

Rezidor focuses on emerging markets in Radisson expansion

By Jeri Clausing

Rezidor bills itself as one of the world's fastest-growing hotel companies. And while there might not be hard science to back that up, there is certainly plenty of anecdotal evidence.

Even in these times, when new hotel deals seem to have changed from the norm to the exception, the company that operates Carlson's Radisson brand in Europe, the Middle East and Africa keeps plugging along. In just the last month Rezidor has announced new hotels in Russia, Mozambique, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and Oman, to name a few.

And the expansion shows no signs of letting up, global recession or not.

"We have seen explosive growth in signings in the last 18 months," said Puneet Chhatwal, Rezidor's senior vice president and chief development officer. "We signed 54 hotels last year and 19 by the end of [June]."

In addition, he said, the com-

pany had opened 47 hotels over the last 18 months.

A key part of Rezidor's strategy to keep growing in the downtime has been a focus on emerging markets, Chhatwal said.

"Rezidor was the first one, with the Radisson brand, to go to the Baltics and Eastern Europe — and very aggressively. We are very strong in Russia, CIS [the Commonwealth of Independent States, which comprises former Soviet republics] and Africa. Today we have 30 hotels open or under development in Africa. In Russia and CIS we have 40 open or under development."

The company just announced plans for the Radisson Royal Hotel Moscow, which is scheduled to open in December following an extensive renovation. The property, originally named the Hotel Ukraina, was part of the legendary "Seven Sisters," Stalin's Soviet skyscrapers built in Soviet neoclassical style between 1949 and 1957. Leading Soviet architects studied

the engineering techniques used to erect New York's skyscrapers in developing the hotel, which, at 34 stories high, was the largest European hotel of its day.

In Africa, Rezidor's goal, Chhatwal said, is to open a Radisson in every capital city. After that, the company likes to follow with its midscale brand, Park Inn. Some of the deals, he said, have been aided by a Scandinavian government development fund. Rezidor, based in Brussels, used to be the hotel arm subsidiary of Scandinavian Airlines. The company has had a partnership with Carlson and its Radisson brand since the mid-1990s. It went public in 2006, and Carlson now owns more than 40% of its stock.

In addition to operating the Radisson and Park Inn brands, Rezidor recently launched a boutique luxury brand created with the Italian fashion house Missoni.

The first Hotel Missoni opened

in Edinburgh, Scotland, last month, and a Missoni resort is being developed in Kuwait. Last month the company also announced plans for Hotel Missoni in Muscat, Oman, and Cape Town, South Africa.

The brand is also focusing on new Radisson Blu resorts, boutique hotels in major markets and renovations of airport hotels.

Recent and soon-to-be-completed projects include resorts in Cesme, Turkey; Dubrovnik, Croatia; and Tunisia; boutique hotels; and airport hotel renovations in Zurich and Hamburg, Germany.

"I think for a long time now Rezidor has claimed to be, in this part of the world, the fastest-growing hotel company, and nothing has changed with that," Chhatwal said. "One of the key differences has been our growth: from 29 hotels in 1995 to 370-plus today. None of that has happened by virtue of some merger or acquisition. ... It's been very much one hotel at a time."



Rezidor, operator of the Radisson brand in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, has opened 47 hotels in the last 18 months. Pictured, the recently opened Radisson Blu in Dubrovnik, Croatia.

