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Sandals reveals 'revolutionary' wedding program



Adam Stewart says providing a unique level of flexibility and customization is the recipe for success. File photo

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Published: Dec 29, 2011

Sandals is "pushing weddings hard", according to the company's CEO, and will unveil a "revolutionary" program next year in an effort to attract a record number of brides.

The resort chain plans to step up its Sandals Weddings program in collaboration with lifestyle giant Martha Stewart.

"If you talk about one of the major things going on at Sandals, this is revolutionary," said Adam Stewart. "Nobody has ever put together a wedding builder like this that speaks to the consumer. We expect the second and third quarter to be explosive because of this."

The recipe for success, Stewart added, is providing a unique level of flexibility and customization.

More than 7,000 photos have been loaded into the resort's online wedding builder, allowing clients to

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select every nuance of the big day, from the colors, to the flowers, table top settings, place cards and the cake.

The hope is the push will mean not just a healthy bottom line for Sandals, but will spur more tourism arrivals in 2012.

Calling wedding bookings “relatively flat and consistent” year-on-year, Stewart said this new program is meant to generate momentum for the brand in this fringe but profitable niche market.

Sandals presented the concept to hundreds of travel agents invited on a tour of the chain’s properties back in November, and again at its annual general meeting held in Jamaica earlier this month.

Weddings are expected to take on a central role at the resort’s latest acquisition in Exuma - Emerald Bay. Stewart said the resort has added a European wedding garden, and while that resort might be on the higher end in terms of price, special occasions might be more resilient to cost.

Stewart pointed out that traditionally The Bahamas has been at a disadvantage in the wedding market. During the winter months, from January to March, it tends to be cooler than other Caribbean destinations.

“We never run hot in January through March in The Bahamas compared to April, May and June. We do four times as many weddings as spring approaches,” he said. “I suspect we’ll do 100 weddings in those first three months. But then you’ll start to do 80 per month come April.”

Sandals continues to compete with several venues in The Bahamas for the wedding market, perhaps most notably Atlantis. In October, Guardian Business reported that this type of booking at the Paradise Island venue had grown “consistently”, with revenues rising 30 percent in 2011.

Atlantis established a special department for weddings just two years ago, according to Anna Wilson, vice president of weddings and special affairs at the resort. It also built a “ocean overlook chapel” this year for happy couples to recite their vows.

Gordon Stewart, the chairman of Sandals, told Guardian Business in October that his chain indeed plans to “turn up the heat” with its wedding offerings in the near future.

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