

[More Than Just Tourism](#)

Appleton Estate Rum Experience to benefit wider economy

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SANTA CRUZ, St Elizabeth — All agree that Gruppo Campari's US\$7.2-million investment in expanding the popular tourist attraction Appleton Estate Rum Tour, now renamed Appleton Estate Rum Experience, will boost earnings from tourism.



Appleton Estate dates back to the 17th century.

But it's not just about tourism. Listen to Clement 'Jimmy' Lawrence, chairman of J Wray & Nephew Limited — parent company of Appleton Estate and subsidiary of Gruppo Campari — and it soon becomes clear that the investment is also about further imaging of the prized Appleton rum.

At a recent function just prior to a “stakeholders' hard hat tour” of the expanded Appleton attraction now under construction, Lawrence identified the value of the project to Jamaica's tourism and wider economy, including the linkages through agriculture, transportation, employment, and craft business, et al.

He described the project as a “gateway” for Jamaica's south coast tourism product. But also, Lawrence argued, the project provided a “win- win” and a meeting point for tourism and the rum industry.

“The restoration of this world-renowned property (renovation and expansion of the Appleton tour) is well needed as Gruppo Campari seeks to grow the Appleton brand globally, creating several opportunities along the way for Brand Jamaica. So there is a synergy there that we want to exploit,” Lawrence told his audience.

Central to the improved facility will be a state-of-the-art restaurant and tasting rooms, which will allow Appleton Estate staff to expose 200,000 visitors annually to favourite Jamaican meals “with premium rums”, Lawrence explained.

Even the very practical desire to restore rail service between Montego Bay and Appleton, to get visitors to the rum attraction quicker and more efficiently, is influenced by the immediate spin-offs in the promotion of Appleton products.

“The train would halve travel time of the three-hour bus ride and allow visitors to start the rum experience while travelling to their destination. So that is the hype and interest and how the railway will fit our business well,” Lawrence said.

The expanded and modernised Appleton tour facility, including the addition of modern tasting rooms, restaurant, retail store, and renovation of the wider property, is expected to be completed in October/November, with a soft opening immediately after and a “grand opening” early next year.

When the project is fully up and running, visitor arrivals to the Appleton tour is expected to jump from 50,000 annually to 200,000. “Think of what that will do,” said Lawrence.

But he emphasised that central to the success of the improved attraction — which sits on an 11,000-acre sugar estate said to have been producing rum since 1749 — must be the Jamaican Government's long-promised rail service from Montego Bay to Appleton.

Minister of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries Karl Samuda voiced his own frustration at the slow progress.

“From where I stand, I am a little disappointed we have not got further ahead with the re-establishment of the rail between Montego Bay and Appleton,” Samuda said.

He pledged to be an “emissary” on behalf of Appleton for the rail project. Samuda said he was aware he could speak on behalf of Tourism Minister Edmund Bartlett, “who is very anxious to at least get the Montego Bay to Appleton” rail service going. The rail link was discontinued in the 1990s.

Asked by a journalist after the tour to explain the reason for the delay in the rail project, Samuda identified “a difference in approach”.

According to the Industry minister: “One (approach) says we must extend it (rail service) much longer. The Minister of Tourism (Bartlett) is intent on a service from Appleton to Montego Bay, Transport Minister (Mike Henry) wants it to run (over a longer distance) from Williamsfield (Manchester) to Montego Bay.”

While Samuda did not explain further, that difference in “approach” to the rail project would presumably be affected by cost considerations.

Recognising that the rail service won't be ready prior to the opening of the new-look Appleton tour, Lawrence urged speedy attention to the potholed and bumpy roads from Montego Bay to the south coast, in order to make the journey more comfortable for visitors and locals alike.

“We don't want them (visitors) to be shaken, we just want them to be stirred to visit Appleton,” he quipped.

Samuda hailed the Campari Group and J Wray and Nephew for their forward-looking and people-friendly approach to investment in Jamaica.

He recalled that last year when the Appleton sugar factory had to be shut down and the annual sugar crop abandoned because of environmental considerations, the company compensated workers for loss of earnings.

“I recall meeting with Campari and they were most concerned about the welfare of the workers,” said Samuda.