



Service at the Center



Beachfront Honeymoon Butler Room with Private Pool Sanctuary at Sandals Halcyon Beach (left); Sunset Loft Suites at Sandals Negril (above); Over the Water Private Island Butler Villa with Infinity Pool at Sandals Royal Caribbean (opposite page)

An Interview with Gordon “Butch” Stewart, Chairman, Sandals Resorts International

EDITORS’ NOTE “Butch” Stewart founded Sandals Resorts in 1981 and Beaches Resorts in 1997. He was born in Kingston and educated in Jamaica and England.

COMPANY BRIEF Sandals Resorts International (sandals.com), founded in 1981, is based in Montego Bay, Jamaica and owns and operates 15 couples-only, Luxury Included® resort hotels in the Caribbean. The resorts are located in Jamaica, Antigua, Saint Lucia, Barbados, Grenada, and The Bahamas and offer upscale amenities such as gourmet à la carte dining and activities including scuba diving and golf. The company also owns three resorts under the Beaches brand name in Negril and Ocho Rios, Jamaica, and in Providenciales, Turks & Caicos. Beaches Resorts caters to families with Kids Camp programs, Xbox® 360 video game centers, water theme parks, and nanny services. Beaches is also home to the Beaches Resorts Caribbean Adventure with Sesame Street, which brings kids’ characters Elmo, Cookie Monster, Grover, Zoe, Abby Cadabby, Oscar the Grouch, Big Bird, and Bert and Ernie to the resorts year-round for daily activities and special stage shows.



Gordon “Butch” Stewart

14,000 employees and more than 40 different nationalities, we are the largest private sector employer in the Caribbean. We are nothing without our team.

The quality of our product is only getting better and we intend to keep it that way. We offer more quality inclusions than any other resort on the planet. Scuba diving, for instance, is included. Our boats are manned with captains and crews that are trained to the point where the PADI organization recently recognized Sandals as

one of five best scuba operators in the world. The Aqua Center at Sandals Ochi Beach Resort was recently named the first facility in Jamaica and the third in the entire Caribbean to be designated as a Career Development Centre (CDC) by the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI).

Our 5 Star Global Gourmet™ dining program offers guests up to 21 dining options including Surf & Turf at Butch’s Chophouse, or Lobster Butter Masala at our first-ever Indian restaurant, Bombay.

We are constantly raising the bar and have no intentions of stopping anytime soon. I often say that I have never worked a day in my life and that is true. I love what I do, I get the chance to share what we have built, it is truly a great thing.

How important has it been to stay innovative and to continue to evolve your service offerings at the properties?

In today’s world, innovation is key. We introduced the Luxury Included® concept in 2007 and since then we have created waves in the industry and continue to do so with our newest additions and renovations. We are constantly innovating the Luxury Included® experience. For example, we do not only have unlimited scuba diving, but we have sailing and water-skiing. We do not only have beachfront butler suites, but butler suites with skypools, as well.

The Gold Standard services starts from the moment our guests touch down, where they are greeted by the largest fleet of transportation options offered among any other hotel in the English-speaking Caribbean. While we do offer private transportation for all of our guests, our visitors may also choose to book a Private Luxury Transfer via Island Routes Caribbean Adventures. Guests can choose between an Audi

A6, Mercedes Benz E class sedans, Volkswagen Transporters, or for the bigger groups, a private luxury coach bus.

The most recent renovations at Sandals Montego Bay will offer guests our highest standard of luxury and unprecedented services, providing them with the best possible vacation experience. Our flagship resort now boasts a completely new lobby and beachfront bar, and has undergone a property wide renovation of rooms. Among these new and updated rooms are the luxurious Beachfront Millionaire One-Bedroom Butler Villa Suites with Outdoor Tranquility Tubs and Beachfront Romeo & Juliet One-Bedroom Butler Villa Suites with Outdoor Tranquility Tub.

Wellness and spa is a huge part of today’s industry. Based on the tremendous popularity of our spa program, we continue to make major investments in spa expansion. With the addition of every new resort, our spas only continue to get better. In fact, the Red Lane® Spa at Sandals Royal Bahamian in the Bahamas has been voted by readers of *Condé Nast Traveler* as a “Top Caribbean Spa Resort” and the first of three resorts to be recognized as a “Top Spa Resort.”

It doesn’t stop there; we are also making innovations and updates across the brand. Earlier this year we added three new dining options to Sandals Grande St. Lucian and even more recently we added an Over the Water Wedding Chapel, the first in the Caribbean.

Our newest and perhaps most exciting additions to the Sandals brands is the Caribbean’s first of its kind Over the Water Villas making their debut at Sandals Royal Caribbean in Montego Bay, Jamaica this past November. Those rooms came in at over \$1.5 million a key. We didn’t cut corners. We pay attention to detail and continue to invest in our product in order to exceed our guests’ expectations.

Is there an effective understanding that for Sandals, all-inclusive comes with the highest levels of service and standards?

For decades, the all-inclusive sector has suffered from the perception of midnight buffets with no à la carte service or fine dining. We at Sandals do not believe in that type of experience. It is easy to claim to be all-inclusive, but not every all-inclusive resort is the same. There is such thing as the Sandals Difference and we distinguish ourselves every day on things that matter to our guests: location, luxury accommodations, dining and beverages, water and land

What has made Sandals the industry leader year after year in the all-inclusive segment?

Sandals Resorts is the industry leader year after year in the all-inclusive segment because of one simple ethos: to give the customer more than they expect.

Service is paramount and reflective of the warm, friendly hospitality tradition of the Caribbean region and its people. When our guests arrive at Sandals, we want them to feel like they are home. Service is at the center of everything we do.

With service at the center, it is the Sandals team members that make that possible each day for guests. They too share the passion that we feel. We invest in our team. Team members receive rigorous training in concert with Sandals Corporate University, which is committed to their professional development in partnership with 13 top-ranking accredited institutions of higher learning.

We believe in training and giving people opportunity. It is incredible to see how much more sophisticated the training has become and how comprehensive it is. With more than

sports, golf, live entertainment, and the overall quality of their vacation.

We believe in genuine international five-star standards in an environment where everything is premium and part of our all-inclusive setting. This vision has proved to be very successful for us and we continue to improve. We have customers who have grown up with us and are fully aware of who we are and what we do. At the same time, we have the younger generation who may not fully understand just yet, but can go to Trip Advisor and see that though we are the most expensive all-inclusive resort, one gets exactly what they pay for – and that will always be a memorable Luxury Included® vacation.

Do you see opportunities for continued expansion for the brand?

There is always room for growth and expansion. In order to continue to be the best, we have to continue to redefine luxury in ways no one else can. We are always looking at new destinations, our most recent being Barbados. Phase II of the Sandals Barbados expansion will be finished in December of 2017. Upon completion, the resort will offer five new restaurants, a new spa and wellness sanctuary, three new swimming pools, and an entertainment pavilion. The new Sandals Barbados will also feature an expansive state-of-the-art 10,000-square-foot conference facility.

Would you discuss the success of Beaches and how important this concept has been to the growth of the company?

Beaches Resorts was born of a need to satisfy our Sandals guests who no longer travel exclusively as a romantic couple of two, but are now also looking to experience a Luxury Included® vacation with their families. Beaches Negril Resort & Spa, which debuted in 1997, was our first resort created to cater to everyone – from singles to niche groups to families.

Beaches Resorts was designed to introduce guests of all ages to the Luxury Included® experience. Since then, we have grown to become the ultimate all-inclusive family experience. We now have a total of three Beaches Resorts, two in Jamaica and one in Turks & Caicos. We continue to evolve to fit the needs of guests seeking an unforgettable vacation for everyone.

In 2009, we introduced our partnership with Sesame Workshop from which we created Beaches Resorts' Caribbean Adventure with Sesame Street®. This longstanding partnership has been a huge success at our resorts.

We also have partnerships with Scratch DJ Academy & Xbox® Play Lounge. Beaches truly is the ultimate getaway for every member of the family. With outrageous waterparks, Xbox® Play Lounge, Scratch DJ Academy, exclusive Kids/Teens camps, certified nannies, butler service, and Red Lane® Spas, we have created an experience that is unrivaled in the Caribbean. With all of these experiences, the parents can unwind while the children have fun. Everyone is taken care of.

We continue to evolve through innovation and are committed to providing the best and most comprehensive Luxury Included® family vacation in the world.

Sandals places a major emphasis on the quality of its people. How important is the investment in training and the family culture that Sandals is known for to the strength of the brand?

Our employees are Sandals Resorts' ambassadors. They are who our guests interact with on a daily basis. Training our staff in the Sandals Resorts service philosophy and equipping them with the skill set they need to deliver quality service has always been a priority. One of our key operating principles is to elevate service standards on a daily basis.

In order to do so, we created what is known as the Sandals Corporate University – an initiative to educate and empower employ-

of our DNA since we opened our first Sandals resort in 1981. It was something that was very important to me and I encouraged all of our team members to follow and lead by example – not just helping those in need but playing an active part in uplifting our region and our home to greater heights. For more than three decades, we have been doing what we can toward playing a meaningful role in the lives of the communities where we operate across the Caribbean.

In 2009, we took that commitment to the next level and formed a formal 501(c)(3) as a way to include more people – our customers, our travel agents, tour operators and wholesalers, industry partners such as airlines and tourist boards, and, of course, our 14,000 team members who serve as our ambassadors on the ground to help get the word out, fund-raise for causes, and do their part for those who need



ees. This program implements extensive and regular employee seminars and refresher programs. Staff are given the opportunity to pursue their dreams in education by earning degrees in hospitality management, culinary arts, maintenance, engineering, and many more areas, by being awarded scholarships. We have awarded many scholarships to many employees who are raising the bar. We also award employees who consistently deliver excellent service that meets guests' every desire.

Making sure that our employees are happy and feel the passion is a priority. Our team is well-coordinated and most have represented the brand for a long time. On top of that, we are friends and that is important. The truth is, our team members are everything, because without them we are nothing, so investing in them goes without saying.

Would you provide an overview of the work of The Sandals Foundation and how you engage Sandals' employees in your philanthropic efforts?

The Sandals Foundation, the nonprofit arm of Sandals Resorts International, was part

it most. It's a win-win for everyone as we are able to connect the dots and put people and resources together. Whether it's supporting local schools with training, supplies, computers, and overall infrastructure; protecting our precious oceans and reefs; providing much-needed healthcare and opportunities for the empowerment of women; or being there when natural disasters such as Hurricane Matthew strike, we as an organization stand ready to help.

As the largest brand in the region, we fully recognize and embrace our responsibilities. In good times as well as the not so good ones, we have stood side by side with the communities we represent in the very same way that they have stood by us. I'm so proud to say that our foundation is now seven years old and we just surpassed putting \$26 million into programs and initiatives across the Caribbean, 100 percent of which goes back into the community. There's certainly always going to be need, and I'm proud of the team we have that is always willing and up for the task. ●