

Top travel agents the stars at Sandals gala awards show

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OCHO RIOS, St Ann — Sandals Resort International rolled out its red carpet for scores of its top travel agency partners from the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom (UK), at its 10th annual STAR Awards Saturday night at the upscale Sandals Grande Riviera here.

The STAR Awards recognise travel agencies and individual travel agents who have excelled in sales performance through outstanding marketing initiatives to boost hotel occupancy for the hotel chain.

Sandals Chairman, Gordon ‘Butch’ Stewart credited the success of his hotel chain, which also includes Beaches, Royal Plantation and Grand Pineapple, to the hard working travel partners. In his message to the travel partners, he said he was proud of the resorts, pointing out that they keep getting better and better.

“We have had the most amazing love affair with the travel agents throughout the world, North America, UK, Europe,” he said. “Our love affair with the travel agents is 30 years old and going strong. We are grateful for all you do for us and all we have achieved together,” Stewart said.

Destination Weddings.com, a worldwide travel company that specialises in destination weddings, walked away with the top award during the event, after it was declared the top booking agency worldwide.

“Really, I’m speechless, I’m just very, very proud,” said Edward Cotton, chief operating officer at Destination Weddings.com. “I’m just very proud of all our agents, our company and our partnership with Sandals,” an elated Cotton told the Observer shortly after he collected the coveted award.

Cotton described the Sandals/Beaches product as a marvellous one for Destination Weddings and said the company enjoyed a great partnership with the Sandals group.

Destination Weddings.com also copped several other regional and national awards including Best of the Best for the northeast region in the US, top regional award for Top Suite Concierge Travel Agency as well as the Top Producing Travel Agency for the northeast region in the US and the Top Booking Agency for the US.

Another prestigious award, the Sandals Hall of Fame, were presented to president of MLT vacations, Ken Pomerantz and senior director of Caribbean product and marketing and Travel Impressions, Pauline Abatemarco–Pigott.

American Express Travel was awarded the Top Beaches Travel Agency in the worldwide category, while Liberty Travel walked away with the Top Sandals Travel Agency Chain. The worldwide top 10 travel agencies were awarded to Beach Bum Vacation, Horizons Unlimited, Enchanted Honeymoons, LMG Travel Canada, Dream Makers Vacations, Twimburg Travel & Cruise, VIP Vacations, Vacations To GO, Nexion and Carlson Marketing Group Canada.

Steve Simmonds of Honeymoon Inc received the Chairman’s award, which is presented to an agency that has demonstrated significant exponential growth and commitment and dedication in achieving self-expressed targets.

Flight Centre Canada, which recently donated 117 computers and contributed US\$50,000 to <http://activepaper.olivesoftware.com/Default/Scripting/ArticleWin.asp?From=Archive&Source=Page&kin=JObserver&BaseHref=JMO%2F2011%2F12%2F12&ViewMode=HTML&PageLabel=4&EntityId=Ar00500&AppName=1>

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Sandals Foundation as well as assisted in giving some much needed facelift to three schools in St Ann and St Mary and the St Ann's Bay fire station, received the Sandals Foundation award.

The President's Award was presented to Amy McHugh of Dream Maker Vacation Services, an award presented to an independent agency owner who has created the environment for significant sales growth within the agency for the period August 1, 2010 to July 31, 2011.

SRI Chief Executive Officer Adam Stewart, in commending the travel agencies for their commitment to the Sandals brand, said this past year had been one of the best years in the company's 30-year history.

"We are very confident in our product and our role as leaders in the marketplace. With solid support of our travel agent partners like you, we will continue to evolve and grow, overcoming the many challenges we face together," the CEO said in his message to the travel partners.

"Your achievements, which we celebrate tonight, are proof of that," he added.



Sandals Chairman Gordon 'Butch' Stewart (fourth from left) and Sandals CEO Adam Stewart (second from left) acknowledge some of the top personalities in the travel business from left: Zeina Gedeon, general manager of Air Canada Vacations; Michelle Kish, vice president of GoGo Vacations; Dale Smith, president of the Flight Centre and Greg Dixon, president of the Flight Centre Canada. Occasion was the STAR Awards held at the Sandals Grande Riviera, Ocho Rios, St Ann. (Photo: Joseph Wellington)