

# African tourism opportunities become more tangible

 By Leigh Andrews

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The Rezidor Hotel Group's Global Director of Sales and Marketing tells us about destination marketing, the first five-star hotel in Sierra Leone, and the challenges of marketing to/in Africa compared to the rest of the world...

World Travel Market® Africa or WTM, to those in the know, is the leading B2B exhibition for the inbound and outbound African travel and tourism markets. It kicks off today at the CTICC.



Radisson Blu Lusaka, Zambia

Yigit Sezgin, Global Director of Sales and Marketing of The Rezidor Hotel Group, will be attending WTM Africa and talking about the hotel group's newly developed trade offerings as well as the group's extensive expansion and development into Africa. This includes a Radisson Blu Hotel Libreville in Gabon and The Rezidor Hotel Group flagship hotel in Africa, the Radisson Blu Hotel Nairobi in Kenya.

I pinned Sezgin down for a sneak peek into what to expect...

## ■ 1. *Let's start off with a little more insight into your work life. Tell us about your role as Global Director of Sales and Marketing of The Rezidor Hotel Group.*

**Sezgin:** I have held a number of sales and marketing positions globally, including the UAE, Qatar, Turkey and Bahrain. I am responsible for Carlson Rezidor's portfolio of operating hotels and hotels under development in the Middle East, Africa and Turkey with vast knowledge of the regions. I'm in charge of area sales and marketing funds, supporting revenue generation-retention, brand launches and awareness, owner relationships, hotel developments, openings as well as the training and development of sales and marketing leaders and six global sales offices. I am also responsible for introducing the organisation's products to both new and existing markets.

## ■ 2. *What does it take to then effectively market a hotel group?*

**Sezgin:** The key element is understanding your guests - who they are, and what satisfies them. I believe that "people talk to people", so content management and communication are key marketing tools. Our aim is be leading in innovation and setting new trends in the industry. In EMEA, Carlson Rezidor offers four unique hotel brands across specific market segments, i.e. luxury, upper upscale, lifestyle and mid-market. The four brand keeps us competitive and allow us to cater to the varying needs, wants and desires of our guests.

### ■ 3. *Africa's clearly a pertinent region for growth at the moment. What are your intended outcomes for your talk at World Travel Market (WTM) Africa?*

**Sezgin:** Carlson Rezidor holds the largest hotel pipeline of hotels in Africa, operating Radisson Blu in the upper upscale segment and Park Inn by Radisson in the mid-market segment. With our flagship Radisson Blu Hotel Nairobi opening later in 2015, we believe that building strategic partnerships with local and international partners will be key as we aim to work together to advance business in Africa. During WTM Africa we will showcase our hotels in operation and under development in South Africa, Mozambique, Zambia, Ethiopia, Gabon and Kenya. Most recently, Carlson Rezidor opened three new hotels in Africa - the Park Inn by Radisson Newlands, Park Inn by Radisson Libreville and Radisson Blu Mammy Yoko Hotel in Freetown - the first five-star hotel in Sierra Leone.



Radisson Blu Lusaka, Zambia

### ■ 4. *Sounds like a stellar opportunity. Let's look at the downside of marketing to/in Africa compared to the rest of the world.*

**Sezgin:** One of the biggest challenges is changing the perception of Africa in the minds of people who do not live on the continent. Africa has so much to give to the world, and while doing business in Africa may be challenging in some respects, we find ourselves in a very fortunate position. Africa at the moment is hot property for investors, and with all this investment going on it gives way for infrastructural development including new hotels, and the development of tourism and attractions.

### ■ 5. *Well said. What does the concept of 'destination marketing' mean to you?*

**Sezgin:** Tourism is a key economic driver in most African countries and, with the tourism infrastructure in many of these countries still under development, it's important that the private sector factors destination marketing into its marketing strategy. For Carlson Rezidor, our brands are sometimes the first international hotel brand to enter a destination, so for us, we do our best to ensure that we not only promote our product but that we promote the destination in our ad campaigns, trade shows, partner marketing and loyalty programme, [Club Carlson](#), which has a global reach.

World Travel Market (WTM) Africa is taking place from today, 15 to 17 April in Cape Town - [click here](#) for more.

## ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh\_Andrews.

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