



## LEADING INDICATOR



### GONE TO THE DOGS



Jamaica, best known as a tropical paradise and the birthplace of Bob Marley and reggae music, is now getting international publicity by boasting another title. It is home to the only dry land sled dog racing team in the Caribbean.

Don't laugh! Remember the Jamaican bobsleigh team?

Typically, dog sledding takes place in Canada, Alaska, Scotland, and England during winter on snow covered grounds. Of course, Jamaica has no winter. No snow? No problem mon!

The Jamaican dogsled team, based at the Ocho Rios branch of Chukka Caribbean Adventures, is the brainchild of Danny Melville. The group is sponsored by two heavyweights; music producer/hotelier Chris Blackwell, and country singer Jimmy Buffet, who is also a co partner with the Jamaican-based Margaritaville Caribbean chain.

In 2005, on a trip to Canada, Melville stumbled (literally) across a dog sled adapted for use in the summer. By the end of the trip he had selected and contacted a dog sled coach in Scotland, and the rest, as they say, is history.

The dogs on the local team are not the well known Huskies that usually participate in such events; the Caribbean is too hot for them. Instead, the Jamaican team consists of local talent, born and bred Jamaican mongrels adopted by Chukka Caribbean Adventures from the Jamaica Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals. The team currently has 40 canines, but the number increases regularly, boasts Mrs. Zadia Forbes, a member of the Chukka Caribbean Adventures marketing team.

The international team, established in 2005, consists of 2 mushers persons who sit in the dog sled and urge the dogs on -who regularly compete in races from the Highlands of Europe to Canada, often times placing a strong second.

In 2007, dog sledding became one of the twenty-eight attractions at Chukka Caribbean Adventures. There are two options for those interested in partaking in this particular attraction. Visitors can either have an 'encounter' with the animals, which involves meeting them, touring the facility and observing them in action; or they can have an 'experience' with them. The latter option is a 16 minute thrill which involves the guest being pulled across the Jamaican country side by the loving and enthusiastic animals.



The accomplishments of the unlikely race contenders have been reported in the print media in Calgary, Toronto, Baltimore, on the BBC News, and featured on a billboard in Times Square. In addition, a documentary capturing the evolution of this team from conception to reality was released on DVD last October.

According to Mrs. Forbes, the dog sledding is very popular, particularly with tourists from Canada and England.

"It's a hit!" she enthuses.

The attraction lures tourists who want more than the expected sea, sun and sand, exposing them to a whole different aspect of Jamaican culture. Jamaica's exposure from dog sledding highlights the island's growth as a multifaceted attraction, which augurs well for the tourism industry.

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