



## *Birth of the Guide*

*It* is said that food is one of those aspects of culture that every society holds dear, and here in Jamaica this is especially true. We are fiercely proud of our food and with good reason. Yet, with all that there is to be proud of, Jamaica's local culinary industry has only recently begun to blossom. It was surprising to learn only a few short years ago just how little information was available promoting the local industry to both locals and visitors alike.

**The decision to start the Jamaica Restaurant Menu Guide was prompted by this lack of information, a desire to be a part of the growing food industry, as well as a desire to be financially independent.**

The idea itself was not an original one by any means; the menu guide model has been well established worldwide. In fact, it was during a trip to Cayman many years ago that my partner, Elizabeth Ewart, first came across their menu guide and realized the potential for Jamaica. From then on it was a matter of timing, and when a few years ago a host of new restaurants began to open, the time seemed at last right.

**The initial concept for the Guide was simple: Classy, Jamaican, Irresistible and, most importantly, Free.** The first three were a matter of production, delicious food shots, vibrant colours and good print quality. The last meant that the entire magazine had to be paid for by advertising.

Since neither of us had had any experience in the publication industry, there were quite a few challenges to overcome, and perhaps the biggest of these was a lack of confidence on the part of advertisers. Almost everyone we pitched the idea to said, "It's a great idea, but we think we'll wait for the next issue".

On top of this, the initial page costs were almost prohibitive to most restaurants. To overcome this we opted to provide as complete a service for the cost as we could, including all photography and graphic layouts, and inclusion in the Guide's website (this importantly also allowed us to control quality and maintain consistency).

Even with all that it was still necessary to offer discounts, and to subsidize most of the initial pages with our own funds just to get the product going. We knew that once people saw the product they would want it and also want to be a part of it, so we had to get that first issue out.

The actual production of the first Guide proved to be no less challenging. The process of taking images, doing layouts, getting approvals, and getting payments to meet a printing deadline again proved our own naivety in underestimating what was involved.

We also felt strongly that a Jamaican menu guide should be produced and printed locally, but local printing costs were far greater than printing abroad (even when shipping and clearing were considered). For us this left little alternative but to go abroad for that first issue. Our desire to have a fully local product did not diminish, and we worked to establish and continue a cost effective local relationship, which we utilized to success for the second and third issues.

Ultimately the process has been and continues to be a learning experience. Each issue has become easier to produce and sell as confidence in, and recognition for, the Guide has grown. We in turn have been able to reduce the cost to our clients with each issue as well as expand and improve the Guide itself.

Fortunately, we have been able to work with individuals who share our vision for the guide and work well together to form a great team, the most important members of which are the actual clients themselves. Their support and advice has become invaluable and, coupled with feedback from the public, has allowed us build a better product.

While the initial goal of being a financially profitable product has not yet been achieved, we know with growth it will be. From here we see the guide continuing to grow and improve, and that **we will be the ultimate food guide for Jamaica's culinary industry.**

*David Douglas*

Director, JRMG

Contact: [jamaicamenuguide@yahoo.com](mailto:jamaicamenuguide@yahoo.com)