

# Marriott International to increase presence in Africa

Described as “the continent of opportunity for the 21st century”, the focus of the business world has started shifting increasingly to Africa. This is possibly most evident in the hospitality sector, with global hotel companies aggressively expanding on the continent.



Image by 123RF

“We at Marriott International have looked to the promise of the Middle East and Africa region for a good few years now,” explains Alex Kyriakidis, President, Middle East & Africa, Marriott International. “Our presence in the Middle East is now substantial and constantly growing, and we began a rollout of new properties in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2014, with the acquisition of South African-based Protea Hotels.

That move immediately projected us into the top spot in terms of hotel companies’ presence on the continent.” The more recent acquisition of Starwood Hotels & Resorts has provided Marriott with an even greater footprint in Africa.

Kyriakidis points to the significant change in parts of the sub-continent, where particular countries are enjoying political stability, and are free of conflict, for the first time in recent years. “This allows for economic growth, and a consequent increase in business travel. At the same time, the international leisure traveller has demonstrated enthusiasm for visiting many parts of the continent, too.”

Increasing travel within and into the continent is heavily dependent on air access, and many airlines have added new flights

to various parts of the sub-continent. However, there is still room for increasing air access even further.

Population growth in Africa is significant – increasing by over 30 million people a year – and in certain parts of the continent, this comes together with increasing wealth. A new middle class is emerging – offering great potential for the hospitality industry in the years to come. “This is a new market for both regional travel, and for outbound travel from the continent.

“We are also seeing a realisation among some governments that they need to diversify their economies so that they do not continue to rely so heavily on resources. They understand the benefits that tourism can bring,” Kyriakidis says, noting in particular the stance of Rwanda, a state which is welcoming business and opening up significantly to tourism.

The latest plans for expansion on the continent certainly reflect Marriott’s confidence in the region. South Africa, Nigeria, Uganda and Kenya are earmarked for substantial new hotel developments, and the company is also looking at opportunities in new markets such as Madagascar, Mauritius and Senegal.

“Our presence is geared to provide accommodation and business conferencing facilities to a wide variety of market segments,” Kyriakidis continues, explaining that, “The growth will happen in major gateway cities, commercial centres, as well as in resort destinations.”

An announcement is expected soon about a new Marriott-branded venue in South Africa, which remains at the forefront of Marriott’s African presence.

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