



Sandals and Beaches resorts Chairman Gordon 'Butch' Stewart (left) is all smiles as he accepts the Inaugural Tourism Pioneer Award from World Travel Awards founder Graham Cooke at the awards banquet held at Sandals Royal Caribbean Hotel in Montego Bay last Wednesday. (Photo: Joseph Wellington)

Stewart gets Tourism Pioneer Award

CARIBBEAN hotel mogul Gordon 'Butch' Stewart was last Wednesday honoured with the World Travel Awards' inaugural Tourism Pioneer Award and hailed for his unwavering determination "to make tourism a force of real change and betterment throughout the Caribbean".

Stewart, who is the chairman of the Sandals and Beaches resorts chain and the ATL Group of companies, which includes the Observer, was presented with the prestigious award by Graham Cooke, founder of the World Travel Awards.

Cooke shared with hundreds of guests at the awards banquet, held at Sandals Royal Caribbean Hotel in Montego Bay, Stewart's innovative achievements in tourism, starting from his acquisition of a struggling hotel in Montego Bay in 1991 to the creation of a brand that stretches across the Caribbean and which is world-renowned.

According to Cooke,

Sandals boss hailed for making tourism a force for good

Stewart's "passion for the Caribbean, creative leadership and commitment to quality" saw the Montego Bay property "transformed into a haven for two people in love, and today it remains the flagship of what has grown into the most successful all-inclusive brand in the world".

"His philosophy is simple — finding out what people want, giving it to them, and in doing so exceeding their expectations. But more than that, his application and vision are unrivalled, and have steered the expansion of this brand across the Caribbean, with 23 world-class resorts in five countries," said Cooke, who noted that this year Sandals is celebrating 30 years of pushing the boundaries of travel excellence.

"Most important is his

passion for the Caribbean, and how he carries that message through in every aspect of his marketing, advertising and sales programmes, not only by continuously supporting the various tourism boards and their initiatives, but also by investing tremendous resources into his own brand campaigns and propelling the Caribbean's constant presence in the marketplace," said Cooke.

He said that since Stewart's entry into the tourism industry, he has maintained a solid relationship with the retail travel agent community by providing them with the education and tools to sell his product with complete confidence.

Cooke also highlighted Sandals' development of partnerships with some of the

most globally recognised companies, including Sesame Street, XBOX, Martha Stewart, Greg Norman, and Berlinger, and noted that the resort chain has created some of the most innovative consumer marketing messages such as the current MORR campaign, which have maintained Stewart's status as a trendsetter in the industry.

"As a result, the brand has become a household name, and alone has brought millions of tourism dollars into the Caribbean," said Cooke. "It has also created thousands of jobs for local communities and is boosting local economies. As a matter of fact, this company is the largest private sector employer in the Caribbean. Its global marketing initiatives have also helped spread the good word of the Caribbean to

every corner of the globe, including previously untapped markets as far away such as Russia, Eastern Europe and the Far East, which in turn has generated revenue for the entire region, and fostered the development of the travel and tourism infrastructure."

The World Travel Awards founder also praised Stewart for his philanthropy, describing it as "one of the cornerstones of his philosophy".

He noted that the Sandals Foundation set up by Stewart's son, Adam, who is the company's CEO, funds projects in three core areas — education, community, and the environment — "for the enhancement of the region".

Explaining that the goal of the World Travel Awards is to seek out those individuals who are doing more than anyone else to transform the industry, Cooke said that Stewart was among "those players whose vision, courage and dedication are making tourism a force for good, and a force for change".