

CHIEF AWARDS

BUSINESS OPERATIONS

Winner

The Landings Resort & Spa, St. Lucia

During the pandemic, all CAPEX expenditures were halted. However, as we are a condominium property, we were able to keep 80 employees on hand to maintain the existing structure even while closed. This included cosmetic upgrades to the Beach Club Restaurant. When the hotel reopened, the planned expansion was still not possible, so temporary structures were erected to facilitate the mandated social distancing and increased number of covers due to off-site restaurants being closed. We also focused on improving other aspects of the dining experience such as food quality. Once reopened, our new Executive Chef created a reporting system which identified the menu items which were not profitable and used this information to re-engineer the menus, and for all outlets to use more local and cost-efficient ingredients. This has become useful for combating worldwide supply-chain issues. The decision was also made to re-prioritize the renovations of the restaurants.

Despite worldwide inflation, we have managed to maintain our food costs with the new menus. From 1st January to 31st August 2022, we had a total of 126,716 covers as compared to 100,608 covers for the same period in 2019. This represents an increase of 26% over 2019, our benchmark year. We achieved this by actively promoting the beach dinners to maintain social distancing while offering guests a more private dining experience. This also allowed a quicker turnover in the restaurant at mealtimes, which contributed to the increased number of covers. When the Coffee Shop was first reopened during the pandemic, it was not profitable, however after 9 months, it is now making a net profit of 25%. An important lesson learned was that having a strong cash-backed operation provided a safety net to allow for limited capital expenditure to deliver

a profit. As such, the revamping of the F&B services and outlets remains a viable plan for which the groundwork has already been laid. Construction at the Callaloo Restaurant is set to begin at the end of September. That and the refurbishment of the Palms Restaurant are set to be completed before the winter season, while the renovation of the Beach Club Restaurant has been scheduled for 2023. We also learned the importance of having the right leaders with the right skill set who can help an organization quickly pivot its operations during challenging times to reduce loss while maintaining standards. The new Executive Chef, with his experience, brought about a change in the various menus, which managed costs while satisfying our guests. To add value to guests in lieu of the planned renovations, the Coffee Shop was added to our all-inclusive package. With this addition, guests had a grab-and-go option for meals that were freshly prepared in-house. The Coffee Shop was also promoted to the local market for special occasions such as Mother's & Father's Days as an alternative source of revenue. Additionally, the option for beach dinners was promoted to guests for more intimate dining while allowing the restaurant to facilitate more covers. We have also incorporated a modern design for the restaurants that blend well with the traditional style of the resort in order to appeal to a wider range of guests.

Finalists

1. Tranquility Beach Anguilla Resort

We initiated creative operations to maintain momentum for our newly opened resort. The resort soft-opened in January 2020. In April, Anguilla's borders closed, reopening in Nov. with strict entry/quarantine rules. New, with construction costs and pre-pandemic operations in place, we had to pivot to build awareness, generate revenue, deliver a guest experience worth the entry effort, and keep staff safe. A resident staycation program helped retain staff, finetune operations,

collect reviews, and generate revenue while borders were closed. To deliver our high-end service and be certified to welcome back visitors, we initiated guest/staff WhatsApp chats and outdoor delivery stations. Using distance, PPE, and signups, guests enjoyed the beach/gym safely. New games provided more in-place fun. We helped form a Meads Bay Bubble, giving quarantined guests wider beach/dining access and increasing our share of bookings. Creating revenue despite constraints impressed owner prospects. We measured our success by vacation bookings, editorial mentions, ownership sales and number of positive online reviews during the pandemic and ongoing. Thanks to the hands-on TLC leadership of Property Manager Deanna Cabrera and an ability to pivot quickly, our resort remained buoyant and stayed open. We maintained staff levels, kept guests and owners happy and generated revenue. Our successful practices were featured in Drift Magazine, Travel & Leisure, Jet Set Sarah, True Anguilla, and Anguilla-Beaches.com. We sold a record-breaking over 50% of condos within 12 months, largely attributed to our strong revenue track record, excellent guest experience, and stellar online reviews. Staying open was also critical for condo sales, as in the case of one owner who first visited during strict protocols. We made plans to check it out right after the holidays despite pandemic hurdles. If we hadn't successfully adjusted our operations and remained open, we would have missed the sale. Anything is possible when approached with a solution-based mindset and willingness to do things differently while keeping guest satisfaction at the forefront. Opening a new resort is tough already, even without a pandemic and island lockdown. We got creative and persevered. We proved that small changes, such as being able to walk further down the beach during quarantine or an easy way to contact staff, can have a big impact on guest comfort and revenue. Per reviews: "Being in the Meads Bay Bubble has been a breeze. I appreciate being able to enjoy more of the beach."

Or, "the fact that they connect with each guest via WhatsApp is a flawless system, why doesn't everyone do this?"

Being able to show prospective guests and owners that our staff can maintain a positive company culture and present a quality product under trying conditions

provides peace of mind that we will deliver even better results when times are good.

This experience will continue to make us more nimble and better decision-makers moving forward. Innovating new ways to operationally deliver on our guest promise was at the forefront of these and future initiatives. We saw firsthand that having robust, adaptable property and channel management systems from WebRezPro and Siteminder, gave us the tools and freedom to make on-demand adjustments to a perpetually changing situation quickly and easily. We are able to continue to offer staycations for residents and have further innovated the short-stay local program to fill availability windows less than our minimum stay to maximize occupancy, as well as attract repeat business travelers and frequent golfers from neighboring islands. Our WhatsApp group chat tactic is now standard procedure. It provides an intimate and personalized channel through which guests feel free to communicate without barriers and hassle. It is a guest favorite and frequently mentioned in reviews and influencer videos.

2. Antigua & Barbuda Hotel & Tourism Association

The period of pandemic was one that tested the operations of all our members. I stand however proud of the work done by the Board of Directors and Executive Team of the Antigua & Barbuda Hotels and Tourism Association. Our work on so many areas was swift, targeted, and effective in ensuring that our operations and that our members remained productive and viable.

The areas we excelled in were specific to:

- The support of employees in the sector with the Thrift Fund
- The development of Destination Protocols
- Becoming a hub of information for our members

- Showcasing the Destination

The support of employees in the sector with the Thrift Fund

The rules of the Thrift/Retire Fund for employees in the sector established and managed by the Antigua & Barbuda Hotels and Tourism Association and the Antigua and Barbuda Workers Union were amended under a Memorandum of Understanding between both parties to allow for the distribution of relief funds to employees within the fund.

Employees were allowed to withdraw \$340 weekly from their fund to help sustained their basic needs. This exercise lasted for three months (April – June, 2020) and resulted in an overall payout of EC\$1.4M.

Becoming a hub of information for our members

We have been and continue to exist in a world of information overload however, during the pandemic, the demand for accurate and timely information became the driver of ensuring that our members adjusted their operations to meet the demands of an ever changing environment.

Examples of our communication included:

- Resort Opening dates and announcements
 - This information was particularly important March – December 2020 as the re opening of our member hotels varied throughout the year
 - Today 790 rooms or 30% of our room stock remains closed
- Changes to Protocols for example:
 - Mask Mandates
 - Returning Buffets to the operations

The development of Destination Protocols

The ABHTA lead the charge to develop committees of Association Managers from both the Hotel and Associate membership. The foundation of the protocols was developed by the committees, reviewed by a local Microbiologist before a submission to the Ministry of Health and the Environment and the Ministry of Tourism and Investment.

The protocol document was also utilized to develop the inspection guidelines for the

Ministry of Health and the Environment and the Ministry of Tourism and Investment to conduct:

- Inspection of all to be certified for re-opening
- Training of all employees prior to re-opening

Showcasing the Destination

Showcase, in its 7th year, was held June 8 – 10, 2022 and hosted by the Antigua & Barbuda Hotels and Tourism Association and the Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Authority, brought together a recording breaking seventy-three (73) Tour Operators and Travel Partners from the:

- Caribbean
- Latin America
- North America
- United Kingdom
- Europe, and
- The United Arab Emirates

3. The Chancellor Hotel

We monitored the pandemic warnings prior to the closure of borders. Planning and training staff through observation from my international alumni led me to create our own training program to ensure we could manage our team without losing staff to the deadly virus. As a small boutique property, we took the lead to start conversing with our authorities to use hotels for quarantine. We held the first online meeting to start discussions on how to survive the pandemic. After this successful meeting, we were then selected as the hotel of choice for the business repatriates. Every staff member was trained through all the programs offered; No staff contracted COVID-19 to date; All staff were vaccinated; and we had repeat high-profile business clients because of how we managed. Guests felt safe.

1. Training of staff was key, as it built confidence in performance.
2. We were able to introduce our culture to foreign guests in that period, celebrating our religious cultures through meals and ethnic wear.
3. We carried ourselves in a neutral manner, not fearful. The guests enjoyed service on plates, seating outside rooms, and the ability to exercise.
4. Use of online technology. We were on board with an event platform prior, so the staff all had access to meetings from home or work. I had all staff follow all the CHTA sessions, which was truly inspiring as it kept us abreast of what was happening in the region. This allowed us to continuously review and update our policies.