

Tracing Jamaica's History at Seville Heritage Park

The Seville Great House and Heritage Park, located on a 301 acre property in the parish of St. Ann, has seen continuous habitation for several hundred years.

It has been described as "the site of the encounter" where different cultures in Jamaica's history - the Tainos, African, Spanish and English - met at various times in its past, sometimes violently, and left a very interesting heritage trail. In its long history, the site has been a Taino settlement; the first Spanish capital of Jamaica; a Plantation with a thriving sugar estate and all its attendant evils of enslavement; a dwelling house and now a museum and heritage park. It has undergone numerous refurbishing, the latest of which began in 2010 and was completed last year. Subsequent to that refurbishing exercise, the Spanish Jamaican Foundation (SJF), the Tourism Enhancement Fund (TEF), the CHASE Fund and the Jamaica National Heritage Trust (JNHT), all joined in a collaborative effort to establish a 21st century museum and exhibition at the facility. Approximately \$19 million was spent on that venture. The museum now has a state of the art exhibition which includes audio visuals that show simulations of what the property looked like when the Great House was first built in the 17th century. Several pieces of artifacts found on the property through excavations over time are also featured. Chairman of the JNHT, Ainsley Henriques, says the Seville site, is perhaps the most historic in the western hemisphere. Principal of the Browns Town Community College, one of the leading tertiary institutions in the parish, James Walsh, agrees. Mr. Walsh says the Seville site is a critical path to possibly one of the most pivotal events in human history, which is the intersection of Europe and the Western Hemisphere, which has transformed world history "in a very total way." "This centre represents a very symbolic and emblematic part of history, and it is uniquely placed to portray the development and the transformation of the history of Jamaica and by extension the Caribbean, and the interaction in the first real major step in globalization," Mr. Walsh says. Addressing the opening ceremony of the Museum and exhibition, held recently, he said the facility will serve as a stepping stone for the eventual full development of the Heritage Park. Minister of Youth and Culture, Hon. Lisa Hanna, who was also in attendance at the official opening of the museum, says it is located at a place with a convergence of dynamic cultures. "Our culture is not only dynamic it is diverse. It's not static and Seville and what we represent here continues that dynamism," she notes. With the Seville facility being used as an attraction, Minister of Tourism and Entertainment, Hon Dr. Wykeham McNeill, weighed in on the relevance of the facility to the tourism sector, noting that "tourism and our heritage go hand in hand because it defines us as a people and as a nation. "I firmly believe that as global travelers increasingly demand interaction with an authentic Jamaican experience, then it becomes more evident the ways in which we need to develop and showcase our heritage sites as part of our tourism product," observes. Opposition Spokesperson on Youth, Sports, Gender Affairs, Entertainment and Culture, Olivia Grange, says the Great House and its Museum is a cultural space owned by the surrounding community, facilitated by government and its respective agencies, and supported by the private sector and our international family. She describes the Seville Museum project as one with immense possibilities. Integral to the development of the museum and exhibition was the Spanish Jamaican Foundation, whose president and Spanish Ambassador to Jamaica, Her Excellency Celsa Nuno, sees the facility as site for educational purposes, with great potential for cultural/heritage tourism. Ambassador Nuno points to statistics that show that approximately 50 per cent of tourists always desire to participate in some cultural activity while they are on a trip. She says that her country and the Spanish Jamaican Foundation are very happy to play a part in promoting Jamaica and its rich cultural history.

Source:JIS