

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

## 500M Marriott guests' information hit by data breach

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*St. Regis San Francisco lobby. Image credit: St. Regis*

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By STAFF REPORTS

Hospitality group Marriott International is responding to a data breach affecting about 500 million guests' information.

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Hackers accessed information from Starwood's guest booking platform, including details such as names, addresses, phone numbers, passport numbers and credit card numbers. Following its discovery of the breach, Marriott says it is working to upgrade and phase out its Starwood systems, which have been hit before ([see story](#)).

### Data breach

On Sept. 8, Marriott's system was alerted to an attempt to access the Starwood guest reservation database in the United States. The company then enlisted security experts to conduct an investigation.

In November, the company found that there had been ongoing hacks dating back to 2014. During these unauthorized periods of access, information had been copied and encrypted.

After decrypting the data in question, Marriott found it related to the Starwood database.

The majority of the data taken on guests pertained to details such as names, mailing addresses, phone numbers, passport numbers, date of birth and gender. There was also information about Starwood Preferred Guest accounts and reservations taken.

Some of the 327 million consumers who had the aforementioned data taken also had their credit card numbers and expiration dates stolen. While Starwood encrypted the payment details, Marriott is unsure as of press time whether the hackers were able to take the components from the system needed to de-encrypt the card details.



*Some customers' credit card data was stolen. Image credit: American Express*

Remaining guests had information such as their names, addresses and email addresses taken.

The breach impacts stays made on or before Sept. 10. The company has alerted law enforcement, as well as regulatory authorities.

Marriott is alerting consumers who were affected by the breach via email on a rolling basis.

The company has also set up a dedicated Web site and call center for the breach, and is providing affected guests with complimentary enrollment in WebWatcher for a year, allowing them to monitor if their data is being shared.

"We deeply regret this incident happened," said Arne Sorenson, president and CEO of Marriott International, in a statement.

"We fell short of what our guests deserve and what we expect of ourselves," he said. "We are doing everything we can to support our guests, and using lessons learned to be better moving forward.

"Today, Marriott is reaffirming our commitment to our guests around the world. We are working hard to ensure our guests have answers to questions about their personal information, with a dedicated website and call center.

"We will also continue to support the efforts of law enforcement and to work with leading security experts to improve. Finally, we are devoting the resources necessary to phase out Starwood systems and accelerate the ongoing security enhancements to our network."

Marriott is not the only hotel chain to be hit by hackers.

Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group similarly revealed a data breach in its credit processing in which hackers stole consumer card information.

According to a statement from the company, it found and eliminated malware from an "isolated" number of hotels in Europe and the United States. Leaks in payment security may cause concern for consumers, but taking direct action and retaining open communication about measures can help a brand regain trust ([see story](#)).

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