A forgotten 18th Century port and an English poet create the backdrop for Jamaica’s next generation of cruise experiences.
Falmouth, JAMAICA, October 29

The coastal town of Falmouth lies just 22 miles east of Montego Bay, Jamaica’s most famous resort. Falmouth today is noted as someplace you pass on your way to somewhere else, but the town has a wonderfully storied past; one in which astonishing wealth, politics and even love came crashing together in a heady history. And it is that glorious history that is set to propel the town to become one of the Caribbean’s most culturally vibrant cruise destinations.

By 2009, the Port Authority of Jamaica (PAJ) expects to debut Falmouth as a major cruise port with facilities to host two Genesis-class ships. The destination will deeply reference the town’s history, offering visitors a unique sensory experience of the Colonial era. “This is quite simply one of the most outstanding things we’ve done, but is also one of the most natural things for us to do in order to amplify Jamaica’s position in the market,” explains William Tatham, Vice President of Cruise and Marina Operations at the Port Authority of Jamaica. “Cruise visitors are looking for more memorable experiences, and this is certainly what Falmouth will be able to deliver.” Falmouth was founded in 1790 from land owned by Edward Barrett. His grand-daughter Elizabeth Barrett Browning would later be celebrated as one of the greatest poets in the English language, but Edward put the family in a notable position long before that as the brilliant steward of the family’s wealth granted by Cromwell’s parliament, and also as the developer of what would become one the wealthiest ports in the New World. By the late 1700s, Jamaica was the world’s leading sugar producer.

This was certainly no place more evident that than in Falmouth and the 88 sugar estates in the region. The town was meticulously mapped out and in the Colonial tradition, streets were named after British royalty and heroes—King Street, Queen Street, Rodney Street (after 18th century naval leader Admiral Lord George Rodney) and Wellington Street (after Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington recognised as Britain's greatest military commander). Flush with the wealth from their holdings, planters were eager to show off their good fortune. Their plantations were too far from the town to facilitate day trips and so it made easy sense for them to maintain second homes in the town. Commerce also developed at a brisk pace and soon the merchants themselves had much to show for the boom. Spurred by the wealth of their clients—both planters and merchants—the architects and builders extravagantly adopted

Georgian architecture, using the finest materials. By the late 1700s Falmouth boasted around 150 homes, described at the time by one observer as "superb, elegant, and substantial." The town was noted for having some of the best representations of Georgian architecture outside of Britain.

An early 19th Century visitor to Falmouth would find a town that was metropolitan in thought, even if this was tempered by the reality that this was still in fact some 5,000 miles from England.There were newspapers, hotels, even a theatre hosting travelling dramatic troupes. The Town Hall was the venue for extravagant balls and concerts for the moneyed-class, while those less wealthy found their distractions in the Town Square with its many taverns, and its bustling, colourful market on the weekends.

My dream is of an island place,
Which distant seas keep lonely;
A little island on whose face the stars are watchers only.
Those bright still stars! they need not seem
Brighter or stiller in my dream

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Elizabeth Barrett's connection with Falmouth goes deeper than the town being founded by — and nearly named after — her grandfather, yet in the sweetest irony of all, she never visited Jamaica. Elizabeth had a terrible falling out with her father (who was born in Jamaica) over her courtship with fellow poet Robert Browning, and she was saved from absolute destitution when her uncle Samuel, bequeathed to her all his Jamaican properties. Her wedding announcement read in part "...of Wimpole Street and Cinnamon Hill, Jamaica", an obvious tribute to her heritage and restored good fortune.

Falmouth made an indelible stamp in the Abolition movement, and again, there was a Barrett connection. Baptist missionary William Knibb was befriended by the Barrett family soon after his arrival in Falmouth. Knibb went on to preach of equality and brotherhood much to the dismay of the planters who felt that his views would ferment rebellion. They were right, as a slave revolt in 1832 led to the destruction of cane fields and great houses. The blame for the rebellion fell squarely at Knibb's feet and he was only saved by the clout of the Barrett family. Exiled to England, Knibb railed against the conditions of slaves and as a consequence, his church, along with 19 others, were set on fire. In response to pleas from the Abolitionists, Parliament passed

the Emancipation Act of 1833.

It is expected that Falmouth's rich heritage will provide an impressive backdrop for the new cruise destination. The design will draw on the many inspirations not just in terms of the social and architectural history, but also on the landscape of the area. The PAJ expects that Falmouth will deliver a wraparound experience not unlike Colonial Williamsburg, but one that is infused with the signature warmth of the Jamaican people and the sheer beauty of the land. Falmouth is in close proximity to some of Jamaica's leading attractions and adventures including rafting on the Martha Brae River; the Greenwood Great House (also a former a Barrett residence); swimming with dolphins at Dolphin Cove, nature adventure tours at Chukka Caribbean Adventure Tours and also Jamaica's wild heart: the Cockpit Country, the mountainous home to flora and fauna found nowhere else in the world. Perhaps more than anywhere else in the Caribbean, Jamaica has the range and scope to match the varied interests of cruise visitors. Now, with Falmouth on the charts, the island is well on its way to raise the bar of visitor satisfaction even higher.