

Hospitality



Exceeding Expectations



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

*Sandals Royal Barbados lobby (left) and pool (above);
Sandals Montego Bay lobby (below); Sandals Montego Bay
Beachfront Millionaire One-Bedroom Butler Suite
with Tranquility Soaking Tub (bottom)*

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 Family-owned Sandals Resorts International (sandals.com) has transformed itself from one brand and one resort in Montego Bay, Jamaica, to one of the most well-known and award-winning hospitality companies in the world. With five brands and 24 properties in seven countries including Antigua, The Bahamas, Grenada, Barbados, Jamaica, Saint Lucia and Turks and Caicos, Sandals Resorts International is the undisputed leader of Caribbean luxury vacation experiences and remains fiercely committed to the region. Sandals dedicates itself to innovative resort development that in the words of Chairman and Founder Gordon “Butch” Stewart, “exceeds expectations” for guests, associates and the people who call the Caribbean home.



Gordon “Butch” Stewart

we were creating from the ongoing commoditization of the “all-inclusive” concept. In 2007, we made a conscious decision to change that. Our Luxury Included concept quite simply means that we provide the most quality inclusions in the experience we deliver at Sandals Resorts and Beaches Resorts of any other resort company on the planet, period.

This means our incredible beachfront locations, luxury suites that come with butlers trained by the Guild of

Professional English Butlers, watersports that include diving with the best PADI certified instruction and equipment, Five-Star Global Gourmet Dining, entertainment and partnerships with iconic brands such as Microsoft and Sesame Street and so much more is included. For us, it’s about exceeding expectations. That is the thread that is pulled through everything we do and is part and parcel of our organization.

The Sandals brand is based on “Luxury Included.” What does this mean and how is this concept ingrained within the culture of the company?

For too long, we paid close attention as the term “all-inclusive” became a descriptor of the experience instead of what it truly is – a pricing strategy. In this way, every hotel that included a single buffet line and house wine and beer was “all-inclusive.” It was becoming impossible to distinguish the luxury experience



As you look at growth for Sandals, are you focused on making additional investments in your current properties or adding new properties to the portfolio?

We are nimble, privately owned and committed to going where opportunities take us including adding new resorts – like Sandals Royal Barbados, our second resort there that debuted December 20 as well as a fourth resort we’re currently developing in St. Lucia; but we will also always invest in our existing resorts. This is absolutely about exceeding expectations and we owe that to our guests and industry partners. Beyond that, unlike other hotel companies, we own the hotels we operate. We enhance our hotels, from the entire make-over we just completed at flagship Sandals Montego Bay to reopening Beaches Turks and Caicos better than ever. We are not just investing in real estate – we are investing in the quality and reputation of our brands.

How do you define what makes the Sandals experience unique?

In a word, service. Our people truly define the Sandals difference, reflecting the warm Caribbean hospitality that is the hallmark of the region. Tipping is not permitted, nor is it expected at Sandals Resorts. Staff 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.



Sandals places a major emphasis on the quality of its people. What are the key traits that you look for when hiring talent?

Enthusiasm. We can teach a smart person a skill, but attitude is innate. When it comes to service, attitude is everything.

Would you discuss the success of Beaches and opportunities for growth for the Beaches Resorts brand?

We see tremendous opportunity for the Beaches Resorts brand, which was designed for everyone but is especially loved by families. We have generations of families travelling together – moms and dads, kids and grandparents, and I think that’s the key to the brand’s success. We’ve created a place where everyone in the family can have a great time. Vacations are important. With families living far apart, time away is time together and Beaches makes it so easy.

What advice do you give to young people interested in a career in the hospitality industry?

Hospitality is as much about generosity of spirit as it is about hard work. Enjoy what you do, work hard to do it better than anybody else and approach every guest as if they’re the most important in the world – because they are. ●