

## 'Say I Do In Paradise'

Jamaica is banking on expanding its imprint on the growing destination wedding market, which is estimated at 350,000 nuptials annually, according to The Knot's 2012 Market Intelligence Destination Weddings study.

"This figure represents 24 per cent of all weddings in the United States," says Marcia Bullock-Jobson, regional director, groups and conventions, Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB), North America. Bullock-Jobson and her team are riding on the success of Jamaica's first-ever Wedding Destination Showcase tagged, 'Say I Do in Paradise', held at the Manhattan Penthouse, New York City, in collaboration with the renowned Wedding Salon. More than 300 brides-to-be attended the event, which served as a venue for couples planning their nuptials to discover what Jamaica had to offer for their trip down the aisle. The affair featured a range of experiences, including cake tastings, hair and make-up sessions, models in designer wedding gowns, and one-on-one consultations with wedding specialists from a range of Jamaica's top resorts. The strategy, the JTB said, was to penetrate markets through strategic initiatives, utilising a vetted bridal database. "This event ideally was to reach maximum potential audience with focus on the potential bride, secure on-the-spot qualified leads and bookings and promote events utilising social media platforms in conjunction with traditional media efforts." Most popular locations The Jamaican participants included Grand Palladium Resort and Spa, Half Moon, A Rock Resort, Holiday Inn Sunspree Resort Montego Bay, Iberostar Hotels & Resorts, Jewel Resorts, The Tryall Club, Sunset Resorts Jamaica, as well as the Montego Bay Convention Centre and Tai Flora Services Ltd. The Knot research shows that 30 per cent of destination weddings take place outside Continental USA, with the Caribbean, Mexico and Hawaii being the most popular locations for Americans. According to Wedding Salon's CEO and Founder, Tatiana Byron, couples today want a unique and memorable experience for their wedding and Jamaica has an endless array of options for them to choose from. "From casual ceremonies on some of the world's most celebrated beaches to formal affairs in luxurious resorts combined with its generous and soulful people, the island is the perfect place to celebrate a couple's love," she said. Thrilled about the overwhelming interest Jamaica received from brides at the showcase seeking a destination wedding, Bullock-Jobson said the island was able to present all that the country has to offer, from the wedding to attractions and more. "We were able to take the guesswork out of planning a destination wedding. Due to the impressive turnout, we're looking at doing future events in other key markets," she added. Throughout the event, wedding specialists interacted with brides of every budget on how they could plan their fairy-tale wedding in a seamless way. Jamaican designer Sheena Carby dressed models in her new collection of island-inspired wedding gowns, while renowned celebrity artist Sonia Rodriguez gave brides wedding-ready hair and make-up sessions before they headed to a photo booth for a fun photography session. Bullock-Jobson is heartened by the fact that the average destination bride is 30 years old, "With persons involved in destination weddings having an average of 86 guests in their party, we consider this a win-win situation". The opportunity also exists for wedding planners, as 51 per cent of destination wedding couples use a planner, while 86 per cent of the couples still plan to take a honeymoon after their wedding. Jamaica Gleaner