

What Size “Sandals” Is Right For You?

by

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Entering the long driveway to the entrance of Sandals Royal Plantation, Jamaica, one is immediately struck that it is indeed, royal. The entire entrance is reminiscent of the quality you see in “Small Hotels of the World.”



This is not your typical mammoth all-inclusive, but rather a boutique size hotel – perfect for “Intimacy Travelers.” We were told that it is unique in this respect from all the other Sandals resorts.

When we arrived at the Royal Plantation, we were greeted by the new manager, Mark Starkey. Mark has a vivacious spirit and takes pride in the work ethic of his staff and the total dedication to customer service. He is constantly visible around the facility, speaking with guests and being in contact with staff, to make sure everything is running smoothly. If a guest finds something that isn’t working up to standard, Mark

won't give you the typical "I'll look into it." He gets on his cell phone and has it taken care of immediately.

All the accommodations are butler suites, which face the ocean. Our room was well-appointed and clean, with all the amenities one would expect including free Wi-Fi. The mini-bar is fully stocked, and there is a coffee maker so that you can partake of the magnificent Blue Mountain Jamaican coffee whenever you like.

Tip: You can call ahead of your trip if you would like the bar to be stocked with particular beverages. They will do their best to fulfill your order.

Although our particular accommodation, room 256, didn't have a walkout balcony, the view was still spectacular.



There are other suites with medium and large-sized balconies. Some of them are adjacent to the Governor General's Suite, which is a third-floor, corner room. When you book this accommodation, the four-poster beach bed is automatically reserved for you.

All the Sandals' resorts are all-inclusive but the tipping restriction is lifted for beach waiter service and butlers. You would think by the way they advertise it, that butler service would imply that you don't have to lift a finger for anything. This is not the case - you do have to lift a finger . . . to press a button on the cell phone the butler gives you, to call for anything you wish! And, unlike many of the famous "genie" stories, you do get unlimited wishes. The use of cell-phones by the butlers makes for very fast service. So if suddenly, as in our situation, we wanted to have breakfast in the pier gazebo, jutting out into an unobstructed view of the Caribbean, we just picked up the phone, called, Tafari, our butler and he arranged it, right then and there.



We had a sumptuous breakfast, with an unobstructed view of the multi-colored, crystal clear blue Caribbean Sea, with a breeze on your body that felt like caresses from God.



The gazebo is a perfect place for a wedding ceremony or a private candlelit dinner. As with all the resorts we've visited, private dinners like this are an added expense. (But not the breakfast – hint, hint)

Speaking of breakfasts, the Royal Plantation has a "Make Your Own Healthy Martini." From a list of native fruits, like papaya, melon, orange, pineapple, strawberry, mango, etc., you can select any combination and your non-alcoholic "creation" will be served, pureed in a martini glass.

Of course, being an all-inclusive resort, you can't expect first-rate, gourmet food, right? Wrong! The Royal Plantation cuisine and presentation is top-notch! The drawing room leading into "Le Papillon Restaurant" is breath taking, which, in itself, is an appetizer and sets up a dining expectation that does not disappoint.

Being a boutique-sized hotel, you can expect the Royal Plantation to be relatively quiet and private. If you want something more up-beat, you can go next door to the Sandals Grande Riviera. It's a much larger resort with more activities, a younger population, proportionately, and a lively nightlife. As with other Sandals' resorts, you can "pay at one and play at the others." So you can take the shuttle from either of the resorts and have full access to the facilities at the other.

Just because the Royal Plantation has a less lively night life, it doesn't mean that it lacks quality entertainment. Just as we sat down for our first *al fresco* dinner, the "Rapture" band came up on stage – two guitars, keyboard and drums. We thought, "Well, there goes our romantic, peaceful dinner!" But with the first notes of this group, we realized that along with the candlelight and moonlight atmosphere, we were going to be serenaded, not assaulted.

On Jamaican Cultural Night, however, the scene is quite different, with Jamaican music, drummers, fire-dancers and colorful costumes. The emcee, Oshane Holmes added to the spirit of the evening and motivated everyone to participate in the festivities.

The Wobbly Peacock bar is great place to get your favorite drink, expertly made. They had some of the best Pina Coladas we've tasted. But if you want a special treat, return to the bar after dinner until midnight and delight to the sounds of pianist, Andre Campbell. His ability to play music of any genre and style is truly amazing.

You may want to plan excursions to the many off-site adventures Ocho Rios has to offer. Sandals' own Catamaran offers the Dunn's River Cruise, Lover's Rock Cruise, and Survivor Cruise. You can also go deep-sea fishing aboard the 32' Bertram Sabrina. The Dolphin Encounter and Swim is an unforgettable experience as is the Horseback Beach Ride. Other adventures include the "Jamaican Bobsled, Zipline and Skyride," or "River Kayaking," "Bamboo River Rafting," "Bicycling in the Blue Mountains," "Dune Buggy Safari," even a "Camel Ride."

If golf is more your speed, then you will want to experience the Sandals Country Club Golf Course. The greens fee is included while staying at a Sandals' resort. You just pay for cart and caddy.

Tip: If you are going to play golf at least three times, ask for the "Play Three, Pay For Two" golf cart package. Also try to arrange for Ortigo as your caddy. He will definitely improve your game!



In the "rec" room, which has TV and a computer area, there is also a pool table. Can't find anyone to play with? Call your butler for a challenging game. Or, you can play a round of croquet, which is located just by the fitness center and spa.

The fitness center is equipped with treadmills, ellipticals, fitness bicycle, large exercise ball and a full complement of weights. There is also a TV to distract you from a tedious routine and a refrigerator with water to keep you hydrated.



If you are thinking of a couple's massage, we recommend arranging one right on the beach. The spa is immaculate with treatment rooms, sauna and steam room.



There are two sides to the Royal Plantation beach – east and west. The west side has a pier and is mostly for swimming or having lunch, either served to you or at the beach restaurant. Smoking is not permitted on this side of the beach.



The east side has all the water sports and activity boats. You can take out a sailboat, kayak, water bicycle, or hop aboard one of the Sandal's boats for, either a glass-bottom experience, snorkeling, or fishing. Smoking is permitted on the East side.



There is something very special about the warmth and genuine friendliness of this Jamaican staff, which immediately makes you feel comfortably right at home and difficult to leave. Yet you can ease the separation anxiety somewhat by taking advantage of the "Soon Come Back Promotion." With a \$750 discount off your next visit, plus airfare credit and earned points, this is an exceptionally good value. We took advantage of it before we departed and booked our next trip to Sandals Emerald Bay on the island of Exuma. We're looking forward to bringing you our next review!

You can find luxury just about anywhere, for a price. But at Sandals, you can have luxury and a great value at the same time.

What size Sandals do we wear? We prefer a "small," and Sandals Royal Plantation is just the right fit for us.

