

# TRAVEL WEEKLY

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## 60 years of all-inclusives

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### Independents go inclusive



*Seagrape Suite on the beach at the Spice Island Beach Resort, Grenada.*

There's a long list of independent properties that have stepped out of the room-only box to embrace the all-inclusive concept.

These range from Spice Island Beach Resort in Grenada to Curacao's Lodge Kura Hulanda & Beach Club, Solmar All-Inclusive Resort & Beach Club in Los Cabos, Curtain Bluff Resort in Antigua and Wyndham Sugar Bay in St. Thomas.

Peter Odle, chairman of several all-inclusive Barbados properties, including Mango Bay, Island Inn and SunSwept Beach Hotel, said that service is key to attracting and keeping all-inclusive clients in an arena dominated by large chains.

"Service results in a satisfied customer, which leads to word-of-mouth advertising that can be just as effective as large chains with huge advertising budgets," Odle said.

Odle's 2010 business did not suffer, "primarily because of our loyal repeat guests and our all-inclusive rate structure, which provided the value consumers look for during tough economic times," he said.

Bolongo Bay Beach Resort in St. Thomas launched its optional all-inclusive dining program in 1989, the first resort in the U.S. Virgin Islands to do so.

"One of the changes over the years is that guests who like the all-inclusive concept are booking Bolongo because they prefer a smaller, more intimate experience," said Richard Doumeng, managing director.

In Mexico, Sandos Hotels & Resorts' three properties on the Riviera Maya could be considered a chain, "but in a sense we also are the 'anti-chain,' as each of our resorts features its own strengths and personalities, which attract different markets," said Jacques de Paep, director of sales and marketing.

He described the 956-room Sandos Caracol Eco Resort & Spa in the Riviera Maya as "one of the world's leading eco resorts, while the Sandos Playacar two-resort complex is our culinary flagship."

The philosophy behind the Spanish chain is based on creating different concepts within the market "for those who are bored with the usual all-inclusive experience," de Paep said.

Starwood Hotels & Resorts recently launched its first all-inclusive packages at its Westin, Sheraton and Le Meridien resorts in Cancun, Puerto Vallarta and Los Cabos.

The new plans serve to remind consumers that "Mexico is a great deal right now for a safe, fun and accessible vacation getaway," said Trip Barrett, vice president of brand management for Starwood's Latin America division. --

**G.N.M.**