

Negril hotel gets nod to add 40% more rooms

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RONDEL Village will expand its room count by 40 per cent next year, despite economic challenges being faced locally, said general manager Carolyn Wright.

The resort, which currently has 40 rooms, will start building 16 more in May for completion by the start of the winter tourist season, next December.

The expansion plans are being driven by attempts to increase revenue and make operations more cost-effective, the general manager said. "As a smaller property, marketing cost doesn't get distributed as well as in larger places. We are also trying to fully utilise the space we have and also offer some employment."

Expanding during tough economic times is not new to the hotel, said Wright.

In 2002, a year after the terrorist attacks on the US, the resort underwent a major expansion and refurbishing project on the beach side of the property. This came at a time when "things were in a bad place but we decided to go ahead with the plans and it turned out successfully", she told the Business Observer. "With the economy in its state, planning to develop doesn't take place today. You have to decide in advance and we did so about a year ago."

Last week, the family-owned resort received permission from the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA) to expand.

No figure has been attached to the development, as a "detailed costing" has not been done as yet, said John Wright, the property's managing director. This is still dependent on the parish council, which is to give its permission for construction activities to begin.

The expansion should result in 12 to 16 more jobs. "Typically, it (hiring) would be one employee per room, so maybe 16," he said. Given efforts to increase efficiency and minimise costs, this number could also be 12 but "certainly no more than 16".

The hotel is located on either sides of a road, dividing the property into beach and "landward" sides. Expansion is to take place on the landward side that currently has eight rooms. This would bring the hotel's total room count to 56, including the 32 rooms on Rondel's beach side.

Approval of the environmental permit was listed on NEPA's website. However, the hotel operators have not yet been given the nod in writing, John Wright said. He expects that the physical approval will be delivered in the first week of January, helping to keep the hotel's expansion plans on schedule for a 2012 year-end opening. The written approval should also give specifics of the "stipulated conditions" that the environmental permit referred to.

NEPA is a government agency that is aimed at integrating environmental planning and sustainable development policies and programmes. It promotes sustainable development by ensuring protection of the environment and orderly national development.

Though planning for the expansion, the owners said upgrades take place throughout the resort annually. This is necessary to attract repeat visitors, which it has built up a large number of, they said.

Rondel Village was the winner of the Jamaica Hotel & Tourist Association Small Hotel of the Year Award in 2008.

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The Rondel Village resort, as seen on its website, will be expanding to increase operational efficiencies and generate revenue.