

Jamaicans Urged to Vacation at Home

Encouraged by the more than \$27 billion, which Jamaicans spent on local attractions in 2007, Tourism Minister, Hon. Edmund Bartlett, is urging nationals to embrace the concept of domestic tourism.

The Ministry is promoting the concept through the 'Experience Jamaica' campaign, which was launched on Sunday (Sept. 6) at Devon House.

Mr. Bartlett, in his remarks at the event, noted the economic value of the concept, in terms of increasing spending locally, enabling the country to retain much of its foreign exchange earned, and preserving jobs within the industry. Additionally, that it would ensure the multiplier effect of the dollar.

"The Statistical Institute of Jamaica (STATIN). indicates that Jamaicans spent \$27.5 billion in tourism-related services alone, in 2007. I am sure (that) if we should look at (statistics for) 2008, if those figures were available, there would be an (increased) increment, and, certainly, 2009 would be showing a similar improvement," the Minister informed.

Of the \$27.5 billion, Mr. Bartlett said \$4.3 billion was spent on overnight trips, with \$2 billion, representing 46 per cent, being spent in hotels and other "short stay" accommodations. A total of \$3.9 billion was spent on same day trips to local destinations, with nearly 60 per cent of persons visiting friends and family, 22.8 per cent went on vacation, and 8.9 per cent travelled on business.

"In considering these statistics. even though crises are not unexpected, the tourism industry requires, at all times, effective management strategies that will maintain the attractiveness of Jamaica as the preferred destination. The promotion, therefore, of what I am calling "staycations," is one such strategy. stay and have a vacation in Jamaica," Mr. Bartlett emphasised.

Noting that the concept was not new, the Tourism Minister informed that two million British nationals, to date, have vacationed at home. While not having figures for the United States, he informed that the authorities there have been promoting domestic tourism "vigorously," pointing out that they "have been inviting their people to drive down to Orlando (Florida) and Las Vegas (Nevada).rather than fly out and go everywhere else."

In advancing the 'Experience Jamaica' concept, Mr. Bartlett contended that there was much about Jamaica which many locals have yet to discover.

"Destination Jamaica offers a variety of experiences that our own Jamaicans have not yet, themselves, tasted. And it is important that they do.because.they will recognise what visitors are clamouring about and are coming here in droves to have," he said.

He suggested that firsthand experience of the island's offerings will heighten locals' awareness of the country's valuable assets and encourage them to protect those assets.

"So issues of visitor security would become a thing of the past. Issues in relation to (deficient) service levels would, equally, be something of the past. So that recognition of being courteous and kind, being friendly and hospitable, will become second nature. What we want to do is use this opportunity to marry economic value.and sustaining employment within the industry during a critical time, with the social and cultural values which flow from it," Mr. Bartlett contended.

The 'Experience Jamaica' campaign, which will be spearheaded by the Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB), will seek to encourage locals to "taste, see, feel, and enjoy" more of the country's tourism product, by re-discovering the cuisine, places, and activities that make the island an enduring magnet for visitors from around the world.