

DESTINATIONS

ALL-INCLUSIVE HOLIDAYS | WATERSPORTS

Q&A

MICHAEL CLARKE, GROUP DIRECTOR OF WATERSPORTS, SANDALS

INTERVIEW BY Katie McGonagle



Q. How did you come to work for Sandals?

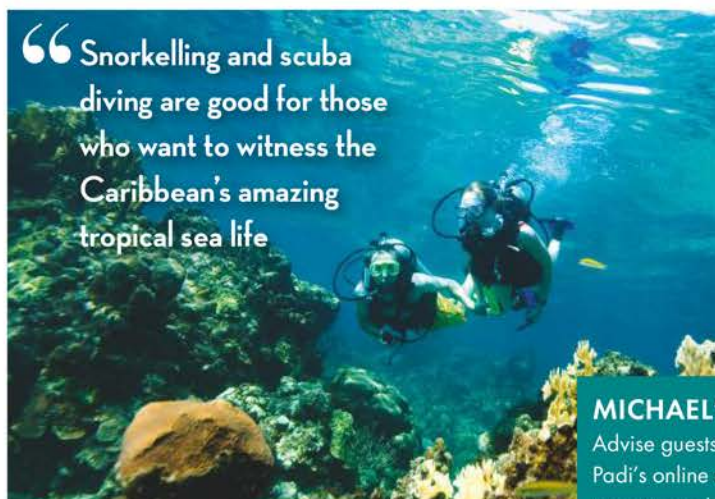
A. I owned my own watersports business for years before starting as a manager for SuperClubs resorts. After a few years, I saw an advert for the opening of Beaches Resorts and I have now been working at Sandals and Beaches for 19 years. I started at Beaches Ocho Rios in 2002 then moved to Beaches Turks and Caicos. After that, I moved back to Jamaica and took on my current role as group director of watersports.

Q. What does your job involve day-to-day?

A. I oversee all the water-based activities at Sandals and Beaches Resorts, from paddleboarding and kayaking to snorkelling and scuba diving. I ensure all our equipment is safety-checked and conditions are safe for guests to be out on the water. Being based in Montego Bay, I am often on-site at Sandals Montego Bay and Sandals Royal Caribbean Resort & Private Island. Each morning, our teams ensure all the Hobie Cats, paddleboards and kayaks are set up on the beach, so when guests want to get out on the water, we are ready!

Q. People think of the Caribbean as a fly-and-flop destination – have you seen guests becoming more active in recent years?

A. Absolutely! I think more and more guests are keen to try something new and get involved with the activities at each resort. A lot of our guests enjoy spending a couple of



PICTURE: Steve Samacore

“Snorkelling and scuba diving are good for those who want to witness the Caribbean’s amazing tropical sea life

hours each day doing watersports, followed by a quiet afternoon by the beach or pool. Seeing them having a great time and mastering a new skill is really rewarding. Some arrive having not tried any watersports before and they leave having learnt something new.

Q. Which activities are most in demand?

A. Kayaking and paddleboarding are always popular for guests who enjoy being on the water rather than in it, but snorkelling and scuba diving are good for those who want to witness the Caribbean’s amazing tropical sea life. At Sandals, we find couples are keen to try new activities together, which makes our snorkelling trips the most popular. At Beaches, kayaking and paddleboarding are more popular as families of all ages can take part, and they give older children and teens a bit of independence.

Q. How have you adapted in light of Covid?

A. We’ve made changes to the way we work at each of our resorts. All staff were given enhanced health and safety training; we introduced our Platinum Protocols of Cleanliness programme; and staff members are required to wear masks, gloves and observe social distancing. The dedicated dive staff also received further training from Padi to ensure they are aligned with safety and security protocols to keep guests safe throughout their stay, and are exceeding dive industry standards.

Q. Should guests bring their own snorkelling masks or other equipment?

A. All of our equipment is put through a rigorous cleaning and sanitisation process to ensure we



MICHAEL’S TOP TIP

Advise guests to take Padi’s online e-learning programme before getting to the resort, so they can simply finish the practical exam to complete their qualification. Also, remember clients can’t dive on the same day they fly in or out of the resort.

are keeping guests safe at every resort. Guests can choose to bring their own snorkelling masks with them if it makes them feel more at ease, but they can rest assured that we are cleaning all equipment

thoroughly between each use.

Q. What activity do you love seeing guests try for the first time?

A. Lots of guests try paddleboarding, which has seen a huge amount of interest over the last few years. We also have plenty of guests try scuba diving – our Padi Discover Scuba Diving course is taught by Padi-certified professionals. Plus, we’ve seen a surge of people completing their Padi certification since the pandemic. We also recently had a US celebrity guest visiting Beaches Negril with her family. Her son is on the autism spectrum, but we were able to help him get Padi-certified and go diving for the first time, which was really special to watch. **TW**