

Hilton plans to boost African presence

Hilton Worldwide has expanded its product offering in SA over the past six months and the US-based group intends to increase its presence in Africa, according to vice-president of operations for Africa and the Indian Ocean, Jan van der Putten.



Hilton Worldwide has introduced two new brands to SA since November last year; the Conrad Pezula Resort and Spa in Knysna and DoubleTree by Hilton in Cape Town's Upper Eastside. The group has five hotels in SA, three of which are Hiltons.

According to research by consultancy W Hospitality Group, the number of planned new hotel rooms in sub-Saharan Africa has increased significantly over the past year, with Hilton Worldwide "leading the way" by having 6,230 rooms in its African pipeline.

W Hospitality Group managing director Trevor Ward said in March that Hilton Worldwide's planned new rooms in the region, through its Hilton, DoubleTree and Garden Inn brands, had shown "an extraordinary 84% increase" in the 12 months to January.

Van der Putten said in an interview at the Tourism Indaba in Durban at the weekend that while there was scope to introduce another of the group's luxury brands on the continent - the Conrad - there were no specific plans to do so yet.

DoubleTree

The "key drivers" of Hilton Worldwide's expansion in Africa would be through DoubleTree by Hilton, Hilton, and Hilton Garden Inn.

Van der Putten said Africa "is one of the strategic objectives from a growth perspective" for the group and it was targeting key capital cities in the region.

"We have a lot of focus, attention, and dedicated work being done on our African growth and in the months and years ahead we will see that come to fruition," he said.

Hilton Worldwide's brands were also becoming more recognisable in Africa, which would also boost growth.

"The more new hotels we build, the more interest there is from investors," he said.

In the rest of Africa, the group would undertake mostly new developments, while growth in SA would be more focused on re-branding existing hotels.

However, Van der Putten said there was potential for new hotels in SA, especially in the next few years as occupancy levels improve boosting interest from investors.

"We have exciting plans for Hilton in Durban and the Hilton in Sandton and we are actively looking at new opportunities to increase the number of hotels we have. There are no specific plans yet but our development team is keen to talk to any interested parties.

Van der Putten said SA's local brands were strong and very well established.

Gert Venter, general manager of the Conrad Pezula Resort and Spa, said the resort - which was officially re-branded under the Conrad name in November - had attracted visitors from new overseas markets since including China and Taiwan.

This was largely due to the brand being given greater "visibility".

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