

CHIEF AWARDS

SALES & MARKETING

Winner

Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort, Aruba

The success of the initiatives is clear comparing Bucuti to Aruba and CHTA. For decades, occupancies were 90%+ year-round with 2018-2019 up to 97% with 64% repeat guests. Bucuti has the highest average occupancy and RevPar on Aruba with more demand for rooms than supply. Attached charts show rebound data with double-digit improvement over regional resorts. Minimum night stays of 5 nights (7 for holidays) were reinstated, and bookings keep increasing. The 30-day cancellation was successfully reinstated in April of 2021 for 2022 dates. Travel professionals were guaranteed no rate increases through 2022 and have sought Bucuti evidenced with increased bookings. The remainder of 2022 has been booked solid since April. Rates for 2023 have increased substantially and January and February are already 92% booked. Social media followers and the database keep growing. The resort continues receiving top awards from Tripadvisor, Conde Nast Traveler, Travel + Leisure - a testament to the guest experience. By keeping on staff, despite the financial strain, morale was higher, Bucuti didn't have to rehire and lose valuable time with mass training.

Maintaining awareness of guests concerns, policies were adjusted for flexibility and protection for guests and resulted in few cancellations. As forecasts improved, minimum night stays of 5 nights (7 during holidays) were reinstated and we saw bookings continue to increase. While many laid off sales and marketing staff or stopped messaging completely, Bucuti increased its efforts. We learned to trust our deep knowledge of our guests and their buying behavior to apply in crisis. No panicking or rate slashing. Quickly organized renovations were possible due to strategic financial and business planning and supported the ailing local economy. Since databases were maintained and in-house CRM allowed for fast message

creation and production, we didn't lose time. Operating methodically allowed for speed and planning to happen at the same time. We looked at skillsets, absolutely maximized them, and shared it all continuously to keep guests and partners engaged. We stayed true to our identity. We stuck with our signature fixed-rate pricing while others heavily discounted. We flexed as needed in our cancellation policy, but didn't drop it. The lesson is that having ongoing communications and holding true with travel professionals and guests builds the essential trust needed so they return or are willing to hold onto bookings. The culinary team pivoted to creating to-go meals for locals, especially for special occasions that would otherwise be enjoyed onsite at the restaurant.

We creatively offered livestreamed micro-weddings yet didn't give in on our no large weddings policy. We hosted doctors and nurses and asked them to rebuild our sanitation protocols resulting in high-tech, hospital-grade technology only found in operating rooms. We utilized tech-savvy staff to create a social media engagement campaign that was soon copied.

Finalists

1. Bay Gardens Resorts, St. Lucia

The pandemic forced us to be flexible & nimble. During the closure of borders, we continued to use social media to engage our audience with positive messages focused on our reopening. Once travel resumed marketing focused on free cancellation, free COVID-19 testing on property, enhanced health and safety protocols and travel insurance. Seamless travel experience was highlighted, which included curation of specified tours & services including courtesy shopping & takeaway/delivery from our dine around partners (clients were not allowed to leave property & restaurants were limited to takeaway). Focus always was more

on what customers could do as opposed to messaging about what was not open or unavailable. With our limited marketing budget, we focused on direct bookings & enhancing our digital strategy. Online check-in, Whistle Messaging App, enhanced CRM (Revinat) & integration of a live chat feature on our website complemented existing social media, SEO, SEM & meta search advertising. 2021 Online Bookings were on pace with 2019 and 2018. When travel started to rebound in 2022, we saw full benefits of prior efforts with online marketing. For 2022 our properties are having their strongest year ever (up 4% over 2019) despite the sluggish recovery of Caribbean, Corporate & Conference markets which are at a 1/3 of pre pandemic levels. Online marketing allowed us to offset these losses. YTD Online Direct bookings are up 132% over 2019 with ADR up 23%. Book direct benefits include free daily spa treatments, our dine around program, free breakfast & allowing two kids to eat & stay free. Given travel uncertainties, we offered automated feature for last minute deals on our website for booking up to 7 days prior to arrival. Our Digital ad strategy is now more strategic & has produced a ROI ranging between 15-25:1. Our Direct Bookings were already our largest source of business pre pandemic and are now firmly in the lead over OTAs & tour operators (over 40% of total). Stay ready & be flexible despite circumstances. Maintaining service excellence & not compromising on brand promise & on experience was paramount. While direct bookings are preferred, we realized many of our markets preferred to book via third parties. As such, we maintained strong relationships with these sources & remain among Saint Lucia's top 5 producers for Expedia & Booking.com. We also learned that you can't put your eggs in only one basket. Our hotels are diverse in terms of markets they target (family, romance, groups, corporate & all geographic segments) & we continued to engage them all. As each market reopened, we benefited. Also maintained strong relationships with UK tour operators & used 2020 downtime to foster stronger relationships with them for Bay Gardens Marina Haven which was 65% reliant on regional market pre-pandemic. Given how weak this market has been to recover we focused on positioning this property in UK which allowed Haven to operate at 75% occupancy YTD. Innovation allowed us opportunities to discover new ideas & technologies to increase productivity beyond pandemic era. It is noteworthy that during lockdown of Spring 2020 we used time to reimagine &

relaunch our website which launched with many innovative new features in June 2020 like a cart abandonment tool & pop-up messaging, just in time for the reopening of tourism. We were also innovative on how we spent our marketing dollars, opting for performance-based marketing spend (pay only when booking received) during the early days of tourism's reopening & then switching to more traditional model (CPC) when the market was settled so that we could benefit from higher ROI fully. Some of the technological advances we implored during this period included implementation of personalized shopping services, access to the dine around program and digital menus.

2. Oceanid Hospitality Group LLC, United States

Challenged with no cash flow, no business on the books and limited resources to open the hotel, The Landings Resort and Spa board realized quickly that commercial experts were required to pave the path to business recovery. A distinct approach was needed to get some quick wins and ease the pressure on the hotel team. Someone who could not only consult but execute and train on agreed strategies. We reopened with a skeleton crew, a need to focus on operational efficiencies, and manage customer expectations, health regulations and travel policies with no corporate support and very little in-house expertise to focus on the intricacies of commercial strategies. Finding the right talent with a broad skill set was critical.

Oceanid was able to accelerate our business recovery. The team provides a one-stop solution leading all cross discipline commercial activities (Global Sales, Revenue/Distribution, Marketing, PR/Social Media), effectively acting as our Sales, Revenue and Marketing Director. The Key Performance Metrix of the result include: 2022 Performance Against Budget Year-over-year growth 2021 and 2019 (which was the record year for the hotel); Growth in key feeder markets, particularly the UK market where we historically underperformed; Business Mix shift to direct channels (website, mobile web and property direct); Ability to

replace the lack of group business; Incremental revenue growth (F&B in particular and ancillary room revenue through no-show/cancellations); Performance against competitive set and the destination overall (with the data set available); Forward demand optimization and operational preparedness; Increase in productivity & cost savings; Simplify business process; Improved team knowledge, best practices and employee retention.

Driving strategic commercial initiatives requires a multi discipline approach and an in-depth know-how, technical expertise, and strong relationships in the market. Many of us feel that we can manage the process effectively while also focusing on the operation and customer satisfaction, but few have the granular knowledge, time or resources to go into the required level of analysis as well as manage all external relationships for best returns. Being early adopters of virtual technology and a clear proactive communication strategy allowed us to reach thousands of travel agents even while the world was in lockdown. Creating virtual site inspections, newsletters, and TV-like talk shows instilled confidence with the agents to book the resort as the demand returned. Levering and optimizing technology to improve speed to market and finding alternative distribution channels also forced us to accelerate our efforts in direct connectivity solutions to ease the pressure on the hotel and operator. Oceanid was founded during the pandemic on the premise to support independent resorts in their business recovery.

Their holistic scope of services is unique, effectively overseeing all commercial strategies of the hotel in contrast to the traditional representation or marketing agencies who tend to be single-subject or single-market experts. Oceanid's comprehensive commercial plan touches on every aspect of the business across all disciplines, channels, segments and markets. Their technical know-how, business acumen and in-market relationships enable them to be proactive and agile, optimizing technologies and implementing tactics that maximize returns and exposure. Oceanid is an integral part of the resort's leadership team, accountable for the overall revenue delivery while guiding & training on-resort associates along the way. Bringing decades of experience with branded and independent resorts,

they not only recommend but also negotiate and execute all initiatives from A to Z.