

'Two new Sheraton properties in Islamabad within two years,' Area Manager, Pakistan and Tajikistan, Sheraton Hotels

OVERVIEW (November 30, 2012) : Antoine Joignant is the Area Manager Starwood Hotels & Resorts Pakistan and Tajikistan, along with being General Manager Sheraton Karachi Hotel. He has been heading operations in Pakistan for past 3 years, and has been instrumental in implementing the Sheraton Hotel's very discerning branded services at the property. The branded services include Link@Sheraton, allowing guests to interact while browsing the internet from the hotel lobby, the very exclusive Club Lounge, Sweet Sleeper Beds and Sheraton Fitness program powered by Core Performance. He is a certified Six Sigma Green Belt and a member of the Executive Committee American Business Council of Pakistan. "Two new Sheraton properties are under construction in Islamabad", revealed Antoine Joignant in a recent interview with BR Research. He elaborated that one site is located on the Islamabad-Murree road, called Sheraton Golf & Country Club; while the other overlooks the Rawal Lake in Islamabad. "The Sheraton Golf & Country Club shall be the most spectacular property in the country, as it has been designed by the same architects that designed the Atlantis in Dubai. This 367-room hotel shall include an 18-hole golf course with many other amenities for guests," he said. He also revealed that the Sheraton Islamabad shall be a 180-room hotel primarily catering to business travelers. To set up any Sheraton Hotel, the Company ties up with investors who develop properties in line with the Company's specifications. "Our business model necessitates long-term commitment between us and our partners, so the selection process is rigorous and comprehensive," said Antoine, adding that other potential partnership opportunities for other cities are being assessed in terms of long-term viability. Considering that security has become a major contention for the hotel industry in the country, the upcoming properties shall include maximum security measures as well as disaster management programmes without affecting the overall look of each hotel. He also informed that a new boundary wall will be erected on the periphery of Sheraton Karachi to beef-up security, while maintaining the "guest friendliness" of the property, in the near future.

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STARWOOD EXPERIENCE

The Sheraton Hotels brand is owned and operated by Starwood Hotels and Resorts which also owns other world renowned hotel chains such as Four Points, Westin, W, Le Meridien, Aloft, Elements, The Luxury Collection and St Regis. According to Antoine Joignant, being a part of the Starwood group provides an edge to the Sheraton Karachi over its competitors. One key differentiator is our ability to personalise our services and guest experience through various Starwood online tools which allow real-time tracking of maintenance work and guests' feedback. As is the norm at most hotels, guests would previously fill out survey cards at the end of a typical stay which would then be sent to be compiled by the relevant department. But the system in place at Starwood Hotels allows guests to offer their feedback online, which is then compiled automatically. "Now instead of receiving survey results at the end of the month like other hotels, we are receiving guest responses instantaneously. That is revolutionary as it gives us the ability to address clients' requests while they are still at our hotel, instead of waiting for

them to come back the next time," he explained. "We already have a programme in place for our most frequent clients, whom we call ambassadors, whereby a dedicated member of our team helps make arrangements for them according to their personal preferences, he said. The system not only sends clients' comments to hotel management in real-time; it also provides live scores for each location against the hotel chain's benchmarks allowing the hotel management to follow their relative performance. "Globally, we are the only hotel chain to have such a system in place, which is why our service is distinguishable from competitors", he summed up.

PAKISTAN: THE DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH

"Pakistan is a treasure trove of culture, natural beauty and mouth-watering cuisines for world travelers," says Antoine. A long list of attractions ranging from the pristine beaches of Karachi and Balochistan, awe-inspiring peaks of the Northern Areas, local art and handicrafts; to the historic sites of Moenjodaro and Harappa, rolled off his tongue like that of a well-traveled local. "It is very unfortunate that the image that has become attached with this beautiful country is set in violence and unrest," he said. He highlighted recent events such as the Grand Opera, Peshawari Night and food festivals that the hotel conducted to attract international travelers and locals alike; pledging grander functions in the future. He expressed hope that these attractions will play a part in countering negative international perceptions regarding Pakistan. Antoine Joignant also highlighted that the value for money which guests receive in Pakistan is much higher than that provided by hotels in other countries in the region. He admitted that the local hotel industry is facing tough times given the subdued flow of foreign tourists to the country, but he stressed that occupancy rates have been on the rise for Sheraton Karachi over the past three years.

"LIFE IS BETTER WHEN SHARED"

Antoine Joignant stressed that the hotel is cognisant of the community around it and is actively involved in addressing social issues afflicting the people. "Under our check-out for children programme, run in collaboration with Unicef, we charge a dollar to our guests' bills. This money goes towards building schools in under privileged communities in the country" he explained. In the aftermath of the 2010 floods, the Sheraton Hotel has rebuilt a village in Sindh, under the "give a brick, give a break" programme. The village has access to electricity and water. There is also a local community and learning centre for the villagers. "Money is not the only way to help the community around you," said Antoine while adding that the hotel's chefs regularly visit a school for deaf and mute children in Karachi to deliver cooking lessons. Similarly, the Hotel has also tied up with the Make-a-Wish Foundation to grant the simple wishes of children afflicted by terminal illnesses. "It is heart wrenching to find a child that is terminally ill and whose last wish is simply to have a good meal with their loved ones. It is a matter of great pride for us that these children want to share this experience with us and for that purpose, the Sheraton Karachi shall continue to grant their simple small wishes," summed up Antoine Joignant. All information and data used are from reliable source(s) and subjected to extensive research after diligent and reasonable efforts to determine the soundness of the source(s). This analysis is not for the benefit of or discredit to any person, scrip or tradable instrument. The content(s) of this analysis shall not be construed as an advice or recommendation to trade. No relationship of client will be created between Business Recorder and user of this information. Professional advice must be taken by the reader before making investment/trading decisions. BR disclaims any liability for investment(s) made or liability accrued on basis of this analysis. The content(s) including all opinion(s), statement(s) and information are subject to change without prior notice and/or intimation.

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