

DESTINATIONS

ALL-INCLUSIVE HOLIDAYS | BARBADOS

Q&A

PATRICIA AFFONSO-DASS,
GROUP MANAGER, OCEAN HOTELS

INTERVIEW BY Katie McGonagle

Q. Can you tell us how you came to work in Barbados?

A. I was born in Dominica, so I'm a true product of the Caribbean. We left Dominica when I was two years old to live in Trinidad then Antigua, before moving to Guyana where I grew up, then on to Barbados in 1998 where I have lived for the past 23 years. I am group general manager of Ocean Hotels in Barbados and I was president of the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association. My affinity for tourism spans a 30-year career ranging from my first job in Antigua with the Caribbean Hotel Association (now the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association), to management positions in Guyana and Barbados.

Q. Have the hotels reopened for the winter season?

A. Our three hotels on the south coast of Barbados are all open. Sea Breeze Beach House and South Beach Hotel have been open all year, while the new O2 Beach Club & Spa opened officially on November 1. Bookings from the UK across all three properties are extremely strong for winter, close to pre-Covid levels, largely due to our agent support.

Q. You've just revamped and reopened the O2 Beach Club – why did you take that step during the pandemic?

A. The reimagining of the Ocean Two Resort & Residences had been planned for 2020 and 2021, so we decided to keep to our schedule and turn the travel restrictions to



our advantage, undertaking the majority of our renovations and heavy building works when travel to the island was limited. As well as a new name, the O2 Beach Club & Spa has a modern design, luxury accommodation, gourmet dining and a new premium all-inclusive concept. The resort has a new nine-storey, 42-suite tower with our fine-dining restaurant, Oro, on the ninth floor. Also new is the resort's Acqua Spa offering the island's only hammam experience and treatments around the theme of wellness through water. The new resort has redefined the all-inclusive experience in Barbados by offering guests the chance to embrace Bajan culture.

Q. How have you seen all-inclusive holidays change over the years?

A. Over the past few years, all-inclusive resorts have expanded

their offering to meet the demands of guests who expect more from their inclusive package. Since the pandemic, this demand is greater than ever with guests not only looking for more value, but also wanting to feel more connected to the places they visit, have more-immersive experiences and spend time with family and friends. At Sea Breeze Beach House, we have added more dining options, bars, activities and wellness experiences. The new O2 Beach Club & Spa has one of the most extensive all-inclusive offerings on the island, with the new Luxury and Concierge Collection suites offering a host of additional inclusions, from groceries to 'learn to' experiences as part of the all-inclusive experience.

PATRICIA'S TOP TIP

We have a new travel agent training and rewards programme covering all our resorts, which include the O2 Beach Club Barbados, plus the four-star Sea Breeze Beach House and all-suite South Beach Hotel. oceanhotelsrewards.com



PICTURE: Nicholas Herrera 3D

Q. Do guests venture out of the resort?

A. Yes. We strongly encourage our guests to discover the island's culture, history and attractions first-hand and our 'experience ambassadors' are

available to recommend the best places or experiences. Some of the most popular choices are luxury sunset catamaran cruises, off-road 4x4 safaris, scuba diving, deep-sea fishing, visits to Barbados National Trust sites, golf and horse riding. And guests who stay with us during turtle nesting season can see turtles laying their eggs and hatchlings breaking out on the beach in front of the hotel!

Q. Do you have a favourite holiday spot?

A. It's really difficult for me to pick a favourite! But if I had to narrow it down – Dominica, Grenada, Portugal and Italy are places that I never get tired of going back to. **TW**