

Kuwait

INTERCONTINENTAL HOTELS GROUP HAS MAJOR PLANS FOR KUWAIT AS IT EXPANDS ITS PRESENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

New projects testify to the confidence global group IHG has in booming Kuwait as an international business destination and in its thriving corporate and leisure travel industry

Ask Hani Kafafi for the average check-in time at his hotel and he answers instantly, "I can tell you, it is 65 seconds. Some hotels' check-in time is about a minute, others' 78 seconds, but the average in the whole industry is four minutes."

Mr. Kafafi is General Manager of the five-star deluxe Crowne Plaza Hotel in Kuwait, and also Director of Operations Northern Gulf for the InterContinental Hotels Group. Checking in guests, he elaborates, is "just one simple process in the hotel industry," but it is attention to even the simple things that makes a great hotel.

"There are hotels that would not know what I am talking about. They still talk to their clients and try to sell them something at check-in time, no matter what the guest feels at the time. We realize that guests expect a fast and efficient process. If you are checking in after a 10-hour flight all you want to do is shower and relax."



Hani Kafafi, GM of the Crowne Plaza Hotel:
"The future belongs to the strong brands."

One of the largest multi-brand hotel operators in the Middle East, IHG has invested substantially in Kuwait in recent years, where, in addition to the Crowne Plaza, its portfolio includes two hotels under the Holiday Inn brand: Holiday Inn Kuwait, which was opened in 2005, and Holiday Inn Kuwait Downtown, opened last year.

One of the Middle East's most important business markets, where corporate and leisure demand for accommodation is rising fast, Kuwait has a significant need for more upscale hotel rooms. This makes it a prime target for the worldwide hotel group, whose plans for expanding its presence in the country are a testament to its confidence in Kuwait's future.

IHG's major upcoming development in Kuwait City is an iconic new InterContinental hotel, which will cater to the luxury travel sector with 200 rooms, including 20 suites, speciality restaurants, state-of-the-art meeting

facilities and a banquet hall with over 600 square meters of space. Due to open in 2009, the InterContinental will be the fourth IHG property in Kuwait, which will be followed by a second InterContinental Hotel set to open in 2010.

At the same time, IHG plans to introduce its extended-stay Staybridge Suites brand in Kuwait and other parts of the Middle East. Aimed chiefly at business travelers looking for more residential style accommodation, the brand is already well established in the U.S., where extended-stay is one of the fastest growing segments of the hospitality industry. The Kuwait property, for which Bu Khamseen Group Holding Co. is also the confirmed investor, will offer 150 rooms and is due to be completed by 2008.

Looking to the future from his office at the Crowne Plaza, Mr. Kafafi says the skyrocketing of oil prices has opened up huge potential for the hotels and hospitality industry in the region. "My feeling tells me that the oil prices will continue to be high, and there will be a surplus of funds in this part of the world," he says. "This will be good for Kuwait and good for investors in Kuwait."



Holiday Inn Kuwait Downtown



The Crowne Plaza Hotel, Kuwait

Together with oil and investment, Kuwait's expanding retail market will also benefit the industry. "There is a great deal of disposable income here. Kuwait will be known as a shopping destination. This will bring more people to the area."

The Crowne Plaza itself has been undergoing a major expansion, including a magnificent new Aqua Tonic spa, a new conference center and an 1,800 square-meter ballroom, boosting its facilities for weddings, functions, conferences, and product launches. There will also be 225 new guest rooms and suites.

Mr. Kafafi believes that it will be the established brands in the industry that will benefit the most. "I can see what the future looks like, and the future belongs to the strong branded products, to the strong organizations that are really dominating the business."

He says it is a matter of reputation and quality. "We have to be able to satisfy the demand and expectations of the experienced travelers that visit Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Qatar, or wherever. The hotel sector must develop, to be able to compete on the same footing." ■



Reception at the Holiday Inn Kuwait, part of IHG's portfolio in Kuwait, which also includes the Crowne Plaza and the Holiday Inn Downtown

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