

Calls for youth to be empowered to tap into tourism opportunities

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Youth leaders engage in discussion at the Tourism Awareness Week Youth Forum, under the theme 'Tourism and Peace: Out of Many, One Love', which was held recently at the Montego Bay Convention Centre in St James. From left: moderator Amashika Lorne; President of The University of the West Indies Tourism Society, Katrina Chin; Prime Minister's National Youth Award for Excellence in National Leadership recipient, Odane Brooks; Dean of Discipline at Anchovy High School in St James, Levon Brissett; and Jamaica Tourist Board Junior Minister of Tourism, Taj Melbourne.

YOUTH LEADERS and other stakeholders have highlighted the need for increased investment in education and training to enable young people to tap into the opportunities available in the tourism sector.

The young people, who participated in a recent Tourism Awareness Week (TAW) panel discussion at the Montego Bay Convention Centre in St James, noted that while tourism offers many prospects for employment and entrepreneurship, there is the need for persons to be empowered to take advantage of the opportunities.

“If we can increase the skill sets of our young people to be able to tap into some of the opportunities available, then we will be able to reduce the amount of tourism earnings that leave the country,” said 2024 recipient of the Prime Minister’s National Youth Award for Excellence in National Leadership, Odane Brooks.

He cited the Tourism Innovation Incubator of the Tourism Enhancement Fund as one avenue through which young entrepreneurs can receive mentorship and coaching to take their businesses to the next level.

“We have to see more of those as avenues for young people to be able to tap into [opportunities] so we can take small businesses to the higher value chain, where you can earn more from the tourism sector,” he noted.

“It is great to know that this is something currently being pursued by the Ministry of Tourism to retain more of the earnings from tourism,” he added.

The Jamaica Tourist Board Junior Tourism Minister, Taj Melbourne, said that the training thrust must start in schools with the integration of technology.

The Westmoreland-based Manning’s School student suggested a special artificial intelligence programme that would facilitate students learning more about the Jamaican culture, so that they are better able to engage with visitors to enhance their understanding of what is authentically Jamaican.

President of the University of The West Indies Tourism Society, Katrina Chin, also agreed that “investing in innovation is very important”.

She noted that Jamaicans are creative but need the resources “to get things done”.

Dean of Discipline at Anchovy High School in St. James, Levon Brissett, in his contribution, noted that tourism encompasses a wide range of disciplines, and there are jobs in the sector “that the naked eye may not necessarily know are tourism jobs”.

As such, he stressed the need for partnerships with work experience coordinators to prepare students with vocational skills to take on jobs in tourism, so that “our students would not then leave high school wondering ‘where am I going to go next?’”

The panel discussion on the topic 'Building a Bridge: Youth as Catalysts for Change' was moderated by public relations specialist Amashika Lorne.

More than 200 students from Tourism Action Clubs in some 23 secondary and tertiary institutions, as well as other tourism stakeholders, participated in the TAW forum under the theme 'Tourism and Peace: Out of Many, One Love'.