

→ Doubletree's London debut

THE opening of the 112-room Courthouse Doubletree hotel by Hilton, in central London, marks the brand's 200th property and paves the way for its further expansion beyond North America.

Previously the Courthouse Kempinski Hotel, it is now the third Doubletree property in the UK following openings in Cambridge and Aberdeen, and only the fifth in Europe. A further 20 are in the pipeline for the next few years in a mix of major and secondary cities across the country.

The next in line is the Hoole Hall Country Club in Chester which will open for business as a Doubletree hotel early this year, while the likes of Nottingham, Newcastle and Plymouth are believed to be potential future locations.

Around 40 per cent of guests at the up-scale hotels are independent business travellers, explained Dave Horton, senior vice president, brand management for Doubletree Hotels. "This hotel launch in the heart of one of the most prominent gateway cities highlights the potential to competitively integrate

our successful Doubletree by Hilton offering in the UK and around the world, enabling us to provide an extensive range and choice of premier accommodations to our



customers wherever they travel," said Horton.

Doubletree properties are differentiated from the Hilton brand partly by "size and scope in terms of the number of rooms and the capacity of meetings and events facilities," with Doubletree

properties typically smaller and located in secondary cities in addition to major destinations.

"We're very bullish about Doubletree expansion despite the

current economic climate," says Horton. "It's a fantastic conversion brand and independent hotels are looking for assistance to re-invest and re-brand – they need our brand, our technology and our distribution right now." www.doubletree.com

PARK INN HITS 21 IN THE UK

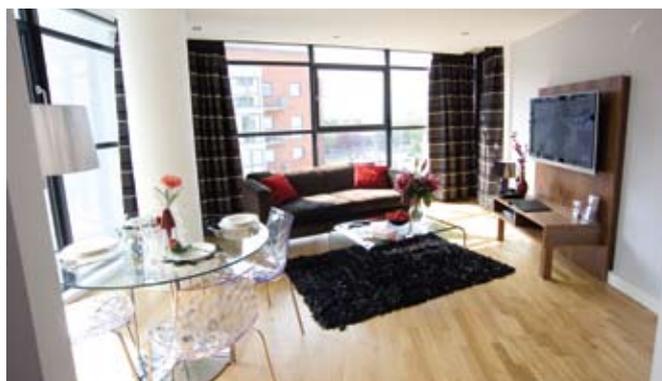
THE PARK Inn Belfast became the latest addition to the Rezidor Hotel Group's mid-market brand when it opened for business last month.

Located in the heart of the city's business and shopping district, the 145-room property features seven meeting and conference rooms, one of which has access to the hotel's roof terrace. The new-build hotel is also home to a fitness suite, sauna and steam room, plus an RBG Bar & Grill – Park Inn's signature restaurant, reflecting the brand's 'colourful approach to hospitality'.

It becomes the 21st Park Inn property in the UK. A further 12 are in the pipeline for the UK, including openings this year in Manchester, Rotherham and Southend.

www.parkinn.com

APARTMENTS SET TO RIDE THE STORM



THE SERVICED apartment sector is set to withstand the global slowdown thanks to the cost savings they offer over hotels – that's the prediction of Manchester-based serviced apartments company, Blue Rainbow Apartments, which has announced ambitious expansion plans.

The group specialises in the luxury end of the market and plans to open apartment hotels across the UK in Aberdeen, Bristol, Liverpool, Birmingham and London. It currently has one five-

star accredited property in Manchester with 82 apartments.

Says, managing director, Will Hannah, "Our Manchester property has been so successful we are actively looking to acquire other sites across the UK in order to meet our growth projections.

"The serviced apartment sector is set to withstand the current global economic slowdown with cost saving benefits compared to hotels and demand outstripping supply."

www.bluerainbowapartments.com

IN BRIEF

- **THE** Rezidor Hotel Group has opened the Radisson SAS Hotel, Durham – the company's first hotel in the north east of England and its 12th property in the UK. The hotel has 207 guest rooms and 11 meeting spaces with capacity for up to 600 conference delegates or 350 for a seated dinner.

- **PARK** Hyatt Shanghai has become the highest hotel in the world, opening on floors 79-93 of the 101-storey Shanghai World Financial Centre. The hotel combines contemporary style with traditional Chinese culture and offers 174 rooms, all with views over the Huangpu River and Pudong.

- **THE** Royal Garden Hotel, situated at the top of Kensington High Street in London, has launched some 38 new Garden rooms, with views over Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, and three suites. The rooms are part of an ongoing refurbishment programme which has also seen the opening of a Chinese restaurant, with further conference facilities due in 2010.

- **THE** Thistle Bloomsbury has opened 42 new deluxe and executive guest rooms and reverted to its original name, The Kingsley. Over £9.7million has been invested in a restoration programme at the property, returning it to its former Victorian splendour.

- **CAMPANILE** Hotels has unveiled a new concept for budget hotels in the UK. Showcased at the new £6million Campanile Hotel Northampton, the new look combines 'value designer-style accommodation' with food inspired by internationally acclaimed three Michelin-starred chef Pierre Gagnaire.

- **CHOICE** Hotels has opened five new hotels in Europe and will open a further three this month. Already open are the Comfort Hotel Florø, Comfort Hotel Trondheim and the Quality Spa & Resort Son, all in Norway; plus the Clarion Hotel Griso and Quality Hotel Michelino, both in Northern Italy. Choice opens properties this month in Sweden, Latvia and Norway.

- **THE** Starwood hotel group is forging ahead with expansion, most notably in India and China, with 101 hotels in the pipeline for the two countries over the next three years. Even Starwood's newest brand, Aloft, has made it to China. The scaled down version of its 'W' brand opened in Beijing last November. In India, Starwood has signed a joint venture with ITC and the first fruits of that agreement will be a Luxury Collection property opening in Bangalore this April.

→ Rotana sets out its stall



MIDDLE East hotel operator Rotana has announced plans to open ten new properties a year for the next four years, taking its portfolio to 66 hotels by 2012. The comprehensive expansion plans follow the signing of management agreements for properties in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Oman, Iraq and Qatar.

Says Rotana's ceo and president, Selim El Zyr, "This is part of our strategic aim to have a property located in every key city in the

Middle East and North Africa and this goal is being steadily achieved through careful long-term planning and timely action.

"The new properties will not only expand our portfolio in the United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Qatar, but will also introduce Rotana into new markets such as Cairo, Oman, Iraq and Saudi Arabia."

Properties on schedule to open in 2009 include the Hili Arjaan in Al Ain, the Boulevard Rotana in Amman, the Bahrain Rotana, the

Raouche Rotana in Beirut, the City Centre Rotana in Doha, the Fujairah Arjaan Rotana, the Centro Sharjah Airport Rotana and six new hotels in Abu Dhabi.

Said a Rotana statement: "The plan is right, the strategy is there. The execution and the know-how are there. Rotana is positive that as long as the company is able to manage growth in an efficient way, then there is the scope to take up further properties."

www.rotana.com



PETER DUNKIN
AVIATION ADVISOR

FOR 2009, I propose a New Year's resolution for airlines to 'be more responsible about pricing' and 'add value' back into the business.

Running an airline is a hugely expensive, high risk and complex business. Aircraft, fuel prices, airport charges and security costs are increasingly high and volatile, and airlines have enormous responsibility for safety and the environment.

Any high risk business requires high returns. And yet air transport is a poorly performing sector with pitiful margins. IATA reports that, over the last 60 years, the average profit margin has been only 0.3 of one per cent. In 2008 airlines were expected to lose \$5.2 billion, while 40,000 jobs and 30 airlines were lost.

Clearly the industry has to do things very differently now, and stick with those things when the good times return. It's about responsible growth, capacity, and pricing levels.

With high competition and over-capacity, the market is often blamed for crazy prices. But the airline industry should take responsibility for allowing its product to be considered a cheap commodity. 'No frills' carriers clearly position themselves as cheap, but is it responsible to advertise fares, albeit loss leaders, as low as £5, or even one pence? I think not.

Full service carriers should be less concerned about no frills carriers' pricing, and instead promote the many extra benefits they offer as part of their own standard product.

The industry sets and generally achieves very high standards, and it's not uncommon for an airline to introduce a brand new aircraft and charge the same fares for the service – some quality Middle East carriers are at times highly under-priced.

The industry has taken massive costs out of the business – IATA members have cut non-fuel costs by 18 per cent since 2001 – but are airlines cutting the right costs? Good people and professional sales and marketing are an investment that adds value and a return to the business. Airlines need to regain confidence, and to change customer perceptions about the value of their services. 'Reassuringly expensive', once applied to a very good beer, might be even more appropriately applied to a quality airline.

NEW OPENINGS FOR CROWNE

THE CROWNE Plaza Group has opened three new hotels in Europe – in the north of England, Ireland and France.

In the UK, the Crowne Plaza Manchester City Centre has opened with 228 guest rooms and 24 Club rooms. Victoria and Piccadilly Stations are both within a short walk of the ultra-modern hotel.

New in Dublin, The Crowne Plaza Blanchardstown becomes the group's second property in the Irish capital. It offers 188 bedrooms and 13 meeting rooms and is located just off the N3 and minutes from the M50 motorway.

Finally, in France, the group's latest addition is the Crowne Plaza Paris-Champs Elysees which opened on Avenue Marceau to offer 54 guest rooms and two suites, plus a business centre.

www.crowneplaza.com

WORLDHOTELS' INCENTIVES TO SELL

CONSCIOUS of current economic woes, Worldhotels – which claims to be the longest established Europe-based global group for independent hotels and regional hotel brands – is introducing a number of initiatives to drive business in the coming months.

The initiatives were announced by newly-appointed vice president, Robert Hornman who was formerly with Accor Hotels.

"We're launching our Global Corporate Select Programme, an ambitious initiative on corporate dynamic pricing. Many global corporate companies are facing a number of challenges and we plan to help by offering a Best Available Rate less five per cent, and will guarantee that there's no better rate in the market. This enables the travel manager to be in charge of expenses. Worldhotels, rather than the individual hotels, will pay the incentive," he said.

"For the MICE market we are incentivising agencies and corporate meetings planners to produce business over the next five months. For every 5,000 euros of



business, we will pay 50 euros in iTunes or Amazon vouchers, payable to the agency or the individual. We're also doing a draw once a month for a weekend for two, including flights, in a Worldhotel in each region."

Worldhotels has 100,000 rooms in 500 affiliate hotels across 70 countries worldwide, with 41 hotel additions during last year. The company's goal is to have 650 hotels by 2010, all of which will comply with the company's policy of having only independent and small group hotels.

www.worldhotels.com

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