

SEEING DOUBLE: DUAL-BRANDED HOTELS ACROSS THE WORLD



The economy gets better and new hotels construction begins. Smith Travel Research reported that in the U.S. 18.5 percent more hotels are under construction, as of last April. As building perks up, hoteliers that once underwent great effort to differentiate the hotel branding are pushing their limits, if not entirely tossing the idea of 'separate brands' to the wayside. While this idea is not new, it is gaining steam across hotel brands.

Dual-branded, combination hotels are cropping up in major cities like Los Angeles, Atlanta, Austin, and New York City. Combination hotels share just about everything: back-office operations, front desks, meeting rooms, recreation facilities, and buildings. **They tend to pair an extended-stay style hotel, like Marriott Residence Inn, with a short-stay hotel more like the Marriott Courtyard Inn.**

The trend toward dual-branding is gaining steam as building and maintenance costs are growing. Marriott expects that 12 percent of all Residence Inn new construction will be combined with other related Marriott brands. Hilton has 15 dual-branded hotels in North America, with 15 more coming up in the next few years. According to Craig Mance, senior Vice President for development of North America with Hilton, this allows the hotels to offer larger pools, bigger fitness centers, and larger guest laundry mats in a more economical manner.

As with all new technologies, the dual-brand model does have some sticking points that potential guests need to be aware of. Each hotel brand has a separate entrance and, often, its own reception and check-in desk. Guests share meeting rooms and recreational areas, as well as room service for Homewood Suites, but they do not share room space. Homewood Suites offers free breakfast, while Hilton doesn't.

Marriott has also moved into the combination hotel business. They are building Residence Inn/Courtyard hotels in Los Angeles as well as Manhattan. The guests that stay at Marriott dual-branded hotels check in at the same front desk. After that point, all paths diverge to their respective hotels. Courtyard guests are located on lower floors, 1 through 33. The upper floors are for the Residence Inn clients, who require a longer stay. If a Residence Inn guest requires a lower floor, they will be forced to switch brands.

With both brands combining operations, some major hotel executives have begun to cross-train front desk and housekeeping staff; this is a risky strategy according to some executives. Guests even notice the combination of staff. Often, the housekeeping staff must shift schedules in order to accommodate a much larger work area.

As dual branding is becoming more popular, a point will be coming where these hotels need to decide how big they must be and exactly how much they need to share. Some hotel companies are not flinching to put more than two hotels together. White Lodging has created a triple-branded hotel, a Marriott Fairfield Inn and Suites/Aloft by Starwood/Hyatt Place hotel. This triple-branded hotel is located in the River North area of Chicago. They've even announced their intentions to add a Springhill Suites to an already existing dual-brand Courtyard/Residence Inn in Houston. It looks like this many-hotels-in-one are here to stay.

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