

## "Taste of Jamaica" to add spice to London food festival

Top Jamaican chefs will be utilising high quality Jamaican produce and processed foods to create sumptuous, exciting local dishes that will delight palates, stimulate greater interest in Brand Jamaica goods and deliver an authentic "Taste of Jamaica" at "Taste of London" - the prestigious food and drink festival scheduled to take place from June 16 to 19 at Regent's Park.

Jamaica's participation in this event is being coordinated under the "Meet Jamaica" initiative, which is a partnership between the Private Sector Organisation of Jamaica (PSOJ) and JAMPRO that seeks to raise the profile of local goods in the UK through a promotional programme of missions and special events in the months leading up to the 2012 Olympics in London. Participating companies will have the opportunity to showcase their products directly to consumers, while UK-based Jamaican Collin Brown and Anthony Matthews of the Spanish Court Hotel will be the chefs charged with working their culinary magic in the two restaurants featured in the Taste of Jamaica space.

Berletta Henlon Forrester, JAMPRO's Export Promotion manager, indicated that Taste of London would provide Jamaica with a platform to showcase the best of the island's food and drink to a wide audience with discriminating palates who recognise exceptional quality.

"This is a major food festival that attracts over 50,000 persons with an interest in food from both a consumer and trade perspective. It constitutes the kind of market that JAMPRO is keen on assisting local producers and exporters to access," she stated.

"Taste of Jamaica will be a huge focus at Taste of London this year, as we will be occupying some 500 square feet of space in a prime location at the very entrance. Our presentation will comprise of two restaurants, two bars, a demonstration stage and a stage for cultural presentations, along with nine booth spaces for exporters of food products who will be exhibiting and interacting with the visitors," she added.

Henlon Forrester noted that Jamaican products on display would include jerk seasoning and sauces, condiments, callaloo, ackee, bammy, rum, Blue Mountain Coffee, jams and jellies. She explained that the two Jamaican chefs would be presenting typical Jamaican dishes with crossover potential in the UK and the wider European market. Henlon Forrester also stated that with the assistance of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, patrons would also be introduced to the raw inputs/produce that go into making the dishes.

Sandra Glasgow, chief executive officer of the Private Sector Organisation of Jamaica (PSOJ), stated that the participation of local exporters in Taste of London would serve to bring significant visibility to Jamaican food and drink products and facilitate business opportunities.

"When we invited JAMPRO to partner with us on the Meet Jamaica initiative, it was our goal to highlight Jamaican brands in the UK to residents, tourists and members of the Diaspora. We believe that Taste of London presents an exceptional opportunity for exporters to not only deepen their visibility but to also expand their opportunities for export into the UK market." She added that the initiative would be seeking to leverage the high level of interest in Jamaican track and field athletes, which has resulted in interest being generated around the local food that they consume. She identified one such food as yam, which is a featured item on the menu of Chef Collin Brown.

Owner of the London, Docklands-based restaurant that bears his name, Brown is noted for his authentic Jamaican and Caribbean dishes with a modern twist. His restaurant is the only Caribbean recipient of the distinguished AA Rosette Award for Culinary Excellence. He expressed his belief that now is the right time for Jamaican cuisine in Britain and revealed that his menu would include deep fried breaded yam ball served with ackee.

"I enjoy working with yam and plan to promote it as a super food at Taste of London, which will offer Jamaica the unique experience of showcasing the island's cuisine and the creativity that goes into preparing the various dishes. Jamaica's participation in this show will open up a new world for visitors to become acquainted with Jamaican products and cuisine," said Brown.

The Spanish Court Hotel's executive chef Anthony Matthews shared the sentiment that Jamaica's participating in Taste of London would help to put the country on the map in terms of quality produce, food products and cuisine.

"Once people are introduced to the variety of Jamaican produce and the different dishes, they will develop a love for it and that will create a demand. Once British people become familiar with something and like it, they can't get enough of it," stated Matthews, whose menu for the event includes stamp and go (fritters) spiced up with ackee and scotch bonnet salsa.

Joy Walcott, project manager for Meet Jamaica, pointed out that in addition to presentation of Jamaican brands and

cuisine, the event would also showcase aspects of local culture through the spoken word, singing, dancing and drumming.

“We are in the process of arranging the presence of some of Jamaica’s most talented performers to deliver quality entertainment in the Taste of Jamaica pavilion at Taste of London. This will provide us with added traffic, which by extension will provide Jamaican brands with greater sales opportunities,” said Walcott.

She indicated that to date, the Meet Jamaica initiative has benefited from the support of entities such as the Jamaica National Building Society (JNBS), the lead private entity; Jamaica Public Service Company Limited (JPS), which has been providing sponsorship support to participating companies; EXIM Bank, LIME and Virgin Atlantic. Walcott indicated that discussions were also taking place with the ministries of Industry, Investment and Commerce, Culture, Youth and Sports, Tourism and Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade.