

Coco Palm Caribbean Resort partners with Avvio to drive direct bookings

Coco Palm is a stunning resort located on the idyllic Caribbean island of Saint Lucia. As you'd expect from a luxury Caribbean resort, it's the closest thing to paradise a traveller can hope to find. Picture waking up to tropical splendour and birdsong, with a surrounding of lush gardens and palm trees. Picture throwing open your luxury Swim Up room doors to a pool bathed in sunlight and later, sitting at the pool-side resort bar, sipping a Caribbean cocktail. Add to that picture, the fact that this 3.5 star resort is the creation of the Chastanet family and you've got Coco Palm.

Operated and managed by the brother and sister team of Allen and Feolla Chastanet, Feolla took the helm when her brother became the now Prime Minister of Saint Lucia in June 2016. Both opened the boutique Coco Palm resort near Rodney Bay in the North West of the island in 2005. A hotel industry veteran, Allen had already helped launch the Island Outpost hotel group in Jamaica in the 1990's, and had a vision to open his own resort that would deliver an authentic Caribbean experience with excellent around-the-clock service that made every guest feel like a VIP.

Coco Palm makes that vision a reality. With a variety of spa and beauty treatments and beautiful gardens of lush green grass and trees pink with hibiscus, the 103 room resort combines an authentic Caribbean atmosphere with stylish, contemporary decor. Guests can get a real taste of life in Saint Lucia at the resort restaurant, Ti Bananne (creole for Little Banana) which serves traditional island dishes. No trip to the Caribbean is complete without some tropical music and the resort does not disappoint. On a Friday evening, guests can kick back listening to a live calypso band, while tucking into an exotic island buffet. The hotel offers airport transportation and excursions, with everything from hot chocolate tours to sunset cruises to adventure days and more. Delivering unmatched personal service, the Coco Palm team work hard to ensure every guest experiences paradise.

It's one thing to deliver exceptional personal service in-house; but it's a whole different game to reflect this service online and in the digital age, it becomes only more crucial for a hotel's success. So Coco Palm has partnered with **Avvio**, the world's leading direct booking platform and digital agency for hotels and other accommodation providers, to ensure their guests' online browsing and booking experience is just as seamless as their stay.

Mark Ferguson was appointed Managing Director of the resort in April 2017, following the restructure when Allen became PM and Feolla became Chairperson from her father. Mark explains his reasons for partnering with Avvio: "Until now we haven't really reflected the



unique Coco Palm brand across our digital channels and I'm eager to maximise our core brand value, which is why I've chosen Avvio to help with that message delivery.

I had two very strong recommendations to look at the Avvio product; one from the gentlemen that installed Avvio at the Merrion in Dublin thirteen years ago and one from an account manager at Ideas. I was sold on Avvio once I had spoken to Rich Tuckwell, Avvio's VP of Sales and Marketing, on what they can do to lift my direct channel programme."

This digitalisation is quite a shift from how the Coco Palm has been run so far, and Mark is keen to try out a wide variety of Avvio's software and services to determine the most effective strategy to showcase the resort online.

Mark says, "I want us to integrate this technology into the business and tailor it with my team to ensure we maximise the benefit to our guests. I think it's important with such a big shift in mind-set and management that we explore and test every available avenue and use as much of the functionality as possible. It really is a total shift from what happens in the independent hotel arena in the Caribbean. In many ways, it's almost a re-education. Coco Palm will be going through extensive changes over the next eighteen months and this technology upgrade is the start of that evolution."

Due to the fact that the Coco Palm resort is owned and run by the entire Chastanet family, guests expect the property to be ahead of all competition. There's huge pressure on the team to ensure the property is always at the top of its game, always advancing, always delivering exceptional personal service, both online and offline. With Avvio's help, the resort will be able to meet and exceed these high expectations with ease.

Mark explains: "Given the Chastanets' involvement in the island, people have an interest in what business decisions are made. As such, people look at Coco Palm in a different way to our competition and they follow what we're doing, so we have to make sure we have very clean delivery and we can't stand still."

Mark embraces the challenge with enthusiasm. When we asked him what it was like to run a property owned by the Chastanet family, Mark told us: "So far it has been full on with both hotel and food and beverage and we've noted a lot of things that we want to address and change. The family have given me full scope to push the business forward embracing technology. I'm working very closely with Allen's sister, Feolla Chastanet to drive that process. I almost feel I like I've been adopted into the family. It has been a great experience so far and one that I hope will last for a while."

Having worked as the Regional Finance Manager of Sandals, the huge Caribbean holiday resort group, Mark went on to say: "My role at Sandals was very much focused on financial



process and controls, a lot of which we can use here at Coco Palm to help us grow the business. We have already started looking at some of the back of house finance processes, particularly in food and beverage control. But there's a lot that all hotel companies can learn from Sandals.

I guess my role here is very much focused on the entire operation and effectively changing the business process to become more competitive and ultimately, enhance the profitability of the Coco Palm property and brand. I have always been a hotelier at heart and I love being here in Saint Lucia. It isn't where I thought I'd end up, but at this point it is very much my home!"

Mark and the rest of the Coco Palm team work closely with [TheHarborClub](#), a brand new property due to open in Saint Lucia in September 2017. Comprising of seven stories and 115 luxury suites, The HarborClub is another project in which Allen Chastanet was instrumental since its inception over four years ago. The HarborClub has also chosen Avvio as its booking engine and digital services provider, as a way to drive the new property's direct bookings from the moment it opens its doors to the public.

Rich Tuckwell, who will be Coco Palm's Conversions Manager at Avvio, says, "Avvio is delighted to be working with these two growing properties, in such a stunning location, helping to drive the digital growth that the iconic resorts deserve."

More about Avvio

[Avvio](#) is the premium booking platform and digital agency for hotels and serviced apartment providers. Founded in 2002, Avvio has grown year-on-year by developing cutting-edge technologies that enable accommodation providers to drive outstanding growth in direct bookings, while reducing their dependence on online travel agency channels. A leader in the marketplace, Avvio is the only booking platform provider to offer new partners a guarantee that they will grow their direct bookings by at least 25% within 12 months when they switch to using the Avvio booking engine and supporting services. To find more about switching your booking engine to Avvio, contact Rich Tuckwell at rich@avvio.com.

