

## Ambassadors For The Caribbean

An Interview with Adam Stewart, CD, Hon. LLD, Executive Chairman, Sandals Resorts International

**EDITORS' NOTE** Adam Stewart is Executive Chairman of Sandals Resorts International (SRI), the company founded by his late father, Gordon "Butch" Stewart, and the organization behind the world's most recognized brands of luxury all-inclusive resorts including adults-only Sandals Resorts and family-friendly Beaches Resorts. Prior to becoming Executive Chairman, he previously spent more than a decade as Deputy



Adam Stewart

Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of SRI. In addition to his responsibilities with SRI, Stewart continues his leadership role in the family's extensive hospitality, media, automotive, and appliance business holdings, including his position as Executive Chairman, The ATL Group, comprising the Jamaica Observer, the country's leading daily newspaper, and ATL Appliance Traders, a chain of domestic and commercial appliance outlets combining exclusive distributorship of the world's top electronic brands with exceptional customer service throughout Jamaica. Deeply committed to the region, he is the President of the Sandals Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization aimed at making a difference in Caribbean communities. An entrepreneur in his own right, Stewart is the founder of leading attraction and tour company, Island Routes, offering more than 500 unique tours that make it easy for visitors to authentically connect with locals and experience the region. Recently appointed as a special investment envoy for tourism by Jamaica's Prime Minister Andrew Holness to drive innovation, investment, and economic growth in Jamaica, and to the Executive Committee of the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), Stewart is a graduate and active alumnus of The Chaplin School of Hospitality & Tourism Management at Florida International University in Miami. He has been personally recognized as the Jamaica Hotel and Tourist Association's Hotelier of the Year 2015, World Travel Awards' Rising Star, Caribbean World's Travel and Tourism Personality of the Year, and received the Distinguished Alumni Torch Award from FIU and The Gleaner Company's Jamaica 50 under 50 Award.

**COMPANY BRIEF** The world-renowned Sandals Resorts ([sandals.com](http://sandals.com)) brand was conceived and brought to life on the majestic shores of Montego Bay, Jamaica – earning its place as one of the most well-known and award-winning hospitality names in the world over the last 43 years and counting. Together with its sister brand, the family-friendly Beaches Resorts ([beaches.com](http://beaches.com)), the organization comprises 21 properties in nine Caribbean island nations including

Antigua, The Bahamas, Grenada, Barbados, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Curaçao, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Turks & Caicos. As the undisputed leader of Caribbean vacation experiences, Sandals Resorts and Beaches Resorts remain fiercely committed to the region, dedicated to innovative resort development that in the words of founder Gordon "Butch" Stewart, "exceed expectations" for guests, associates and the people who call the Caribbean home.

**How do you define Sandals' culture and values?**

We are a family-owned company operating with a people and island-first mindset, steadfast in our commitment to our guests, our team members, and our communities at large. Our love for the Caribbean runs deep and this drives every decision – from where we operate to the magical experiences we bring forward – doing so in a way that supports and celebrates our Caribbean neighbors who are integral to the rich tapestry of island culture and values.

**What have been the keys to Sandals' industry leadership over decades and how do you describe the Sandals difference?**

We are Caribbean and since our inception, we have stayed true to our Caribbean roots, showcasing the very best that this region has to offer – not just with the best locations on the islands, but the unique way we incorporate our culture throughout the entire vacation experience. In short, we've set the benchmark for what it truly means to be all-inclusive, making it our mission to



Sandals Dunn's River in Ocho Rios, Jamaica



bring guests closer to the heart of the Caribbean to experience its incomparable beauty. And we put the customer at the center of everything we do – bringing forward innovations, cutting-edge designs, and meaningful experiences that continue to set us apart from the competition. Our commitment to invest in our family of team members, which today is more than 18,000 strong, creates boundless opportunities for Caribbean locals, and that’s the Sandals difference.

**Sandals continues to expand with new properties and new markets. Will you discuss Sandals’ growth plans and where you see opportunities for the future?**

Our commitment is to our home, the Caribbean, and our appetite and imagination for what we can do in this region knows no bounds. Over the past few years, we’ve made our mark in the Dutch Caribbean with Sandals Royal Curaçao and most recently, the Eastern Caribbean with Sandals Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. With each new location and destination, we’re challenging the status quo and elevating the way guests vacation in the all-inclusive space, whether that’s inviting guests to dine off property through our Island Inclusive program in Curaçao, or introducing two-story overwater villas in Saint Vincent to really take in its mountain-meets-ocean views. Helping our guests discover and experience our sweet region through a different lens drives us forward. As an organization, we are nine Caribbean islands into this journey and yet, the future and what our guests can look forward to are as limitless as the horizon.

**Sandals has a culture focused on continuous improvement. How critical is this focus to make sure Sandals is meeting the evolving needs and expectations of its guests?**

Sandals has been a leader in this space for more than four decades and our commitment to innovation is as thoughtful as it is intentional. Over



*Sandals Saint Vincent and the Grenadines*

the years, we’ve continued to evolve the way our guests vacation, from introducing the Caribbean’s first swim-up bar and Overwater Villas, to infinity-edge pool suites in the sky, Rondoval villas with rooftop decks and a Stargazing Concierge, and most recently in Saint Vincent, in-room fitness suites complete with personal TechnoGym bikes. And now, we’ve gone even further to incorporate island destinations into our Caribbean all-inclusive experience. At Sandals Royal Curaçao we launched butler villas that not only offer the finest design and luxury amenities, but that come with access to a MINI Cooper for island exploration. We listen

to our guests, tap into experts and conduct our own research to bring forward first-to-market innovations on an ongoing basis. Relevance is about continually surprising and delighting the guest with personalized, extraordinary experiences, and we strive to make the discovery of authentic Caribbean culture part of our all-inclusive offerings.

**Will you discuss Sandals’ investment in its workforce and focus on training and service standards?**

We’re in the people industry, so training and service have been at the forefront of Sandals since its inception. For us, it all begins with personal drive – thereafter, we can equip them with the skills needed to work in hospitality. We’re all about creating opportunities, especially for our Caribbean nationals. We are the largest private employer in the Caribbean today with over 18,000 employees across nine islands and we are thoroughly committed to their growth both personally and professionally. Through ongoing training and developmental vehicles such as the Sandals Corporate University – a living, breathing accredited institution – we give Caribbean-based Sandals team members the chance to earn undergraduate and postgraduate degrees and expand and diversify their talents and abilities with practical, on-the-ground experiences. We are preparing the next generation for the industry that is going to be the catalyst for not only Caribbean tourism, but to the development of the region – and we will continuously invest in our team members’ success to make that possible.

**What do you see as Sandals’ responsibility to engage in the communities it serves?**

Being the leader in Caribbean hospitality comes with responsibility, and that responsibility encompasses our team members, the community, and the islands we call home. We have an island-first approach to tourism, so whenever we come to a destination, we create a symbiotic relationship with the community – from the



*The Coyaba Sky Villa Rondovals at Sandals Dunn’s River*



fishermen and farmers to the taxi drivers and through to local schools. It has always been in Sandals' DNA to be part of the community, and through the work of our philanthropic arm, the Sandals Foundation, the ability to uplift our region and its people continues to expand exponentially. We're more than a brand; we're ambassadors for the Caribbean and we are committed to contributing to the region's overall growth and transformation.

**You mentioned the Sandals Foundation which was launched in 2009. How do you define the mission of the Foundation and how has the work of the Foundation evolved?**

The Sandals Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Sandals Resorts International, was launched in 2009 but the reality is that this work dates back long beyond 15 years, when my father, the late Gordon "Butch" Stewart, founded Sandals Resorts in 1981. Long before philanthropy was considered fashionable, my father tapped into the needs of our community and carried that torch because it was the right thing to do. He adopted local schools – from the provision of books to leaky roof repairs – and so much more. It was just part of his DNA and today our commitment to our communities has never been stronger.

All costs associated with the administration of the Sandals Foundation and management are supported entirely by Sandals Resorts so that 100 percent of every dollar donated goes directly towards funding impactful initiatives in three key areas: education, community, and the environment. Through this work we've been able to establish marine sanctuaries; outplant more than 20,000 corals; engage over 55,000 people in conservation efforts, including our guests; create resilient food supply systems in local schools and communities; support local artisans by selling their items in our resorts' retail shops; and so much more. We have



*Sandals Royal Curaçao*

so far touched the lives of more than 1.5 million people, and yet it feels like we've only just begun.

This year is particularly special as we celebrate the Sandals Foundation's 15th anniversary with a new initiative, the Power of 15 – a program that will add all-new sources of renewable energy to schools in the Caribbean region through the installation of solar panels. This will enable uninterrupted learning so even the most remote classrooms will have the necessary power to keep computers running while reducing our carbon footprint. I invite everyone to learn more at <https://www.sandals.com/sandals-foundation-the-power-of-15/>.

**What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership and how do you approach your management style?**

My father, the late Gordon "Butch" Stewart, founded Sandals the year I was born, so I often say that it's as if we grew up together as siblings because I watched him meticulously shape the brand into the incredible company that it is today. I'm a massive believer in providing real life lessons that simply can't be taught in school – that's how I learned this business inside and out as a young boy from my father, and what he showed me was so invaluable that today, that ethos carries through to our team members.

I take them on the road – and to the skies – with me, showing them the ropes and putting more people in the room to understand how the business works. Exposure is the single most important thing because the goal is to have them fully understand the power of hospitality and make sure we have the absolute best teams in place to carry the torch forward in each respective area of the company.

There's only so much I know though, so I also let experts be experts and lean on a very trusted family of people who share my vision in what this brand represents for the Caribbean. Together, we're creating opportunities for team members to grow and learn as we invest in the next generation of hospitality leaders.

**What advice do you offer to young people interested in pursuing a career in the hospitality industry?**

Seize every single opportunity in front of you. Your potential is limitless. Expose yourself to everything and anything – all facets of a business – and become familiar with it all. Be curious, ask questions, and find that passion inside of you that culminates into a genuine love for what you're doing. That's the key to finding your superpower in this industry and in life. Your superpower is what carves your path toward success and all the opportunities that lie ahead. ●



*The Kurason Island Butler Bungalows at Sandals Royal Curaçao*