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## **HOTEL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

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There's a new kid on the block in Lagos! The George, a 62-room boutique hotel, opened in June, and is managed by the Mantis Collection. It's a stylish young thing, and was opened by the new Governor of Lagos State, Mr. Akinwunmi Ambode, in early July, who said "This is a happy occasion because it has reaffirmed the status of Lagos State as the first choice destination of investment".

And indeed it is, if the hotel development pipeline in Nigeria's commercial capital is anything to go by. Data compiled earlier this year ranked Lagos as the Number 1 city for new chain hotel development, with over 3,500 rooms in 18 hotels, ranging from the massive 350-room Centro by Rotana to the 76-room Mantis Ikeja – yes, another Mantis (and I hear that they are looking at a possible third property in the city).

Lagos hotels have had it pretty tough the last 12 months. First there was the travel warning issued by the US Embassy, warning of potential attacks on hotels, specifically naming the two Sheraton properties. Then there was the tragedy of Ebola, the oil price crash, the devaluation of the Naira, the uncertainty over and delay of the February elections – one thing after another, and all outside of the industry's control. So for hotel managers and owners, it is a welcome fact that there is no further supply entering the market of any consequence this year – they just don't need any more rooms just now, thanks.

Next year could see the opening of two new brands, at least new to West Africa, and that's the Ramada Plaza in Lekki, and the African Pride in Ikeja. There's a rumour that the latter might be launched as a Renaissance (another Marriott brand), but I wonder what the existing hotel of that name will say to that! Accor opened an Ibis-branded hotel right next door to one called Ibis Royale, and a right royal(e) dispute ensued, with neither one budging. Watch this space.

Marriott will be making further waves in 2017 and 2018, with two more properties opening, the 251-room Marriott in Ikeja (that'll be their 5<sup>th</sup> hotel in northern Lagos!) and the Marriott Victoria Island, their 6<sup>th</sup> in the city as a whole. Funny really, because only a couple of years, Marriott had nothing in sub-Saharan Africa at all, yet in two or three years' time they could be dominating the scene here in Lagos, partly riding on the back of Protea, which they purchased last year, and partly because they are finally, after years of trying, gaining traction in their own right.



What else? Hilton, Le Meridien, Hyatt, Four Points, Fairmont and Best Western all have signed deals for new hotels under their brands opening – well, opening one day. We're still not very good in this town at opening hotels on time, with delays measure sometimes in years. Talking of which, the Radisson Blu remains closed since January. Some say for renovations, some because of labour problems, but whichever is the case, it seems ironic that a hotel which took so long to build (7+ years) has had to close only a short time after opening!

Elsewhere in Nigeria, the capital Abuja has been the focus of much investigative and planning activity, but there are still only two internationally-branded hotels und construction, the 126-apartments Fraser Suites (a long-stay brand) and the 219-room Hilton Garden Inn, the first hotel at the airport, reflecting the growth in the number of domestic and international flights there.

And in Port Harcourt, Nigeria's oil capital, Radisson Blu are on site with a 200-room hotel, and Hilton are due to start constructing their 270-room property, with opening slated for 2018.

Elsewhere in Nigeria, Starwood's Four Points brand will open shortly in Ikot Ekpene, an oil city in the east of the country, and the former Gateway Hotel in Abeokuta, in the south west, is in the final stages of a transformation into a Park Inn by Radisson. Onitsha, in Anambra State, just across the famous bridge from Asaba, will also welcome a Park Inn next year. And whilst in the region, Asaba, the capital of Delta State will see the opening of the Best Western Plus hotel in August, with another Best Western in Warri, also in Delta State, later in the year.

Phew! And just to think that 10 years ago there were fewer than 10 branded hotels in the entire country!

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