Kingston: The Business and the Leisure Tourism Product

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Introduction

Referred to as ‘The heartbeat of Jamaica’ by the Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB) in marketing campaigns for the island, Kingston is the central point for visitors to indulge and immerse themselves in the Jamaican culture and signature attractions. This includes involvement in the ethnic art, music, heritage and Jamaican authentic cuisine. One of the most unforgettable features of a Jamaican experience is the hospitable interactions with the Jamaican people. Jamaicans are warm, welcoming and friendly individuals; an almost guarantee to each visitor is that, they might leave learning one or more of our local Jamaican Patois words.

Bermuda, the Bahamas, Cuba and Jamaica were five places in the region where the tourism industry first took roots in a serious manner (Holder, 2013). The diversification was needed due to the total dependence on sugar in Jamaica (Holder, 2013). This caused tourism to emerge as a by-product of the banana trade. Tourism essentially began with banana boats which were owned by Lorenzo Dow Baker. These boats were originally used to transport bananas from Port Antonio to the United States of America. The banana boats were however later used to transport individuals from the United States to Jamaica. This then caused the development of the Titchfield Hotel in Portland and later the Myrtle Bank Hotel in Kingston in order to accommodate these vacationers to Jamaica.

Importantly, Kingston is also known as the business center of Jamaica as well as the seat of government. As such, it houses several hotels, fine eateries, business hotspots and Gordon House which the official meeting place for Jamaican Government. Due to Kingston’s diversity, this research will be focused on both the business aspect and the different types of leisure activities
that are available to both local and international visitors. This therefore makes Kingston not only a business hub but also a central point for bleisure.
Problem Statement/Rationale

Bleisure, a relatively new terminology is articulated by the Global Business and Travel Association (2017) as the process of extending work trips to make time for leisure activities. Creatively amalgamating business and leisure (bleisure) can add a different flair to brand Jamaica. With proper research and implementation, bleisure can position the country as the premier destination for bleisure trips. The Kingston resort area marketed by the Jamaica Tourist Board as the “heartbeat of Jamaica” plays an integral role in the development and promotion of bleisure on the island. The aim of this study is to focus on three main areas where bleisure can be packaged and developed. The three properties that will be assessed to demonstrate Kingston’s potential as a bleisure destinations are the Jamaica Conference Centre, the Blue and John Crow Mountains and Devon House. Each of these locations represents a unique section that must be brought together as a whole to properly package and sell Kingston as a bleisure destination.

Firstly, The Jamaica Conference Centre is a large facility built to accommodate large and small business meetings running concurrently. The building holds a spectacular view of the beautiful waterfront in downtown, Kingston; just a ‘stone throw’ away from the Kingston Craft Market.

The Blue and John Crow Mountains provide the perfect backdrop for the Kingston destination. It is listed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Finally, ‘food is the staff of life’ and with Devon house being the island’s first Gastronomy Centre, it is the ideal location to dine and enjoy a tranquilizing atmosphere. The case study seeks to explore, examine and develop Jamaica’s bleisure product.

Picture of Devon House
Walking Area
Source by: O.Neil (September 2017)
Objectives:

1. To explore Kingston as both a business and a leisure destination.
2. To examine how Jamaica’s bleisure tourism product is perceived by visitors.
3. To demonstrate how Jamaica can develop its bleisure product in order to diversity its market.

Picture of Devon House, Built in 1881
Source: O.Neil (September, 2017)
Delimitations and Limitations

Jamaica, known as a tropical paradise is surrounded by the Caribbean Sea. It is also commonly known for its rich cultural heritage and natural scenic beauty. This research however, focuses on the bleisure product within the Kingston resort area. The main destinations that were examined were the Jamaica Conference Centre, Devon House and the Blue & John Crow Mountains. The research targeted three major properties within the Kingston resort area as a representation of Jamaica’s current bleisure products offered to visitors. While there are other resort areas in Jamaica worthy of examination, the team selected Kingston for this study because of its diverse offerings in Jamaican music, art, culture and cuisine, as well as the overall attractiveness of the area with current government plans to redevelop and market the resort area.

The case study encountered a few limitations when collecting information for the research. The most significant was the time taken to contact and schedule appointments with the property owners/managers. The case study demanded effective time management and organizational skills. Information was also not easily obtained from one visit to the properties. As such, multiple visits had to be made to obtain a representative sample. Questionnaires were distributed at varied times when visited. This was also a costly process for the researchers.
Literature Review

Defining bleisure

Walker (2013) opined that business travelers are those people who travel for business purposes, such as meetings; all kinds of sales, including corporate, regional, product and others; conventions; trade shows and expositions; and combinations of more than one of these purposes. Business tourism represents one of the oldest forms of tourism; man having traveled for this purpose of trade since very early times (Davidson, 1994). Contrary to this, leisure is best described as spending time from work, or discretionary time. Some recreational professionals use the words leisure and recreation interchangeably, while others define leisure as the “productive,” “creative,” or “contemplative” use of free time (Walker, 2013). In recent years, the two concepts (business and leisure) have married creating a relatively new term, bleisure. The Global Business and Travel Association (2017) articulates bleisure as the process of extending work trips to make time for leisure activities.

Identifying the Bleisure Travelers

Osdick (2016) in a survey done in the United States of America (US) opined that bleisure travelers are generally millennials between the ages of 20-25. The survey pointed out that this generation is more likely to engage in leisure activities are while on a business trip. Another study conducted by the Global Business and Travel Association (2017) discovered that bleisure travelers take three (3) to five (5) work trips in the past year. The study points out that these travelers usually hold middle management positions within an organization. The based earning for bleisure tourist is said to be US$79,000 per year. The study concluded that the average extension time for leisure time on a business trip is usually three (3) days.
Global Bleisure Trends

Fry (2016) extrapolated that 2016 marked the year when Millennials surpassed Baby Boomers as United States of America largest living generation. Interestingly, the concept of bleisure became very popular in 2016 as millennials are dominating the workforce and are said to be the main driving force behind this phenomenon (Ostdick, 2016). Rodeghier (2016) mentioned that this generation is less likely to married and have children at their age than other generations. Therefore, with fewer family ties, millennials are more willing to take business trips, even at a moment's notice. The need for this type of tourism will become more and more important as the millennials require connectivity and control over their travel experiences. According to Ostdick (2015), specific, unique, or individualized cultural experiences are a big draw for this demographic who places a high value on experiences rather than things. Bleisure travelers are said to be popular in the United States of America and European countries (Fry, 2016). Rodeghier (2016) predicted that even though the literature on bleisure tourism is limited now; it is evident that its contribution to the world’s tourism industry will be significant in the future.

Potential for bleisure in the Caribbean

Business tourism in the Caribbean stands as a 20-million-dollar industry (Curley, 2017) which contributes significantly towards the overall development in the region. Curley (2017) further argued that countries such as Jamaica, Dominica Republic, Bahamas and Puerto Rico have positioned themselves to accommodate business tourism with the development of some of the finest convention centres in the world. Interestingly, the same Caribbean countries that have advanced in attracting business travelers are dominating leisure tourism in the region (Caribbean
tourism review, 2015). It is therefore evident that the above Caribbean countries are able to capitalize on bleisure tourism as their main tourism market is the United States and Europe.

**Destination Jamaica**

Jamaica is the third largest island in the Caribbean and it is surrounded by the Caribbean sea. It is also the largest English speaking country in the Caribbean. It is also believed that the island’s early settlers, the Tainos, named the island ‘Xaymaca’ which is interpreted as the ‘land of wood and water’. Jamaica is currently 146 miles from east to west and 51 miles at her widest point. It is also located at latitude 18 degrees north of the equator and longitude 77 degrees west of Greenwich. The island’s precise location allows her to achieve the title as ‘island paradise’. The Jamaica Tourist Board has divided the island in resort areas to offer visitors a phenomenal experience. These resort areas include Kingston, Montego Bay, Ocho Rios, the South Coast, Negril, and Port Antonio. The resort area of Kingston highlights unique attractions ranging from the Blue & John Crow Mountains to as far as the historic towns in Spanish Town. However, the capital, Kingston is approximately 21.8 square kilometers and it is located in the county of Surrey. Kingston, known as the capital of Jamaica is the island’s cultural and corporate centre.

Tourism may be observed centuries ago, beginning from the fourth century B.C. when the Great Wall of China began its developmental stages and the inclusion of the athletic games held in Greece in 776 B.C. It was highly speculated that people came or travelled to participate and enjoy the Olympia (Olympic Games). Marco Polo became the first noted European business traveler as he pioneered trade routes from Europe to China from 1275 to 1292, staying at primitive inns called ‘khans’ along the way (Walker, 2013). This created a fundamental framework for business travel.
According to the Jamaica Tourist Board annual statistical survey, Jamaica has generated US $1.46 billion in tourism earnings from January to June 2017. This is a drastic improvement and an increase of over 8 percent when compared with January to June 2016. Jamaica also welcomed its 1 millionth visitor for 2017 on June 15. This was by far, a record breaking achievement, as never before have we arrived at the one millionth mark before the mid-month of the year. According to the Jamaica Information Service (JIS), the country welcomed 2,165,330 visitors up to the end of June this year, which is 3.9 per cent higher than the corresponding period last year.

**Jamaica as a bleisure destination**

Although there is limited literature on bleisure in Jamaica. The island is multi-faceted and best known for its unique leisure activities that propel visitors to return to the island on a regular basis. However, the country currently boasts two major conference centres located on the island. These are the Montego Bay Convention Centre and the Jamaica Conference Centre. The Montego Bay Convention Centre is in the resort area of Montego Bay and was opened in 2011. The centre is owned by the government of Jamaica and offers several services to both local and international personnel. A few of the services include teleconferencing, food & beverage services, conferences, weddings, expositions, graduations, meetings and both large and small events. It offers modern meeting, exhibition, ballroom spaces and convention facilities with a combined total of 139, 302 square feet of exquisite land and breath-taking views.

At the beginning of the year, Jamaica was highlighted as one of the top 52 Best Places to visit in 2017, as published by The New York Times on January 4, 2017. This was a significant highlighted feature as Jamaica offers a wide variety of both business and leisure activities to
partake in. In the heart of downtown Kingston, the business district, comprises of many notable attractions to visit while vacationing in Jamaica. The locations of focus are the Jamaica Conference Centre, Blue and John Crow Mountain/Holywell and Devon House. These facilities will be further discussed.

*Picture taken at the Bob Marley Museum
Source O.Bailey (September, 2017)*

**Blue and John Crow Mountain/Holywell**

Serving as the picture-perfect backdrop to the Kingston resort area is the Blue and John Crow Mountains (BJCM) National Park. This National Park is the largest adjoining area of natural forest in Jamaica, protecting 193 acres of forest on mountain slopes, containing 10 watershed
management units spanning four parishes. The area is well-known for its rich cultural heritage, endangered species and being the home to one the largest Maroons settlement in Jamaica. The Blue and John Crow Mountains comprise three mountain ranges; the Port Royal, Blue, and John Crow Mountains. The mountains of the park dominate the skyline of Eastern Jamaica. The Blue Mountain Peak (2,256 meters) is the highest point on the island and one of the highest in the Caribbean. Home to the renowned and globally loved; Blue Mountain Coffee (Blue and John Crow Mountain National Park, 2017)

This unique site is listed amongst some of the world most iconic features such as the Great Walls of China, the Caves of the Vézère Valley in France and the Great Barrier Reef in Australia. The BJCM was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2015 and is the first mixed (cultural and natural) in Jamaica and the Caribbean sub region. Representing one of only thirty-two sites in the world. (Gordon, 2015). The BJCM is relatively small but hosts an enormous benefit to the island. It aids in climate change mitigation, reduces soil erosion including landslides which can damage roads and other infrastructure. Forty percent (40) % of the island receive domestic water from Blue and John Crow Mountains National Park. It contributes to the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) through hiking and camping at Holywell and the Blue Mountain Peak Trail/Portland Gap. These are popular pastimes for tourists and nationals alike. There are a wide variety of plants within the BJCM which may be of use for pharmaceutical or other purposes, e.g. (Blue and John Crow Mountain National Park, 2017)

‘A park within a park’, and a misty tropical forest situated within the BJCM offers a rustic and eco-friendly experience to its visitors. The park is managed by Jamaican Conservation and Development Trust (JCDT). The area of focus for bleisure within the Blue and John Crow Mountain is Holywell (pronounced Hollywell), a 330-acre park located approximately (1)
kilometer above sea level and is the most visited area within the BJCM National Park. The Park is accessible vehicle. Holywell has a Visitors’ Centre that caters to small group meetings, workshops, retreats and other gatherings. The centre can accommodate approximately 20 persons seated theatre style. Though homespun, for a nature lover, nothing could beat a business meeting in a tropical midst forest that is breathtaking, offers ethereal views, and perfect tranquility. The human mind is known to function at best in a relaxing atmosphere which would be necessary for any meeting. Goleman (2015), articulates that a “Relaxed Mind is a Productive Mind”. Therefore, based on the environment, it would be nearly impossible for one not to have a relaxed mind’ the perfect recipe for a productive business meeting. The property has free WiFi which all visitors can access.

Picture of a few hikers starting their journey at Holywell, Blue & John Crow Mountains
Source O.Bailey (August, 2017)
Leisure activities are also available on the property. One can take advantage of the nature trails that are available. There are four nature trails at the property that visitors can choose to traverse. There is also a variety of tours available that can be booked through the JCDT Office. Educational Tours are available which vary according to the age-group/level and special requests. Bird-watching Tours take place at (6 am) in the mornings. The Coffee Tours provide two options to visitors (Holywell National Recreation Park, 2009). The first tour is the Classic Tour which includes a short walk to a neighboring coffee farm in approximately two and a half hours or Nature and Coffee which includes a hike through the farm and up to the house to see and smell the roasting (approximately four hours). Additionally, there is the Gordon Town to Redlight Trail OR Gordon Town to Greenwich via Redlight Trails. These trails go through different communities that are located with the BJCM. The tours are offered by the Jamaica Conservation and Development Trust. The Holywell Recreational Park also boasts a plant nursery on site that provides primarily native, non-lumber plants for reforestation in the BJCMNP. Still, they do produce plants for sale such as Impatiens, Lilies, Christmas tree seedlings, herbs amongst others. Holywell is the host of an annual festival ‘Mystic Bliss’ often held in the winter tourist season is a great way enjoy the local culture.

The Gap Café is also available approximately 1 km outside the entrance to Holywell Recreation Park. It is the perfect place to stop for fine food and coffee before (or after) visiting the park. The rustic café serves mainly traditional Jamaican cuisine such as curried goat and escoveitch fish. Menus that will tantalize the taste buds of visitors. The Gap Café is said to serve the best cup of coffee in the world, with fresh beans taken from the surrounding plantations and brewed to order. For those who want to stay overnight, there are three self-contained cabins and camping tents in Holywell, linked by easy nature trails to the ranger station and picnic area. These rustic
accommodations can sleep four to eight people; all have kitchenettes and hot and cold water. The cabins have balconies that provide a spectacular view of the Kingston resort area. (Blue and John Crow National Park, 2017)

**The Jamaica Conference Center**

Jamaica Conference Centre plays an integral role in the development of business tourism in Kingston. The nearby attractions that surround the Conference Centre make the term bleisure come alive. The Jamaica Conference Centre was the largest conference centre in Jamaica before the erection of the Montego Bay Conference Centre. This centre was established in 1982, celebrating over thirty years of existence. The Conference Centre is perfectly situated on the beautiful waterfront in Downtown, Kingston. The purpose of the Centre is to be the headquarter for the preliminary meetings of the International Seabed Authority, an arm of the United Nations. This organization came into effect in 1994 “to regulate mining and related activities in the international seabed beyond national jurisdiction, an area that includes most of the world’s oceans.” (Chopra, 2011). Over the years, the Centre has accommodated various events such as local, regional and international conferences; meetings, seminars and workshops; graduations, weddings, luncheons and cocktails (Jamaica Conference Centre, 2017).

The Centre comprises five Conference Rooms, three Caucus Rooms, Delegates Lounges, a Restaurant, a Private Dining and Reception Area. The Kenneth Rattray Conference Room (formerly Conference Room 1), is furnished with an electronic voting system. On the first floor, there is an observers’ gallery and press galleries. The speaker’s platform is elevated and can be decorated with a portable circular stage for different performances. Directly behind the Conference Room on the ground floor are Office facilities with rooms for press interviews. A
documents’ distribution booth is also located within the Conference Room. The facilities in the Conference Room 2 are similar to Kenneth Rattray Conference Room (Conference room 1). Both Conference rooms provide easy access to the 4400-sq. ft. Harbour Lounge with a superb view of Kingston Harbour; the seventh largest natural harbour in the world. Conference Room 3 exemplifies natural creativity at its best. Local materials are used in a decorative manner to create a soothing and artistic atmosphere. Bamboo is used as the main decorating element on the ceiling to enhance the acoustics of the room. Throughout the Centre architectural details made use of indigenous art (Jamaica Conference Centre, 2017). The layout of the rooms show that this location is ideal for large meetings and conferences.

Additionally, the conference rooms are furnished with modern day technology to facilitate the interpretation of six languages concurrently. The rooms are designed in either a semi-circular fashion or in vertical blocks to suit delegations. Upon entering the building, a Reception Foyer equipped with an information desk and a documents distribution counter is there to extend a warm welcome to visitors. Provisions for a First Aid response unit are located on the ground floor of the office building. Dining facilities are available on the property.
The Seabreeze Restaurant on the property offers an extensive array of menu selection ranging from Jamaican cuisine to Gourmet with a seating capacity of 250 persons. Private dining can be arranged in the Delegates’ Dining Room which is air-conditioned and seats up to 160 persons. Adjoining the upstairs cafeteria is a 2,400sq. ft. Exhibition Hall with track lighting. Additional exhibition spaces are available throughout the Centre (Jamaica Conference Centre, 2017).

Several attractions are located in close proximity to the Jamaica Conference Centre where business personnel can take some time to experience the heartbeat of Jamaica. Located approximately three (3) minutes from the Jamaica Conference Centre is the Kingston Craft Market. The is the hub of souvenir and local produce sellers. The National Gallery in Downtown, Kingston host Jamaica’s finest artistic displays. Being in existence for over forty years, the National Gallery of Jamaica is the oldest and largest public art museum in the Anglophone Caribbean. Its collections are mainly early (Taino), modern and contemporary art from Jamaica along with smaller Caribbean and international holdings. The Gallery has regular exhibitions such as the ‘Last Sunday” that occurs every last Sunday of each month. Anyone exhibitions can visit this event free of cost. Another interesting attraction in Kingston is Port Royal. It was once deemed as the’ richest and wickedest’ city in the world is currently a very small and quiet fishing village that receives visitors from all over the world. (Jamaica Heritage Trust, 2017).

A bliesure traveler can enjoy the ambiance at one of the oldest public facilities in Kingston. Rockfort Mineral Bath is believed to have surfaced after the powerful 1907 earthquake and is believed to be highly mineralized. Therefore, having therapeutic value which can be enjoyed from the mineral-rich waters that flow from the Rockfort hills. Make your final stop at one of Jamaica’s signature product; the Bob Marley Museum. This Museum showcases the life of the
well-known and one of the best reggae singer of all time. So fascinating it is that the then
President of the United States of America Barack Obama’s placed the Museum at the top of his
‘to do’ list when he visited Jamaica for his business Trip in 2015.

Devon House

This great historical monument is not only loved for its great architecture but for its ability
perfectly package food, business and leisure activities. Originally owned by Jamaica’s first Black
millionaire is one of Jamaica’s most visited historical site; the Devon House. Built in 1881, on
what was originally a 51-acre property. George Stiebel, son of a black housekeeper and a
German-Jewish merchant, was among three (3) affluent Jamaicans who built extravagant homes
in the late 19th century at the corner of Trafalgar Road and Hope Road; often referred to as the
Millionaires Corner. The other two house which belonged to Daniel Finzi and the Verleys were
destroyed to make way for new development. Only the Devon House mansion survived this with
the Government stepping in to ensure that the house was not destroyed.

The house was then declared a national monument in 1990 by the Jamaica National Heritage
Trust. The home sits on approximately 11 acres of land with green lush and well-kept lawns.
Stiebel is said to have made his fortune from investments in gold mines in Venezuela. Therewith
he purchased 99 properties in Jamaica, including Devon Pen (Devon House Development
Company, 2017). The house is not only a heritage site but it also a reminder to those who are
familiar with its rich history that anything is possible. Though not from a wealthy family, George
Stiebel was able to make fortunes not only for himself but the island.
The well-polished Orchid Room and the Devonshire are multi-functional event space represent the ideal location for a peaceful, relaxed and fruitful meeting. Outdoor locations are also available such as the Formal Gardens, South Lawn, and East Lawn. The above areas are used to host multiple events such as corporate meetings, fashion events, birthday parties amongst other small gatherings. The self-contained and spacious Orchid room is equipped with private restroom and Wi-Fi accessibility. Each location boasts some facilities such as secure setup access beginning 24 hours before each event. Highly trained professional hospitality personnel are available before, during and after every event. Audiovisual support is available at the location along with event styling services.

One can take advantage of the wide array of other food establishments on the property. There is the Bad Dawg Sausages (hot dogs), Chocolate dreams (chocolates), Coco Raw (smoothie),