality of Caribbean people and how it could be enhanced to meet the changing needs of today's traveller. The sessions also presented participants with new skills to master as they strive to surpass guest expectations.

With support from the Tourism Enhancement Fund (TEF) and the Saint Lucia Hospitality & Tourism Association (SLHTA), CHTAEF assembled over 160 St Lucian hospitality workers last month to help

polish their skills in a series of guest service training sessions, conducted by Louise John and Suzanne Shillingford-Brooks of Talkabout & Earth Solutions.

Dubbed 'Heartfelt Guest Care to Welcome the World', the training – launched by CHTAEF in partnership with Virgin Holidays – gave hospitality team members, supervisors, managers, and owners the knowledge and the skills needed to best serve a new and diverse generation of customers.

In St Maarten, with the support of Interval International, individual training workshops were created for professionals working at the

front office, the engineering and housekeeping departments, and supervisors.

At the end of the successful training of close to 90 professionals, Troubetzkoy endorsed the need for continuing educational programmes for tourism professionals.

"Our industry is flourishing, but there will always be competing forces out there, so it is very important for us to ensure our hospitality workforce is well educated and prepared to ensure the Caribbean region retains its position at the top of the world's most desirable vacation destinations," reminded Troubetzkoy.

She highlighted the importance of sponsors such as Virgin Holidays and Interval International for opening doors not only for many young people, but also for hospitality workers already in the industry who are seeking to further their education and improve their qualifications.

Sandals, Couples tourism stalwarts honoured on Heroes Day

PAUL ISSA, deputy chairman of Couples Resorts and chairman of the Issa Trust Foundation, and Lyndsay Isaacs, Sandals Resorts' regional public relations manager for the Ocho Rios region, were honoured by the St Ann Municipal Corporation at its Heroes Day ceremony on Monday in St Ann's Bay.

Although better known for their involvement in tourism, the two were nonetheless recognised for their contributions in other areas – Issa for philanthropy and Isaacs for community service.

They, along with four other persons, were each presented with

a plaque and a citation for their service.

Issa, who was not present to collect his award, was recognised for his work through the Issa Trust Foundation, which, over the years, has donated millions of dollars in support of the health and education sectors in St Ann, St Mary, and Westmoreland. Of note is the Air Supply fundraising concert held every two years at Couples Sans Souci to raise funds for paediatric wards at hospitals in the two neighbouring parishes.

"The Issa Trust Foundation has been committed to the sustainable development in healthcare since

January 2005," the citation noted in part.

Isaacs joined Sandals Resorts in 1986 in Montego Bay and moved to St Ann to work at Sandals Dunn's River several years later. Since relocating to St Ann, "Mrs Isaacs has made tremendous impact in the parish through service," the citation read in part, noting her involvement with the Sandals Foundation in implementing several social-assistance projects.

Isaacs is currently serving on four school boards, Seville Golden Pre-School, Boscobel Primary and Infant, Stewart Town Basic School, and Mico Care Centre.



Lyndsay Isaacs of Sandals PHOTO BY CARL GILCHRIST



The Jamaica Pegasus: ‘HOTEL OF CHAMPIONS’

Takes the Taste of Jamaica Culinary Competition by storm

THE CHEFS at The Jamaica Pegasus hotel are usually busy cooking up delectable dishes at the hotel, but 14 of them recently took to the Taste of Jamaica stage at the Montego Bay Convention Centre to showcase their culinary prowess and creativity.

Hosted by the Culinary Federation of Jamaica on October 13, the annual Taste of Jamaica competition saw over 300 chefs participating in 25 categories. The Jamaica Pegasus hotel entered 13 categories, including Chef of The Year, Pastry Chef of The Year, Junior Chef of the Year, Chicken, Lamb, Seafood, Bartender of The Year, Beef, Team of the Year, as well as the Crème Brûlée, Cheesecake, Punch, and Butchery.

The chefs won a total of six top awards along with a cash prize. The most prestigious awards, The



From left: Jamaica Pegasus General Manager Peter Hilary alongside his award-winning chefs Pastry Chef of the Year, Michael Ellis; Overall Winner of Lamb and Vegetarian, Vanessa Mighty; Senior Server of the Year, Lucette Mclean; Senior Server of the Year, Shanna Kay Walcott; Chef of the Year, Nickal Stenneth; Bartender of the Year, Dwayne Barnett; and Jamaica Pegasus Sous Chef Patrice Malcolm.

Chef of The Year, was awarded to Nickal Stenneth, the Pastry Chef of the Year was awarded to Michael

Ellis, the Bartender of The Year was awarded to Dwayne Barnett. Vanessa Mighty was the overall

winner for Lamb and Vegetarian category, while Lucette Mclean and Shannakay Walcott were awarded

ABOVE: Jamaica Pegasus general manager Peter Hilary (left) was proud to be alongside The Jamaica Pegasus hotel culinary experts. **CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS**

as the Top Servers. Apart from these awards, chefs also received bronze and silver medals in the other categories.

Sous Chef and team lead Patrice Malcolm, in highlighting the importance of the competition, said “the objective of Taste of Jamaica is to offer fellow chefs a professional platform to showcase, exhibit, hone culinary skills and raise the overall Jamaican culinary art with international standards”.

Malcolm, who also assisted in training the staff, said “the chefs had to be extremely dedicated to winning, because training was usually done early in the mornings before work and even after work.”

The chefs entered the

competition this year well trained and experienced, as they were no first-timers to the competition.

Two-time winner of Pastry Chef of the Year, Michael Ellis, said, "I tried not to be complacent; winning once was great, but I always want to improve my skills and further build my brand as a pastry chef. It is not easy winning back-to-back titles, because it requires a lot of dedication and hunger"

The journey to this competition was no easy feat. Chef of the Year, Nickal Stenneth, concurred, stating that being in this competition, he had to balance work and practising. "I'm really happy my time and effort paid off."

Jamaica Pegasus hotel General Manager Peter Hilary, being very proud of his staff, said, "they deserve it! The chefs are really passionate about their art and have amazing leaders guiding them every step of the way".

Hilary added that they are not only building themselves but Jamaica, "I am sure it was a valuable experience for all of them, and they will surely maximise their potential and growth in the tourism sector."

The hotel has been entering the Taste of Jamaica competition for seven years and has received numerous accolades since. Executive Chef Mark Cole noted that when his team wins, it's even greater for the hotel, as the chefs learn more creative ways to do dishes and to improve the quality of the food provided at The Jamaica Pegasus hotel.

Winning in the Taste of Jamaica competition also opens up the opportunity to land a coveted spot on the national team for the prestigious Taste of the Caribbean Competition, presented by the Caribbean Hotel & Tourism Association and held in Miami every June. Over 12 Caribbean nations compete annually for top accolades.



Top Server, Shannakay Walcott.



Two-time winner of Pastry Chef of the Year, Michael Ellis.



Bartender of the Year, Dwayne Barnett.



Top Server, Lucette McLean. CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS



Leather sandals. PHOTOS BY PAUL WILLIAMS

AROUND JA WITH PAUL H

Iela sells 'mobile art'

I HAVE been to many artist/artisan's shows and to other events where they sell their items, and I must say this little island is brimming with some of the most imaginative and creative people on planet earth. Their hand-made products can compete with those produced in other countries,

hands down.

At these shows, I have seen a range of quality, from the ordinary to the extraordinary/exquisite. Those made by Iela's Sandals and Accessories easily fall within the exquisite category. Every time I see their products I just gawk, and eventually I am going to get my custom-made piece.

Their items are mainly handbags, neck and waist pieces, wristlets/cuffs, clutch purses and footwear for women. But, should a man want an item, they will readily get on to the job. When I chanced upon her and her daughter, Ahbehoh, at the recent Health Home and Garden Expo at the National Arena, there were a knapsack and other items made of camouflage material that take the ordinary away from men's accessories.

The business is the brainchild of the woman born Lela Rose Williams, and the items are made mainly of leather, canvas, burlap, and "any type of fabric that is appealing to the eyes", combined with other natural material such as wood, bamboo, coconut shell, calabash, and seeds, – 'horse eye', 'maccafat', 'lucky', 'nicker', 'cacoon', 'elephant ear', 'Job tears', etc.

No two items are an exact replica of the other, as each is made from a different inspiration at a different time, those exuding its own essence. "I never do that," Williams said about replicating, "Is like a burden." If a potential customer



Iela Williams' daughter, Ahbehoh, is also bitten by the artistic bug.

wants something similar to what she already has, she will acquiesce, but with a twist as each piece requires a different inspiration; and if she is not feeling it, she is not doing it.

Each item is expected to market itself; it should be a stand-out. Every piece sold, she said, should inspire someone to go to her to get a piece, and that's why we "go hard", she said, "and are constantly on the job". She described her pieces "as mobile art", not hanging



Bamboo, ebony and leather handbags.

from a wall or sitting on a shelf, but things that serve a utility purpose, to go around with.

The processes to create them involve acquiring the materials, measuring and cutting, carving, piercing, sanding, joining, polishing, varnishing, hand-stitching, crocheting, etc. It is really much work and imagination that they have to put in to make the items as engaging and eye-catching as they are. "My best work comes from using herbs and meditation," she revealed.

Yet, Williams said she had received no formal training for what she is doing now. She could crotchet, had art classes in secondary school, a younger sister taught her tie-and-dye, and that was it. Twenty years ago, when she made a certain lifestyle and spiritual change, the ideas started to flow and she combined her skills with that of her partner, and that combination has evolved in a family-operated business.

As with many other artisans, Williams faces challenges, such as



Neckpieces made from natural materials.

slow sales at times, and people who do not want to pay the prices she is asking for. But, the creativity is not slowing down. She is grooming her daughter, who is also bitten by the artistic bug, and she would love to land on to the European tourist market, as she believes they are more inclined than Americans to buy artistic accessories, and her pieces are really beyond the ordinary.



Iela Williams, the woman behind Iela's Sandals and Accessories, says her creative pieces are 'mobile art'.

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Caribbean's largest tourism marketing event on track for The Bahamas

THE CARIBBEAN Hotel and Tourism Association (CHTA) reaffirmed that all systems are go to bring the region's largest and longest-standing tourism marketing event to The Bahamas from January 21 to 23, 2020.

Citing the new tourism offerings in The Bahamas and throughout the Caribbean, and the opportunity to showcase the nation of islands to the travel world following Hurricane Dorian, the CHTA said the tradeshow will bring together hotel and destination representatives as well as other tourism providers – wholesalers and tour operators; online travel agencies – along with media representatives for two intensive days of business meetings, including thousands of prescheduled appointments.

The 38th Caribbean Travel Marketplace (CTM) marquee event will be held at Baha Mar's Performing Arts and Convention Center, at one of the newest and most impressive resorts in the Caribbean region. The Bahamian government also recently

announced that Baha Mar is pushing forward a \$300-million expansion of the resort. This will not only bring exciting new features to the resort, but create employment opportunities for Bahamians.

The CHTA meetup is a collaboration with local partners Baha Mar, the Bahamas Hotel & Tourism Association (BHTA), the Bahamas Ministry of Tourism and Aviation, and the Nassau Paradise Island Promotion Board.

CHTA President Patricia Affonso-Dass asserted that the destination is ready for the event: "Our immediate assessment following Dorian revealed that most of The Bahamas was unaffected by this situation and without question, we knew that The Bahamas, and in particular the Baha Mar complex, remained the ideal location for CTM 2020. The travel trade is interested in seeing one of the region's newest and largest resort complexes and supporting The Bahamas."

She also noted that attendees will have

the opportunity to experience The Bahamas Out Islands before and after the conference thanks to a special initiative of The Bahamas Out Islands Promotion Board and the Ministry of Tourism and Aviation.

Bahamas Minister of Tourism Dionisio D'Aguilar encouraged attendees to register: "Prior to Dorian's impact, The Bahamas was trending towards its best tourism performance ever and expectations are that, with the exception of Abaco and Grand Bahama, the rest of The Bahamas will continue on that trajectory for 2020. Hosting CTM will facilitate the remaining 14 destinations in The Bahamas to proudly showcase the resiliency of the destination, while tourism dollars will help to support the recovery of Abaco and its cays and Grand Bahama."

"We are looking forward to an incredible travel event in The Bahamas that brings together all stakeholders and business prospects to one location, presenting the tourism industry with an opportunity to

showcase the diverse products of the region, including many newly opened and upgraded properties," stated Frank Comito, CEO and director general of CHTA.

"It's a one-stop gathering for hotels, attractions, airlines, tour operators and wholesalers, and destination DMOs to meet with the world's key decision-makers who influence consumer travel. It also is the industry's key forum for attracting new decision-makers who otherwise would not be familiar with the region – thus opening up new markets to the Caribbean, both from different geographic areas around the world as well as with new niche markets," he added.

The meeting will build on the success of the previous Marketplace in Jamaica, which attracted 64 new buyers, including 18 new Chinese entrants.

To register, and for more information on Caribbean Travel Marketplace 2020, visit www.chtamarketplace.com or contact events@caribbeanhotelandtourism.com.