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## **THE MARCH OF THE CHAINS**

**SEPTEMBER 2011**

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If you look at the world map, with all the little lights representing an international hotel chain property, Africa is still “The Dark Continent”. There are a couple of exceptions, of course, namely Egypt and South Africa, but even in the latter there are not many, and of late the number has reduced with rebranding of several hotels from international to “home-grown” brands.

But this situation is changing. Whilst there is still no let-up in the efforts to populate other developing regions – particularly Asia, and the giants of India and China – the international chains are now turning their attention to sub-Saharan Africa in a big way.

Having previously relied on partners to push out their brands on the continent, InterContinental have recently appointed a development director purely for Africa, based in Cape Town. This is a first – Africa has always, in all the brands, been lumped in together either with Europe, or with the Middle East, or with both. Now Africa gets its own man. Expect to see more of those ubiquitous Holiday Inn flags flying soon. Hilton and Radisson are both looking for developers to be based in Africa, realizing that, if they are to have competitive advantage, they cannot “do” Africa from the comfort of a European office.

Other brands, like Kempinski, Marriott and Starwood are all seeking opportunities, particularly in the oil-rich nations, and whilst they have yet to move their executives there, the increased attention they are paying is to be welcomed.

What does this mean for African economies? A great deal, that’s what! Any traveller will know that finding quality hotel accommodation can be a challenge, even in some of the capital cities, so the march of the brands will surely mean that more business travelers and tourists will venture forth. And that means more jobs for Africans.

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