5-31-2012

Out of Many, One People: Grand Valley State University's International Partnership Delegation to Jamaica

Michelle Burke 
*Grand Valley State University*

Forrest Clift 
*Grand Valley State University*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/colleagues](http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/colleagues)

Recommended Citation
Burke, Michelle and Clift, Forrest (2012) "Out of Many, One People: Grand Valley State University's International Partnership Delegation to Jamaica," *Colleagues*: Vol. 8: Iss. 2, Article 6. Available at: [http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/colleagues/vol8/iss2/6](http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/colleagues/vol8/iss2/6)
Out of Many, One People
Grand Valley State University’s International Partnership Delegation to Jamaica

By Michelle Burke and Forrest Clift, GVSU Staff
Photography by Michelle Burke and Forrest Clift

Looking out of the window of an airplane as it slowly descends from the clouds, one gets the slightest hint of what the island of Jamaica holds for a new visitor. Sparkling blue water frames a tiny slice of lush green mountains. Along the edges of the water, thin strands of white suggest the invitation to a pristine sand beach. The sun shines brightly illuminating a bevy of colors and textures. This is only part of what Jamaica will ultimately reveal.

During March 2011, six GVSU faculty and staff members from a variety of educational and professional backgrounds ventured to Jamaica as recipients of the Padnos International Center (PIC) International Partnership Delegation Grant. The 2011 recipients were Michelle Burke (Student Life), Forrest Clift (College of Education), Takeelia Garrett-Lynn (Housing & Residence Life), Susan Kraus (College of Nursing), Vandana Pednekar-Magal (School of Communications) and Ruth Stevens (School of Criminal Justice).

The grant, administered through PIC, provides faculty and staff members the opportunity to travel to one of GVSU’s partner institutions around the world. Each year a different group is selected and the delegation is led by a faculty member with expertise in the destination country and its culture. The Jamaica delegation was led by Dr. Steve Buckridge, a Jamaican native and the Director of Area Studies in the Brooks College of Interdisciplinary Studies and Meaghan Myers-Smith, PIC Study Abroad Advisor.

“It is important for me to share my culture with GVSU faculty, staff and students to dispel the misconceptions and stereotypes about Jamaica and Jamaican people,” says Dr. Buckridge. “I would like everyone to walk away realizing that Jamaica is a beautiful country with a diverse population. This is reflected in our national motto—“Out of Many, One People.”

While seven people participated in the Jamaica delegation under Dr. Buckridge’s leadership and traveled together as a group to all venues, each person came away with different impressions and favorite memories of Jamaica.

DAY 1: Sunday
Historic Jewish Synagogue; Holy Trinity Cathedral; Port Royal and Fort Charles; Devon House

Sunday’s schedule found the delegation exploring the religious development of both the Catholic and Jewish faiths, as well as the Pre-Colonial Caribbean history of Jamaica. Michelle Burke, Director of Student Life and adjunct instructor in the College of Education, said the itinerary Dr. Buckridge developed presented a full picture of his home country in just a few days. “I was intrigued by the cultural diversity of Jamaica and felt the itinerary presented a broad view of the history and culture of the country. I was particularly moved by our visits to the Jewish Cultural Center/Synagogue and the Catholic Holy Trinity Cathedral. The time we spent with local Indian
“From lush, green tropical plants, to the clear, blue skies, to the gray mist-enshrouded mountains hiding the secrets of thriving coffee estates, Jamaica is an island tapestry.”
The Jamaican motto ‘Out of Many, One People’ was deeply rooted and evident in our everyday social interactions. With respect for individuals and diversity it is a rich blend of cultures, ethnicities and religions that create one cohesive and prideful nation”
— Susan Kraus

DAY 2: Monday UWI Campus Visit; Indian High Commissioner’s Residence

The second full day of the trip found us visiting the University of the West Indies (UWI)—the premier institution of higher learning in the West Indies. The Mona Campus of UWI, set in the hills about 20 minutes from downtown Kingston, serves more than 13,000 students, and offers a vibrant student community rich in activities and a supportive academic environment.

Michelle Burke said the UWI tour was exactly what she wanted out of the delegation visit. “I was so impressed with the University of the West Indies-Mona Campus and enjoyed comparing and contrasting the characteristics of UWI and GVSU. The Mona Campus offers breathtaking views of the Blue Mountains from its state-of-the-art academic facilities.” Burke says the campus is steeped in rich and vibrant experiences. “World champion runner and Olympian Usain Bolt trains at the UWI outdoor track. A tour of the library revealed extensive collections and dedicated study spaces.”

Links:
- Port Royal, Jamaica
  nautarch.tamu.edu/portroyal/
- Bob Marley Museum
  www.bobmarley-foundation.com/museum.html
- Old Tavern Coffee Estate
  www.exportjamaica.org/oldtavern/
- University of the West Indies at Mona
  www.mona.uwi.edu/
- Devon House, Firefly, and Rose Hall
  Jamaica National Heritage Trust
  www.jnht.com/
- GVSU Study Abroad Programs
  www.gvsu.edu/studyabroad

Published by ScholarWorks@GVSU, 2012
The delegation had numerous on-campus opportunities to savor life at UWI. We attended an exciting lecture on the history of Jamaican music, from mento to ska, reggae to dancehall. The lecturer, Beryl Johnson surprised us at the end of her presentation by sharing a YouTube video of GVSU students performing a Jamaican folk song. We were honored that she tailored her presentation just for our delegation. Members dined in the Mary Seacole Hall of Residence and toured the Rex Nettleford Hall of Residence, meeting with the staff and some students who lived there.

The visit, says Burke, was revealing. “I found common ground with counterparts in Student Development and Residence Life, because the work we all do is based on the Social Change Model of leadership development. The possibility to take GVSU students to UWI and have Jamaican students visit West Michigan is so exciting! Much like we are at Grand Valley, the University of West Indies staff and faculty we met were so student-centered.”

DAY 3: Tuesday

U.S. Embassy; Bob Marley Museum; Old Tavern Coffee Estate (Blue Mountains); Strawberry Hill

A morning visit with US Agency for International Development (US AID) officials at the U.S. Embassy complex was heightened when Ambassador Pamela Bridgewater unexpectedly joined us for about an hour-long discussion. Ambassador Bridgewater began her career as a college educator, most recently at Howard University (Washington DC) and she took a particular interest in our delegation and the idea of increasing the global perspectives of higher education in the United States. As we entered and exited the embassy we observed a large group of Jamaicans waiting outside the complex, seeking permission to gain entry to the U.S. Although we did go through some stringent security screening, the relatively easy process for our delegation to enter and exit the embassy was a strong reminder of the rights and privileges we enjoy as U.S. citizens.

Traveling up into the thick, vivid greenery of the Blue Mountains was enthralling and a bit breathtaking... literally. The Blue Mountains form the longest mountain range in Jamaica. From the valley to our mountain top destination was approximately 18 miles in a direct line. But the drive up is anything but a straight line going from sea level to approximately 7,000 feet. Our van sped through the winding, narrow roads, as only a native Jamaican driver could handle. Looking out of the window at a steep drop off elicited more than a few exclamations. However, the warm climate changed to a pleasant chill during the ascent. The landscape was dotted with plants not native to North America and many we had never seen before. The Blue Mountains are full of native bird species and we caught fleeting glimpses of Jamaica’s national bird.
FAVORITE MEMORY: Susan Kraus

On a personal level I think the experience that made a strong, lasting impression on me was visiting the Jewish (Shaare Shalom) synagogue and cultural center. I married into a Jewish family. Based on the matriarchal structure of Judaism my daughter is not considered Jewish. However, I believe that from a unique collective identity and religious perspective we need to keep that heritage alive for her. Until this trip I had not given much thought to the Jewish people residing and practicing their religion immersed in such diverse cultures around the world. I appreciated learning the history of the Jewish people coming to Jamaica and visiting their exquisite house of worship.
— the “Doctor Bird”—a colorful species of hummingbird which only lives in Jamaica.

The Blue Mountains are world-famous for growing delicious coffee and we were fortunate to stop at a family-owned coffee plantation, the Old Tavern Coffee Estate. As fog sporadically enveloped our view of the growing fields from the house perched on the side of the hill, we learned from the estate’s mother-and-son proprietors about the rigors of maintaining high standards for coffee to be certified with the prestigious “Blue Mountain” label.

On the return trip to Kingston from the Old Tavern Coffee Estate, the delegation detoured to visit Strawberry Hill, a luxurious resort nestled on the mountainside with an expansive vista of Kingston. This says Ruth Stevens was one of her most favorite memories—“watching evening fall over Kingston and the ocean as we wove our way down from the top of the Blue Mountains.”

**FAVORITE MEMORY: Takeelia Garrett-Lynn**

I really enjoyed going up into the Blue Mountains. It was enjoyable to share the camaraderie with our group. I’m not a coffee drinker, but it was exciting to try something new (tasting the coffee and beans) and learning about their plantation’s history and how they came to be there.

**DAY 4: Wednesday**

**Firefly Plantation; Ocho Rios; Dunn’s River Falls; Open-Air Market**

The delegation trip continued from the Jamaican capital city, Kingston at the bottom of the island to Ocho Rios at the top of the island. Vandana Pednekar-Magal, Associate Professor in the School of Communications, commented on how the route was visually spectacular—“thick coconut groves and villages hidden in lush tropical forests, and then along cliffs with stunning seascapes, and through woods of flowering Jacaranda and tall pines and mango trees heavy with fruit.” This trip was indeed memorable says Pednekar-Magal, “There is this dramatic diversity in the landscape. The diversity of the land is pervasive—in the communities, in language, in religion, in food.”

The trip to Ocho Rios included a visit to the Firefly Estate—vacation home to famed English playwright ( ).
Noel Coward. The property, which once belonged to former Jamaican governor (and pirate), Sir Henry Morgan, features a commanding view of St. Mary’s harbor and Port Maria. Coward is buried in a marble tomb on the estate’s grounds.

After a few days of experiencing the authentic Jamaican people and culture, the visit ended with a taste of the commercial tourism prevalent on the Northern coast. The dichotomy between the excess of all-inclusive resorts and the adjacent poverty-stricken neighborhoods was striking. The need to educate colleagues and students about Jamaica’s full story is apparent. Meaghan Myers-Smith, Study Abroad Advisor with the PIC, believes this is important. “This island is often misunderstood here in the U.S. and not valued for its wealth of resources (beyond tourism): religion, flora and fauna, history, the diasporas. I recommend visitors venture out beyond the resorts and learn about the real Jamaica. Kingston, especially, is an incredible city to explore”!

“The trip confirmed for me that Jamaica is much more than resorts and beaches. There are countless opportunities for students to expand their global perspectives and increase their understanding of economic, educational, and political structures different from the United States.”

— Michelle Burke

On our trip to the airport in preparation for our flight home, we made a side stop to Rose Hall, a beautiful Jamaican-Georgian-style mansion in Montego Bay set high upon a hill overlooking the ocean. Though the visit was brief, Dr. Buckridge shared with the delegation the importance of the home and plantation to island culture and lore. The mansion was the home of Annie Palmer, known as “the white witch of Rose Hall” who is reported to have used voodoo magic to murder plantation slaves as well as her three husbands. With that chilling story under our belts, we made our way to the airport.

While this delegation experience was tailored to GVSU faculty and staff, Ruth Stevens says it has inspired her. “After visiting Jamaica, I am enthusiastically promoting UWI to my students as a study abroad opportunity. The staff at UWI were welcoming and friendly and I was impressed by the new law building for both undergraduate and graduate students,” says Stevens. “Our trip also

EDH 601: Jamaican Culture and Education

A new study abroad experience for College of Education students in May 2012

Up to 18 students from the College of Education’s M.Ed. in Higher Education program will travel to Jamaica May 5-20, 2012. This is a faculty-led program organized by Dr. Jay Cooper and Michelle Burke. During the first week, students will start in Montego Bay and travel to the St. Elizabeth region for immersion in a service learning project benefiting a rural school.

In the second week, the group will continue on to Kingston, visiting several colleges/technical schools throughout the country. Students will stay in a hall of residence at the University of West Indies-Mona campus. Through lectures, meetings with administrators, and field experiences, students will be exposed to the Caribbean higher education system, people and culture, economic climate, history, and the struggles of a developing, complex country.

More information at www.gvsu.edu/studyabroad
opened my eyes to the wide variety of educational and cultural experiences available on the island. The diverse cultures and traditions in Jamaica provide an excellent environment for students to grow in their understanding of the world and other people—something that all of us on the trip were able to experience as well.”

From that first glance out of the plane window, the Jamaica trip revealed many beautiful images and inspiring opportunities to all of the delegations participants. While we might have been amazed and in awe of this new experience as visitors, Dr. Steve Buckridge, a Jamaican native felt a bit differently. “When I return home there is a feeling of great joy—it truly feels good to be home, to be in a place where I am connected,” he says. “Home is also a place where the beaches are pristine, the music is lively, smiles are bright, the culture is vibrant and life is slow and easy going.”

FAVORITE MEMORY: Forrest Clift

While visiting the UWI Mona Campus, Meaghann and I had the opportunity to visit an English literature classroom that was in session. The professor and students were welcoming as we were ushered in shortly after class had begun. The students, at the professors urging were analyzing and deconstructing the meaning of the lyrics to a suggestive song “Bad Man” by a well-loved Jamaican dancehall musician known as Elephant Man. Opinions and comments were flying back and forth with great emotion as each student interpreted the author’s viewpoint and meaning. Some students took issue with the meaning their peers had assigned to some images and words. The discussion grew more excited and intense and the students became louder and more engaged in the discourse at hand. The professor, while monitoring the conversation, allowed the students to lead the flow of where the discussion went. At times, the professor would ask students to quiet down, not out of frustration or annoyance, but to give quieter students less likely to jump into fray a chance to participate and be heard. Amazingly, the others stepped back and let these students “into” the conversation and then the noise grew again. Never have I seen or experienced such a vibrant discussion in a college or university classroom. It was thrilling to watch and experience.

FAVORITE MEMORY: Meaghann Myers-Smith

So many memories! I really enjoyed the conversations with Mr. Kerr, our guide. His input on local culture/current events was really memorable and informative. He gave us the local insight on opinions about President Obama (some residents are skeptical because they know he’s part of a system bigger than himself)...on immigration issues for Jamaicans in the U.S. and on local drug laws including the Christopher “Dudus” Coke case.