

# Hilton wants bigger room for growth

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New Delhi, 21 June

American hospitality major Hilton, which has seen a couple of setbacks in its India expansion plans in the past decade, is now making room for a steady growth.

Its current portfolio of 17 hotels is small compared to most of its peers but the company is confident that more hotel owners will be keen to associate themselves with the Hilton brand, the second-biggest hotel chain globally after Marriott.

“Hilton did not go for the management contract approach that some other companies took in the past. Now, we see a great opportunity to accelerate our growth. We have a limited presence with just 17 hotels but the potential of India excites us and all the other hotel brands. We believe India will emerge as the third-biggest market for us after the US and China,” Navjit Ahluwalia, country head at Hilton India told *Business Standard*.

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projects that are in pipeline and for which contracts have been signed with the owners. “We want this number to be hundred. We want to expand at a much faster pace than we have been doing. But it will depend on different factors, some outside our control,” said Ahluwalia, who joined Hilton early this year after a 13-year stint with Marriott.

Hilton had stitched a marketing and co-branding partnership with Oberoi Hotels in 2003 but it was terminated in 2008, 10 years before the stipulated period. The American

firm then tied up with realty major DLF to build multiple hotels in India but it did not make much of a progress amid the 2008 slowdown and the two parted ways in 2011.

Hilton has an ongoing association with South Indian real estate majors such as Embassy and Prestige for hotels. The Embassy Group owns one Hilton-managed hotel in Bengaluru and is building two big hotels of 600 rooms each in the city.

Ahluwalia said the focus was to grow these partnerships for expansion in major cities

and leisure destinations. “We have an attractive opportunity for investors who are building hotels here. Our marketing and distribution infrastructure is identical with other leading brands though we currently work with lesser number of hotels. Owners can expect a greater focus and attention from us,” he said.

Hilton has a portfolio of around 14 brands globally but only five are now present in India. Ahluwalia said the company plans to bring its top luxury brand Waldorf Astoria to India besides two other brands — Tru and Curio. “We aim to launch these three brands here in next 12-18 months,” he said.

Besides, getting more management contracts from owners whose hotels are under development, Hilton said it would look at the opportunities where an existing owner wants to convert to another brand. “There are multiple conversion opportunities and we are working to convert some of them to Hilton,” said Ahluwalia. It had converted the Le Royal Meridien in Mumbai into a Hilton few years ago.