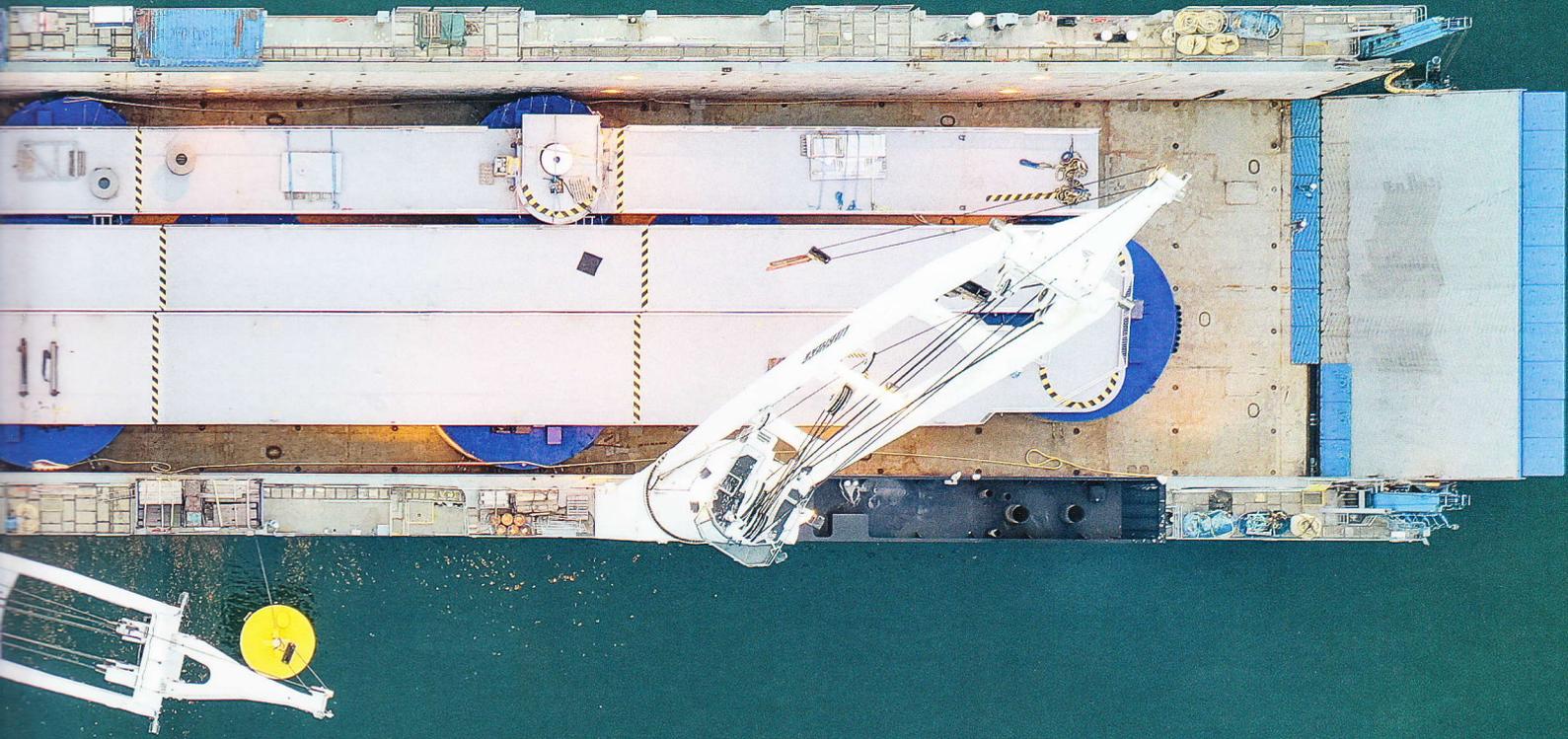




REDISCOVERING PORT ROYAL

By Amanda Hanna

Photography by Corey Hamilton



Two years ago, the Prime Minister, the Most Honourable Andrew Holness, asked the CEO of Kingston's Port Authority a crucial question: "How can we make Kingston into a desirable cruise ship destination?" After much research, the Port Authority produced an answer. Cruise ship passengers, familiar with Kingston's reputation, were not interested in docking there. They were, however, interested in docking at Port Royal. From this research, an idea was born that will lead to the revitalization of Jamaica's most storied port.

"We felt Port Royal could become the gateway to Kingston," explained William Tatham, a member of the Cruise Board and Port Authority. "The idea is to entice passengers with Port Royal's rich history and then expose them to the many desirable tourist attractions available in Kingston. After a few years, we hope to erode Kingston's reputation among cruise ship passengers and be able to welcome cruise ships directly."

As many Jamaicans know, Port Royal was once the richest city in the Caribbean with the most scandalous reputation. Notorious pirates like Blackbeard often convened there, to spend their ill-gotten gains on booze, women and gambling. As such, this sunken city has become a place of fascination for historians, deep sea divers and tourists the world over—but until now, it has only been accessible by land.

“We went to the Heritage Trust and said: what issues are preventing Port Royal from becoming a cruise ship port? They told us it could only happen if it did not involve drudging and did not cause any environmental or architectural damage to the sunken city,” says Mr. Tatham. The creative solution was obvious: Port Royal needed a Seawalk.

Seawalks are used to provide cruise ships’ access to land, in places where docks do not exist. They are sturdy, extendable floating piers that can fully unfurl in just 10 minutes and can last in excess of 25 years. Best of all, Seawalks do not involve drudging and have no negative environmental impacts. It was the permanent solution that Port Royal needed to begin its long-awaited renaissance.

The newly installed Seawalk at Old Coaling Warf, which was once part of the Royal Navy Dockyard, will allow 3,000 passengers to disembark their cruise ships in only 30 minutes. While the landside is currently under development, Port Royal is looking forward to welcoming her first 2,074 cruise ship passengers in January 2020 from the Marella Discovery 2 (Marella Cruises).

“When the first ship docks at Port Royal in January, they will enter a newly built terminal with proper staging. Busses will be waiting for those who scheduled tours on the ship. Passengers who do not choose to do a tour, might take a taxi into Kingston or explore the ruins of Port Royal at their own pace.”

The ultimate goal is to build a series of museums to document the storied history of Port Royal to greet passengers as they disembark their ships. “There is more to Port Royal than the pirates. For 200 years, Port Royal was the Caribbean home of the British Military. It was a major slave port. A major export port. It is a place of a million stories just waiting to be told, and we hope to tell as many as possible,” Mr. Tatham goes on. “The hope is that Port Royal will eventually become a destination, not only for tourists, but for locals looking for fun, family-friendly activities near Kingston.” Δ





The Port Authority
of Jamaica

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