

MOBILE

## Starwood expands Android mobile app to Chinese consumers

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By JOE MCCARTHY

Starwood Hotels & Resorts is keeping up with the expansion of its Starwood Preferred Guest program in the brand's fastest-growing market by releasing an Android application for Chinese consumers.

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**Luxury Daily**

The app allows guests to better organize and coordinate their travel experience and is modified to reflect Chinese sensibilities. Ensuring that the brand's multichannel advances in China are properly adjusted to enable seamless experience will likely be essential for creating brand affinities.

"The guest is at the center of everything we do at Starwood and there is nothing more personal than a guest's device," said Clay Cowan, vice president of global digital for [Starwood Hotels and Resorts](#), Stamford, CT.

"We know the first step in giving our guests a really great experience is speaking the same language and that's why launching a Chinese version of our SPG app for Android was so important," he said.

"Additionally, Starwood's footprint and SPG growth in China is remarkable. As you can imagine SPG's growth in China is unparalleled with a new member joining SPG every 20

seconds."

Running on regular

Starwood chose to design an Android app because Chinese mobile phones predominantly run on the Android operating systems.

Members using the app have access to account information such as Starpoint balance, upcoming and past stays, as well as the ability to send a confirmation or other details to other members via text or email.



*SPG's Chinese Android app*

Throughout a stay, the app provides relevant travel information including directions, property dining options and other hotel amenities.

Integrated social media channels including Weibo allow users to virtually “check-in” to their stay, remain connected to family and friends and engage through SPG’s various

social media channels.

In addition to accounting for language requirements, the app strives to capture cultural differences relating to search formats, drop-down menus and rating scales.

The new SPG App for Android is now available for free download at Google Play. In China, the app is available at all major Chinese Android APP Stores.



### *Unveiling the SPG's Chinese Android app*

As part of the marketing effort, all Chinese properties will have near field communication-enabled collateral so guests will be able to download the application just by tapping their NFC-enabled phones on the collateral.

The company operates 121 hotels in China and has more than 100 properties being developed, making the country a crucial location for innovation.

Earlier this year, the company introduced an enhanced mobile Web experience available in eight languages. Additionally, the brand added Russian and Arabic to the 33 languages it supports across several channels including customer contact centers, independent property sites and branded Web sites.

"In the case of our Chinese app, we're going beyond language," Mr. Cowan said. "We've taken cultural differences and inclinations into account."

### *Catch the quarks*

Starwood has dedicated many resources to refining its mobile strategies.

For instance, the brand enabled its preferred guests to upload their member card to the Passbook application for the iPhone's iOS 6 for instant access to account information and reservations at all nine of its brands including the St. Regis and The Luxury Collection.

Passbook lets iPhone users who are Starwood Preferred Guest members add their cards to the platform and see account details such as Starpoints balance, year-to-date earned nights, customer service contacts and upcoming stay details ([see story](#)).

Similarly, Starwood updated its mobile application to create a seamless, guest-centric

experience for all nine of its brands, including St. Regis and The Luxury Collection.

SPG's app updates include content based on whether or not the user is planning, en route or already checked-in to a specific hotel. It is available for free in Apple's App Store for the iPhone, iPod Touch and iPad ([sees story](#)).

Staying in touch with technological advances goes hand-in-hand with appeasing guests.

"We're confident this new app will not only attract new guests to our Starwood properties, but will help meet the needs of our existing guests and SPG members by giving them a new way to learn about our properties, book efficiently and stay updated on their upcoming travel and SPG status," Mr. Cowan said.

Final Take

*Joe McCarthy, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York*

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