

COMMERCE

Starwood bolsters massive expansion efforts in 2014

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By JOE MCCARTHY

Starwood Hotels and Resorts opened 74 hotels across its nine hotel brands in 2013, with new luxury properties in Abu Dhabi, Greece, Thailand and Peru.

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Starwood claims to have doubled its luxury footprint in six years to a total of 160 properties and will continue this upward trend by adding 10 more luxury hotels in 2014. The collective effort of the company's nine hotel brands for global expansion dwarfs the efforts of contenders.

"With the largest luxury footprint in the world, Starwood gives guests the opportunity to experience our exceptional, authentic and memorable guest experiences around the globe," said Paul James, global brand leader of St. Regis, The Luxury Collection and W Hotels Worldwide, New York.

"Our strong international presence also allows us to attract new guests as travelers today are demanding new destinations and markets to discover, and in our position as having the largest high-end property portfolio outside of the United States we are able to meet this request," he said.

"For example, Chinese guests spending their holiday locally at The St. Regis Sanya Yalong

Bay Resort are now planning their family summer travel to the Gritti Palace in Venice and the St. Regis hotel in Florence, from the beach."

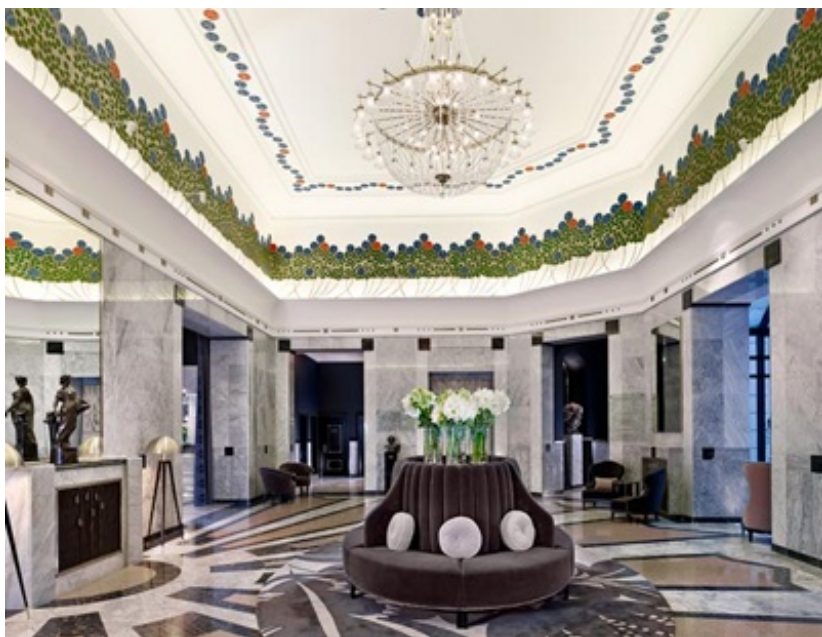
Many oars

In addition to its 74 opened properties in 2013, Starwood also signed 152 new hotel agreements and renewed 75 hotel contracts.



The Luxury Collection in Suzhou, China opening May 2015

Around 75 percent of the company's development projects and 60 percent of the 2013 signings were in fast-growing markets, according to a press release. The other 40 percent of signings occurred in developed nations, indicating that the company still sees untapped potential in places like North America and Europe.



Hotel Bristol in Warsaw, Poland

Although the company's overall acquisitions are formidable, Starwood had a much smaller expansion record among its luxury brands.

St. Regis added one new property in Abu Dhabi, marking the brand's third hotel in the

Middle East.



View from St. Regis in Abu Dhabi

The Luxury Collection gained locations in Greece, Thailand and Peru.

Six more properties between the two brands will emerge in 2014, covering the countries China, Lebanon and Turkey.



Hotel Bristol, Odessa Ukraine

Between St. Regis, The Luxury Collection and W Hotels, Starwood has a total of 160 operating properties, a number that has doubled in six years. Additionally, 90 percent of the luxury properties currently in development are in fast-growing markets.



The St. Regis Florence

Such a concerted focus on global ubiquity will likely make its many brands' names familiar around the world.

Bringing it all together

While Starwood can develop properties in every region of the world, it needs a cohesive digital presence to promote brand continuity and breed loyalists.

The company has made steps toward unifying its diffuse presence.

For instance, 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.

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 a seamless experience will likely be essential for creating brand affinities ([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 ([see story](#)).

Another dimension that will seal brand loyalty will be whether or not the company can deliver original experiences.

"Our guests, as well as a growing segment of travelers in emerging markets, are seeking above-and-beyond adventures in exciting new destinations," Mr. James said.

"More enriching experiences are preferred by the majority of discerning travelers, and Starwood's hotel brands are inimitably positioned to cater to the needs of its guests by continuing to thoughtfully build its portfolio in the most sought after destinations," he said.

"Starwood's luxury brands will continue to fuel growth in North America, Middle East and Asia, including several openings in China, which continues to be an important market for us to increase our presence in."

Final take

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