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Marriott's year is looking up
By Clodhna McGowan, clodhna@cfp.ky

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New manager is on board

New management at the Grand Cayman Marriott Beach Resort is optimistic about the hotel and the tourism industry in Cayman after a highly successful start to the year.

"This has been the best first quarter for this hotel in the past seven years," said new Marriott Beach Resort Managing Director Regidor.

Occupancy for this year so far has been averaging in the high 80 per cent at the hotel, said Mr. Regidor, who took his post at the beginning of this year.

Mr. Regidor, a 41-year-old from Argentina, was hotel manager at Marriotts in St. Kitts and Nevis and before that in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil.

Director of Sales and Marketing Carolina Voullième is also pleased with recent occupancy.

"This has been an amazing and historic season for us," she said.

Ms Voullième has been here for nine months and was specifically brought in for the transition of the Marriott franchise to a Marriott-managed hotel.

She has previously worked at Marriotts in Santiago in Chile and in Puerto Rico as director of sales.

Mr. Regidor, who has been in the tourism industry for 22 years, said his main goal with the Grand Cayman Marriott is to make it one of the best products on the island.

"We have a plan and over time we will make it; over the next couple of years," he said.

"I think this hotel has unbelievable potential. We have a lot of things to do, not only in the hotel but in the destination."

One of the areas he believes can be focused on is the incentives group travel market in Cayman.

"We have so many things to do, a lot of them are connected with water but the water is the treasure of the island."



Managing Director of the Grand Cayman Marriott Beach Resort Walter Regidor with Director of Sales and Marketing Carolina Voullième.
 Photo: Clodhna McGowan

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Community service from employees is another area that is important, he said.

"I think the success of the hotel is linked to the success of the destination," he commented. "If we make the destination successful we make the hotel successful."

He said more hotels can benefit Cayman.

"In the end if we have more hotels we have more airlift, and that would help everybody. If we have more competition the destination would be much better off," he said.

But, he said, care needs to be taken with development.

"I think the beauty of the island and the personality of the island has to be preserved."

Marriott has done its own bit to help enhance the marine environment. The artificial reef balls placed in the ocean just off the hotel's beach are there to protect and restore the reefs and ecosystem

Generally, 20 per cent of the hotel's clients are business travellers and the rest is a mix of leisure clients consisting of families and couples.

In fact, the resort receives quite a few couples, and Mr. Regidor believes that weddings are something that in the future would bring a lot of benefit for the country.

The new Cayman Airways New York route is something the he is pleased about.

"Actually we are trying to work as partners in this in trying to make it a success; we have launched a couple of promotions that we have funded to our Marriott Rewards database to 2 million people promoting Cayman Airways and also to our elite members; those that stay with us over 75 nights per year,. He said

Eighty per cent of visitors to the hotel are from America where recently imposed passport rules requiring Americans to hold valid passports to re-enter the US have been passed.

Mr. Regidor said the backlog in processing the passports in the US is affecting tourism here and in other destinations.

Group incentive travel is being challenged because groups are finding travel is being delayed while passports are processed. Ms Voulli me said that in some cases it is taking three months to get a passport.

Last year the Marriott launched an initiative whereby if a customer is visiting, say, the Grand Cayman Marriot Beach Resort, and Cayman is the first destination on the passport then the customer gets a \$100 credit for food and beverage.

"Marriott was prepared. We spent a whole year getting ready because we knew the changes were coming," Ms Voulli me said. "But, the problem is that it's taking too long in the US to get the passport."

In the past couple of years the hotel has sported a brand new look from a \$15 million renovation.

"They (guests) love the colours. They love the ideas of our decoration. It's very Caribbean," she said. "You feel like you're on an island and that's our intention because we don't just want to be a hotel in any place; we want to be the Marriott in Grand Cayman. We want to be part of the destination, part of the colours, and part of the experience in Grand Cayman."

Next year there will be more renovations in the lobby and restaurants.

Investing money in a property is an important element of its success, Mr. Regidor said.

The atmosphere involving lighting, music and staging of the hotel is also to be worked on.

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"I don't see any huge challenges," he said. "Sometimes you see challenges as opportunities and you reverse those challenges so you can make really good things.

"I found great people, great hospitality here," he said.

"The destination is in a phase that really can have amazing results if we work all together."

Mr. Regidor has worked in every single position possible in a hotel, from office boy to human resources and finance, and he also served as director of training for the company for the Caribbean and Latin America some time ago.

Ms Voulliéme said she is falling in love with Cayman.

"The destination is beautiful and it's an amazing challenge. I love the hotel. I think we have great opportunities.

"I love the idea also to work with so many different nationalities; it's part of the charm of Cayman."

She describes it as a very elegant and safe destination with a nice calibre of tourist and very friendly people.

What's important for the hotel is trying to give a truly Caymanian experience to guests, which the associates do their best to do every single day by brining elements of local culture into the quests' experience.



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