

GANJA Tourism

JAMPRO head says opportunities to be found in spa and wellness product development.

President of JAMPRO, Diane Edwards, said huge opportunities abound for Jamaica's ganja entrepreneurs to capitalise on, through the development of hemp and ganja spa products, wellness centres and other related commercial activities in the island's flourishing wellness tourism sector. Edwards made her comments during an interview with Hospitality Jamaica at the Jamaica Cannabis Reforms Conference, which was staged by the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Industry Investment and Commerce and the Beckley Foundation at the Couples Swept Away Resort in Negril, last Saturday.

"The opportunity between cannabis and tourism is really very exciting because what we can be doing now is developing treatment centres and wellness centres," said Edwards, adding that JAMPRO had a whole cluster developing on wellness tourism, and nutraceuticals, which is a huge ingredient in wellness tourism. According to her, people who want to de-stress, detox, meditate and learn new techniques of coping with life can go to a treatment centre where they can receive massages with cannabis oils. "You could do tonics, facial scrubs, skin creams, soaps ... all sorts of different products," she said. Perfectly legal Edwards pointed out that the use of these topical applications was not illegal. "We could be doing a lot with that, just before we get into things like consumables which, at this point, unless they are less than one per cent THC, are still illegal," she added. Edwards said this sector of the ganja industry would be supported by JAMPRO and that micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) should prepare themselves to be drivers of this segment of the health and wellness industry. "I think there is a great role for the MSMEs. They need to start to understand value chains ... for instance, a wellness village ... all the spas in Jamaica will need cosmetic products ... they will need balms; they will need massage oils, soaps, skin creams, so that is something MSMEs can get into," she explained. "Then there are a lot of services. MSMEs don't think about design services. Everybody needs their packaging designed if they are making a new product. People need their posters, their flyers, their websites. They need them designed so design is another great area for MSMEs to get into," she said. In the case of Colorado, the first state in the United States where marijuana use was legalised, reports show that there has been a rise in the establishment of cannabis-related industries. The ganja industry website, ganjapreneur.com, reported in December last year that since the inception of the recreational cannabis industry in Colorado, the market has "grown and thrived" and created all types of niche businesses, including spa services. One such spa is Primal Wellness, which is said to be the world's first day spa offering cannabis-infused products and related services. In 2013, the Caribbean Export Development Agency (CEDA) reported that health and wellness is valued at US\$180 million in the Caribbean, with the potential to add \$50 million in revenue growth annually. It said that the sector was small and underdeveloped and that the product lacks consistency and branding, which could enhance its potential to grow and create jobs in the region, and that as much as 70 per cent of income from tourist dollar was being lost. CEDA said 95 per cent of oils, lotions and other products used in the health and wellness sector are imported into the region, suggesting that opportunities also exist for the development of a value chain. Spa therapy The number of spa therapists in Jamaica were estimated at approximately 3,000 in 2010. According to a Tourism Product Development Company (TPDCo) document on health and wellness tourism, "resorts and hotels are joining the health spa development craze" and "most upmarket hotels have expanded their services to facilitate guests who now see spa therapy as the deciding factor in a resort vacation, rather than just an additional amenity". The TPDCo said Jamaicans are also leaning towards this form of recreational activity, resulting in a proliferation of day spas, particularly in Kingston, and that the increasing demand for this type of activity could be a window of opportunity for potential investors in tourism. Edwards also said another business area with huge potential for private enterprises, specifically Rastafarians, could be the establishment of a museum similar to the famous Hash, Marijuana and Hemp Museum in central Amsterdam in the Netherlands, which has more than 6,000 items in its collection and a giftshop which sells hemp cosmetics, hemp bags and other items. "For instance, a Rastafari group can get together and say 'we are offering an authentic Rastafari museum or a ganja museum'. You see, the thing is we have to start thinking outside the box, because a cannabis museum, I think, would be a fantastic thing and just starting from how cannabis got into Jamaica, how it was used by cane farmers and indigenous remedies and then coming to the present day, where a lot of what Grandma said is being validated by science. There is a lot to show in terms of the history and the cultural impact," she said.