

## Sandals Jamaica Educational 29<sup>th</sup> Sept – 4<sup>th</sup> Oct 2014

*Beccy Gallop (Senior Travel Consultant)*

When the Premier Travel, Bexhill was offered a place by Sandals on an educational to Jamaica, it did not take much persuasion for me to agree to go. Sunshine here I come!

I met the rest of the group at Gatwick North terminal and we checked in for our British Airways flight to Kingston. Later, as we proceeded through the departure gate to board the flight, we discovered that most of the group and I had been upgraded to club class. I did feel guilty for just a moment, whilst sipping my champagne for the four of the group that had to stay in economy! Club class was a wonderful experience with seats that became flat beds for sleeping, plenty of leg room, menu choice for your meals which were served course by course with real china crockery and metal cutlery instead of plastic, quite the novelty. It took me half the flight to work out what all the buttons on my club class seat did!



Upon arrival in Kingston we then had a two and a half hour transfer to the resort of Ocho Rios and the Beaches property, which was to be our base for three nights, we arrived at the hotel at 8pm, checked in and then it was straight to one of the restaurants on the property for dinner. At 10pm I headed back to my room to unpack and get to bed as according to my body clock it was 4am!

*30<sup>th</sup> September 2014*

I was up at 6.15am (not fully adjusted to the 6 hour time difference) and as we were not meeting for breakfast until 8.15am I decided the best course of action was make myself a mug of tea, get the bikini on and hit the beach which was literally 10 paces from my room. I had an early morning swim in the ocean with the only companions being the seabirds walking up and down the beach looking for crabs for their breakfast.

At 9am we started our site inspections, first to see was our base:-

**Beaches, Ocho Rios** (Beaches being the family brand of Sandals)

Located on 22 acres with 223 rooms and suites in 16 categories, this resort caters to everyone's needs. Overlooking the Caribbean Sea, with magnificent facilities for children including, kids camp, Xbox lounge, Pirates Island waterpark and Sesame Street characters.



Of the 16 room categories, 7 have concierge service which includes preferred check in with chilled towel and champagne in the exclusive concierge lounge, personalized welcome letter, weekly cocktail reception, his and hers robes and an in suite bar stocked with alcohol and soft drinks. Another 7 categories have in room refrigerators stocked with soft drinks only.

There are 6 dining options available, Bayside buffet, Neptune's (Mediterranean), Eleanor's (Caribbean), Venetian (Italian), BBQ and Pizzeria, and Josephine's Creperie. Other facilities include 7 bars, fitness centre, 4 tennis courts, croquet, table tennis, pool tables, shuffle board, and basketball.

Water sports included are kayaks, hobie cats, snorkelling, paddle boards, windsurfing, glass bottom boat, banana boat rides, aqua trikes, and scuba diving for qualified divers. If you wish to learn to dive then courses can be taken.

### **Sandals Golf & Country Club**

This 18 hole course designed by PK Saunders, is 750 feet above sea level with soft, picturesque, undulating terrain. The golf course is open to everyone but if you are staying at any of the Sandals or Beaches properties then transfers, green fees, club storage, and the driving range are all complimentary. A caddy is mandatory at \$20.00 for 18 holes when walking; golf carts are optional at \$40.00 for 18 holes. There are two fully stocked beverage carts on course for convenience. So that we could see a small part of the course, we all piled into several golf carts for a quick whizz round in convoy (no handbrake turns allowed!)

### **Sandals Grande Riviera**

The largest Sandals property on Jamaica, considered the true Garden of Eden and is situated on the slopes of over 100 acres of beautiful hillside gardens overlooking the Caribbean Sea. This magnificently landscaped resort has taken the meaning of "lush" to a whole new level, with views to include blossoming gardens, grand mountain views and panoramic ocean views. This resort has catapulted guest's expectations by offering more variety of accommodation, dining options and activities than any other Sandals resort. There are 529 rooms and suites over 20 categories including 8 butler service and 5 concierge categories, 15 dining options, 9 bars/cocktail lounges, 7 main pools, 88 villa pools, 3 cold water plunge pools, 22 hot tubs and the Ochi Beach Club. This property is also home to the Caribbean's largest rock climbing wall (30x30') along with the Red Lane Spa and water sports which are available at all Sandals and Beaches properties.

Morning site inspection now complete, it was lunchtime and time to try the Jamaican jerk chicken plus the Jamaican Red Stripe beer! After lunch, we had a short transfer (next door) to our next site inspection:-

### **Sandals Royal Plantation**

Built in 1957 during a time characterized by old-world charm this serene sanctuary still maintains a stellar reputation as one of Jamaica's most exquisite resorts. This property sits on a bluff rising 25 feet above the sea on 10 acres of beautifully maintained tropical gardens with 12 colourful peacocks strutting their stuff. Two guest suite wings span the entire beachfront, granting each of its suites views of the ocean. This spacious all suite retreat boasts stately palms, towering Georgian architecture and statuesque fountains. It comprises of 74 suites in 8 categories as well as a 3 bedroomed villa, all have ocean view and it is an all butler resort including beach butlers.



This property was certainly my favourite of the day and with its colonial feel it is a firm favourite with the British market.

We then went back to base with time for a dip in the sea and a cocktail before heading in to change for our hosted dinner. This was a wonderful candlelit occasion, which was set up on the pier and seated above the ocean.

*1st October 2014*

Instead of the original proposed island excursion, today was a free day for us to choose what we wished to do. I seized the opportunity to go scuba diving as it is included as part of the Sandals & Beaches water sports programme. The package includes 2 dives each day and equipment such as BCD/regulator/mask/fins/weight belt. Wetsuits can be hired for the day at a cost of \$10.00. The boat and equipment I found to be of a good standard and with the dive times set at 0900 and 1130, it enables guests to have the afternoon free for anything else they may wish to do.

Some of the group tried out the banana boat rides and hobie cats and one of the group went off to do horse riding in the sea. Once I got back from diving I enjoyed a lazy afternoon soaking up the sunshine and keeping my fluid intake up sampling the cocktail list! In the evening we dined at Neptune's restaurant, right on the water's edge we all had a fantastic meal (surf & turf for me, steak & lobster tail ) together with a lot of laughter.

*2nd October 2014*

It was time to say goodbye to Ocho Rios and head for Montego Bay. So after breakfast we checked out and settled into our transport for the hour and a half journey. On arrival our first site inspection was:-

### **Sandals Royal Caribbean Resort & Private Island**

Renowned throughout the Caribbean for its exclusive refinement, this resort's Georgian style great house setting, hosts the gracious British traditions of a bygone era. Unique features include Jamaica's only resort with a private offshore Island housing an authentic Thai restaurant. The resort covers 15 acres and has 210 rooms/suites in 16 categories including 9 butler service and 2 concierge categories. There are 8 dining options, 5 bars, 7 pools, and 5 whirlpools. We had our hosted lunch here before moving on to:-



### **Sandals Montego Bay**

Situated on the North coast's largest private white sand beach, it is no wonder that this property has so many beachfront rooms and suites with panoramic ocean views. This property has 250 rooms and suites in 19 categories including 8 butler service and 6 concierge categories, 8 dining options, 4 bars, 4 pools, and 4 whirlpools. This resort also has its own beautiful, non-denominational chapel included on its 26 acre plot.



We checked into our rooms as this was our base for our final night in Jamaica. With a couple of free hours it was time to explore the beach. From the moment we entered this hotel you could sense a different vibe. It was much livelier than all the other properties we had visited with dancing, music and games on the beach. It is situated right at the end of the Montego Bay runway so it is great for a very short transfer, but be prepared for aircraft noise.

Our hosted dinner was at Tokyo Jo's, an outdoor Asian wok restaurant. Here you pick your own ingredients from the selection bar and then watch whilst your meal is cooked in front of you, another great evening.

*3rd October 2014*

Following breakfast we had a free hour before checkout time. I went wandering along the beach soaking up the atmosphere. Check out completed, we set up camp in the bar for a farewell cocktail before being picked up at midday for our transfer back to Kingston airport. This was 4 hours away which was a horrible thought as we were only 5 minutes from the Montego Bay airport! However, upon checking in at Kingston we discovered that we had had been upgraded to club class again including use of the club lounge at the airport. We soon got over the 4 hour transfer!

*4th October 2014*

Landed at Gatwick, back home, back to reality!

Sandals are all included, unlimited luxury, an incomparable showcase of quality, choice and hospitality. Quite simply Sandals includes more, from endless water sports such as the Caribbean's most comprehensive scuba diving programme to unlimited rounds of golf with complimentary green fees.

You can enjoy more dining choices with up to 15 restaurants included per resort, featuring culinary concepts and chefs from around the world. More choice of entertainment, options in luxurious accommodations with up to 25 categories per resort and full exchange privileges and complimentary transfers to any other Sandals or Beaches property.

Come in and let me show you the full fact sheets on all the properties visited such as room facilities, wifi, weddings etc.

So why not treat yourself to a Sandals holiday and a top tier suite to enjoy the uncompromising attention of a personal butler, trained to the highest standards by the elite Guild of Professional English Butlers. An ultimate indulgence.