

## Couples Resort Sans Souci: All-Inclusive But Not Intrusive

by

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If “all inclusives” conjure up images of busyness, noise and crowds of people gobbling up food and guzzling down drinks, then you are not imagining Couples Sans Souci all-inclusive resort. At the time of our arrival, Couples was at full capacity, yet the enormous 35-acre property absorbed the amount of guests so well, that it gave the impression of exclusivity. The resort motto, “The all-inclusive refined, redefined” rings true.

When Couples says “all-inclusive” they mean all inclusive. Once we landed at Montego Bay’s Sangster International Airport, we were led to the Couples airport lounge, where we were able to “check in,” get complimentary drinks at the bar and use the private bathroom facilities to freshen up as we waited for our transfer to the hotel. All our bags were taken care of, and in short order, we were on our way to the resort in a comfortable air-conditioned mini-bus. Our driver made accommodations for us to stretch out and snooze, if we wanted to, during the easy 1 ½ hour drive to Ocho Rios. The new highway is an exponential improvement over the old road that once existed. The friendliness of our driver made the trip seem even shorter. So if you’re balking at traveling to Ocho Rios because of the extra drive time there, don’t. It is more than worth it.

*Travel tip (literally): Even though the transportation is included, the skycap that brings your luggage to the bus as well as the driver should be tipped, as they are not connected with the Couples resort.*



We arrived at Couples Sans Souci and were greeted by Michelle Gordon, sales team leader and escorted to the lobby where cool wash cloths, glasses of champagne and most importantly the infectious smiles and demeanor of the Couple's staff awaited us.

We met General Manager Pierre Battaglia who was professional, gracious and informative as he gave us an overview of the property and its history as well as an enticing preview of what our vacation could be.

For as beautifully as the brochure and website descriptions are written, Mr. Battaglia added a personal and intimate flavor that “wet our whistle” and made us impatient to start our adventure at Couples Sans Souci.

The staff, in general, is as friendly and caring as can be and they really do, “engage your hearts and enrich your spirits.”

Just exploring the massive grounds is an adventure in itself and you can get a good idea of what the resort has to offer. There are many stairs to climb, paths to meander and “nooks and crannies” for lovers to discover, including the only Couples resort which has a pool fed by curative mineral springs, dating back to the 1700’s.

The “featured” cabana for the Couples Resorts is the “Hide Away,” where we enjoyed our simultaneous couple’s massages. They were “delicious” and eased us into the perfect frame of mind to enjoy the rest of our stay.



Yet later we discovered an even more sense-evoking massage nook, "The Drift Away," at a private cove at Caribbean Sea level, where you were soothed by waves on your left



and cascading falls of Charlie's Grotto on your right.





A feast for feeling and hearing.



Although there are four pools to choose from, we liked the mineral pool best. It's adjacent to the spa and has a beautiful view on a bluff overlooking the sea. For a change of pace, you can easily scoot down to the ocean for a dip if you'd like.



The mineral pool is also next to Charlie's Spa Veggie Bar, where you can get scrumptious, natural healthy drinks and hot-off-the-grill Panini sandwiches. This pool hosts the aqua fitness classes, which we took with Winston. He combined laughter with drive for a fabulous appetite-raising experience. Fellow-guests, who were professional personal trainers, A-rated the equipment in the fitness center next to the pool, where yoga and meditation classes are also offered. So you can pretty much have it all without leaving this area, but there is so much more to uncover.

Speaking of uncovering takes us to the "au-naturel" Sunset Beach which can be found down a long winding path to the west of the main beach and pool. Despite what one might expect, the comfort level, even for first-timers like us, was extraordinary.

Guests were social, dignified, yet happy and free. It was a non-judgmental, ogling-free atmosphere. The main gathering place is the swim-up pool bar and there's a very cool built-in grotto cave with waterfalls, where you can escape the sun and, with drink-in-hand, find more privacy.

Nudity is mandatory just 'til 5:00 pm, when you are asked to don clothing for the public viewing of the famous sunsets for which the beach is named.

In the spirit of camaraderie, many in our group faced the sunset for a “rear-view” commemorative photo.



All-inclusive also encompasses a full range of water sports: windsurfing, Hobie Cat sailing, water- skiing, kayaking, snorkeling, sea-cycling, and scuba diving – all with equipment and instruction included.

If you want to go outside your intimacy and explore Ocho Rios, Couples Sans Souci provides inclusive multiple offsite excursions to view the local phenomena.

*Travel Tip: Planning a destination wedding? How's this for all-inclusive? Wedding ceremony, cake, flowers and coordinators are free. Photography and government license fees do apply. Contact the Wedding Concierge at [weddings@couples.com](mailto:weddings@couples.com) or call 1-800-268-7537. For Romance and honeymoon packages contact the Romance Concierge at: [romance@couples.com](mailto:romance@couples.com) or call 954-665-2962.*

Unlimited tennis with instruction and golf are also included. Golf carts are optional, but caddies are mandatory at additional cost. But in our case, it was more than worth it and turned out to be a highlight of the trip. We lucked-out with a caddy *extraordinaire*, Ortigo Hinds. Not only did he caddy and provide wonderful and patient instruction but also found some ripe mangos and coconuts for us to eat along the way.



We had the most special rounds of golf and we came away with some invaluable golf tips and lifelong memories. Ortigo was focused not only on helping us with our game, but making our whole golf outing personal and intimate.



*Travel tip for golfers: If you plan on playing at the Upton/Sandals Golf Course, we would highly recommend calling ahead and requesting Ortigo for your caddy.*

*Note: Free transfers from Couples to the golf course are designated at 8:15 or 1:15 with pickups accordingly. If you want to play at other times, it's a short trip by cab that will cost you about \$20 either way.*

Food and drink is literally available 24/7 and Couples Sans Souci and Couples Tower Isle are the only Couples resorts that offer room service from 6 am to 11 pm. Each room comes with a fully stocked bar of domestic and international premium brand liquor, beer and soft drinks, which can be custom ordered to your taste.

There are four restaurants, each with its own character, ambience and menu:

The *Palazzina* is for breakfast lunch and dinner, and offers buffet or table service. The *Bella Vista* and *Beach Grill* are both beachfront and therefore, casual attire. *Bella Vista* serves Jamaican fare in a romantic torch and moonlit setting. Amazingly the *Beach Grill* offers grilled specialties from 11 pm to 6 in the morning. Lunch is from 12 to 5 pm.



The food at these three restaurants lived up to our expectations, both in quality and presentation.

*Travel tip: Reservations are required for dinner at the Palazzina restaurant.*

But the *Casanova* is another story. We have had the good fortune to dine at the *Cipriani Hotel* on the isle of Giudecca, and Harry's Bar, both in Venice and the *Cipriani Restaurant* in lower Manhattan. Learning that the chefs at the *Casanova* were initially trained by Arrigo Cipriani, we were eager to partake of that tradition – and indeed we did. The Italian dishes were excellent and complemented the fusion of tropical Jamaican and Caribbean cuisine. The up-scale *Casanova* adheres to a semi-formal dress code and gave us the opportunity to dress up for one another. We dined at the intimate far corner table overlooking the pool with live entertainment and dancing below. We never felt rushed by the staff so consequently, we were the last ones to leave.



*Travel tip: Reservations for dinner at the Casanova can book quickly so plan your special night in advance.*

*For those who are sensitive or bothered by smoking, be aware that even though smoking is not permitted indoors at the resort, smoking is allowed elsewhere and you may encounter second-hand cigarette and cigar smoke at the beach, pool area, or when dining al fresco.*

*The ultimate in romantic, intimate dining, is the private candle-lit dinner for two. This can be set up on the beach or gazebo overlooking the ocean. You can make arrangements through the Romance Concierge listed above. There is an additional charge of \$170 per couple.*

Although all 150 suites have ocean views, accommodations vary by "blocks" and floors. We had a one-bedroom oceanview room in block E. Our only complaint was that the room had a musty smell. As soon as we alerted the front desk about this issue, Michelle Gordon was on top of the situation and searched for other suitable accommodations. Even though the resort was "at capacity," she did find us an alternative, and during our massage, she had our room "treated." So when we got back, we had choices. We decided to stay in our original room, since the problem was resolved satisfactorily. When selecting rooms, if you want to be by the beach and pool, then you will be looking at blocks A and B, but for intimacy, we recommend block D "Dahlia."

*Travel Tip: We mentioned earlier about the amount of steep steps required to navigate the premises. If you require an elevator, we recommend E, F or G blocks, which are closest to the one and only open, glass elevator.*

The most extravagant accommodation is the Prime Minister Suite, however there are other penthouse suites in various blocks.

The most secluded accommodation is the Hibiscus Cottage. Check the website: <http://couples.com/sans-souci/accommodations.php> for details and rates.

Couples Sans Souci accommodates diversified couples with a grand palette of different appetites and tastes which explains why Couples Sans Souci has garnered the following awards:

2011 Travel + Leisure World's Best Awards – Ranked #2 Best Hotel Spa in the Caribbean and Ranked #56 of the Top 100 Hotels in the World and the #2 All Inclusive Hotel.

2011 Trip Advisor Ranked #2 of 37 Hotels in Ocho Rios.

2010 Travel + Leisure World's Best Service Award in the Caribbean

2009 Travel + Leisure World's Best Awards – Ranked #7 of Top 25 Resorts in the Caribbean, Bermuda and the Bahamas.

We met many returning guests who agree that at Couples Sans Souci, wishes are fulfilled and dreams become reality.

