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# An Eye on West Africa

It's that time of year again, when we look at what the international and regional (African) chains have been doing in terms of signing deals for new hotels up and down the continent.

Our 'Pipeline' report has just been published, showing a total pipeline of 401 new hotels due to open between 2019 and 2026, with just over 75,000 rooms. Of those, 110 deals were signed in 2018 and the first couple of months of 2019, accounting for 18,651 rooms.

Here in West Africa, signing activity was a little subdued, amounting to 25 deals with 4,100 rooms. That's less than 25% of the total, whilst the actual pipeline of all deals, signed over several years, is 29% of all Africa. I guess that's partly due to lower activity in Nigeria, the giant of the region; whilst the chains are as eager as ever to sign deals here, the investors have been feeling the pinch from the economic downturn (now over, we pray), and are less keen to dive into new ventures.

But there were several signings in Nigeria all the same. Perhaps not as much as in previous years, but still seven new deals with almost 1,000 rooms. Accorded with two hotels with between them 300 rooms, a Pullman and an MGallery, both in Lagos. Both are under construction, due to open in 2020 or 2021. Wyndham (Ramada), Continent, Swiss International, Radisson and Hilton each signed one deal, mostly (as usual) in Lagos and Abuja. In Ghana, Accord signed a second Pullman in Accra's Airport City, which will have extended-stay units under the Pullman Living brand.

Elsewhere, there was quite a lot of activity in Francophone West Africa, led by Mangalis, particularly with its Yaas economy brand. The first Yaas is already open in Dakar, and it's coming to Abidjan, where it's already operating with its Seen brand, and with a Noom hotel under construction. With Yaas, Mangalis is pursuing a segment that has huge opportunities, offering a purpose-built, value-for-money product to the increasing number of regional and domestic travellers in West Africa. Mangalis aims to have 47 hotels operating and under development in its three brands by 2021.

Radisson was also active in Francophone Africa in 2018, with all but one of its five West African deals in the bloc, the other in Lagos. Radisson is taking on the Camayenne Hotel in Conakry to rebrand it as a Radisson Blu, and has also signed the first Radisson Red in West Africa, in Abidjan. Another Radisson Blu is in Niamey, the capital of Niger, and

a Radisson Hotel and Residences is on the cards for Abidjan, which will give the group a major presence in Côte d'Ivoire's commercial capital.

Deals are deals, but what of the actual openings of hotels?

Mangalis is at it again, with three Noom-branded hotels due to open this year, in Niamey, Cotonou and Abidjan. Niamey seems to be getting a lot of attention right now, with Hilton, Azalaï and others also planning to enter that market. Melia have three resorts opening in Cape Verde, two in Santiago and one in Sao Vicente.

Accra is due to see the return of Protea when the Yamusah Group opens its 200-room hotel at Kotoka International Airport (KIA). With its sparkling new terminal, KIA is becoming quite a hub for the region, and the hotel offering there is expanding rapidly, with Holiday Inn, ibis Styles and Marriott all in Airport City, and close by the Best Western Premier, Golden Tulip and several others.

In downtown Accra the 220-unit Ascott 1 Oxford Street extended-stay hotel is due to open this year, Ascott's second property in the city, and part of a growing trend towards the development of long-stay accommodation.

And finally, back to Nigeria, where very little can be certain (!) to open this year – for sure the 79-room The Providence, which will be Mantis' third hotel in Nigeria, located in Ikeja GRA close to the international airport – the road to which, by the way, is increasingly chaotic. But the end is in sight for us long-suffering travellers, with sections of the road now complete, and work underway with a new energy, thank goodness! There are a couple of Swiss International properties slated to open in Abuja, as well as Continent's first two hotels in Africa (OK, say it, Continent's first on the continent!), in Warri and in Abuja, and a Best Western Plus hotel in Enugu.

As ever, it's slower than we would like, and slower than the need, but it's happening, and hotel by hotel the quality of Africa's hospitality industry is improving, to the benefit of all us who travel in and within the continent. ■

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