

Cranbrook Flower Forest, Unique Eco-Tourism Site

Cranbrook Flower Forest and River Head Adventure Trail, a unique Jamaican eco-tourism attraction in the green hills of Laughlands, St. Ann, is moving progressively towards increasing its offerings and broadening its agricultural aspects.

This 130-acre attraction, ideal for nature lovers, weddings, family reunions, corporate fun days and educational tours, is located 18 miles west of the resort town of Ocho Rios. Of the total acreage, the property devotes 40 acres to landscape, boasting exotic tropical gardens, lawns, pools and a tropical rain forest. Manager, Lawrence Madden, said that plans are afoot to expand the Cranbrook Flower Forest, as well as establish a fruit forest, growing a variety of exotic fruit trees and, hopefully, be able to offer exotic fruit production, especially to the tourism trade. "We are also going to venture into growing vegetables, a whole range of herbs and spices, and all these will be packaged under the Cranbrook brand," Mr. Madden explained. He said that a recent establishment was the Cranbrook Nature Centre, which is a registered charity, designed to serve as part of the Cranlin Farms Limited's (owners of Cranbrook Flower Forest) thrust of education and outreach for locals and visitors. "It will assist those youngsters in high school who are doing their School Based Assessments (SBA), and we welcome them to come and study the forestry, to learn about how to care for the environment, how to do river training and, at the same time, enjoy recreation and work with the water and water systems," he said. He also noted that Cranbrook would be partnering with the Jamaica 4-H Clubs, to train young people in understanding nature and becoming nature lovers. "We are moving to make this facility into an agro tech learning centre and a centre of excellence for production, where you will learn how to care for the environment so the environment can care for you," Mr. Madden said. He explained that these graduates would be employed as tour guides and demonstrators, within the educational sector at Cranbrook. Cranbrook will be hosting its own agricultural show and farmer's market, where persons can purchase fresh produce of the best quality, he said. The attractions include bird watching, wading in the river, a petting zoo, pond fishing, horseback riding, mountain biking and a nature walk. "There is also tree top tour that is actually done by Chukka Cove, and we facilitate it by actually allowing them to land on our property at the head of the forest, because we are willing to partner with anybody who has a vision and the vision is compatible with what we do," he assured. A favourite for many visitors to Cranbrook is the River Head Adventure Trail, which begins on the lawns of the entrance garden. It takes a path through the beautiful gardens and walkways, along the banks of the Little River, passing under a canopy of bamboo trees and then gently making its way up into an unspoilt natural rain forest. The sound of water cascading over rocks and trees, reaching for the sky, heralds the approach to the cathedral-like gorge, where the river rises from a pristine pool at the foot of the rocks. "Another attraction is the royal palm, which forms a beautiful walkway. All the palm trees are about 30 feet in height, and it is just a beauty to behold, and it forms the backdrop to a lot of weddings, as it is lined with other beautiful plants around the base of the palm trees," Mr. Madden excitedly. "We do not fertilize, because nature provides such an abundance we need not put in much manure," he said, noting that mulching and composting were good techniques in agriculture. "We are creating new gardens almost every month, because we want to showcase all the flowers that people know. For example, in Mona Heights in Kingston, all the streets are named after flowers, and that is how we want to create our gardens, so persons can see and experience them," he said. He is inviting persons to visit the Cranbrook Flower Forest, and experience the flora and fauna and increase their knowledge through an exciting educational tour. Cranbrook was opened to the public in May, 1997, with its flowering plants and ornamentals including orchids, begonias, gingers, heliconias, bird of paradise, yellow shrimp, ixoria, red euphobia, yellow alamander, crotons, ferns, bromeliads, philodendron and a variety of palms. The facility is opened seven days per week, between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. It is normally closed on Good Friday and Christmas Day.