



AFRICA

Hotel Investment Forum

29 Sept - 1 Oct 2014
InterContinental, Nairobi

My name is Matthew Weihs, I'm the Managing Director of Bench Events – we are the Hosts and organisers of the African Hotel Investment Forum...

It is an honour to be asked by the UNWTO to come to Angola and have the opportunity to highlight the work we've been doing as Affiliate Members of the organisation. This is the first year cooperating as an Affiliate Member and already we have made great strides in achieving better communication between the public and private sector. It is clear that both our organisations share a similar direction and passion to supporting further investment into tourism across the continent...

For those of you who aren't familiar with Bench Events our core work is conferences and events for the investment community. However, I think it worth explaining what led to us adopting the name Bench. The reason is that, at inception, Bench's key service to the hotel industry was supplying data analysis of occupancy and revPar comparisons across the market that investors both used to help benchmark their current hotel assets and evaluate the value of new ones.

The benchmarking part of the business is now part of STR Global's services and this organisation is the Global benchmarking organisation for the industry. I urge everyone in this room to consider investigating implementing this across their hotel assets base –it gives investors clear indication of the value of entering a market... I'm very happy to make any introductions.... Bench Events, however, found its niche in producing the industry events and to this day continue to bring the hotel industry in touch with private equity, sovereign wealth funds, private wealth and real estate developers...

We have almost reached our 20 years anniversary for the events business in hotel investment– and, now, annually we bring together over 4000 people together that do the business deals that shape the industry. Our African event is our newest to our portfolio and the relationship with the UNWTO has proved to be of utmost importance to our clients.

Africa, as we are aware is the new frontier for business – it's awash with opportunities and new developments – which is creating new jobs, careers and bringing new wealth into many countries. Doing business in Africa the private sector relies heavily on strong public private partnerships. This isn't so surprising when you consider where Africa is today in its development. And it is our work with the UNWTO that allows us to, like today, encourage dialogue between the two parties to help break down some of the key barriers to entry – just like the discussions we are about to focus on over the course of the next couple of days.

Me standing here today is just a small part of that collaboration and I'm grateful to the UNWTO for inviting me here. Throughout the year, however, our organisations have worked together to help promote this message and, where possible, bring the decision makers together. After I finish we will hear more about the Investour meeting in Spain earlier this year. This was the first time, this important annual meeting for the UNWTO, was able to present a session on "investing in Africa's Hotel Infrastructure" within the proceedings. As we will be covering this particular meeting in more detail after this I won't go into that but I believe that such opportunities are crucial to promoting further dialogue between the Government and private sector.

One of the most significant pieces of work we've done together was hosting a closed door session for investors, operators and Government Leaders during our Africa Hotel Investment Forum in September of last year. This was the first meeting of its kind, led by the UNWTO and the WTTC, where we could have frank conversations around issues such as Air Connectivity, VISA facilitation and land ownership and it gave voice to the private sector to stress how such issues have an impact on tourism investment and development.

We have also been collaborating with the UNWTO to raise the profile of the poaching situation. The Africa Hotel Investment Forum is a strong supporter of work in this area as it is our belief that poaching, continuing down the path it is going, will have a detrimental impact on the value of the tourism economy. So I am excited to see that the UNWTO will be presenting a case of "zero tolerance" to the issue later.

We will continue to support the research and findings of the UNWTO in this space – and we continue to support the great work of the anti-poaching charities. In fact, later this year, a group of intrepid souls (this includes me!) are climbing Kilimanjaro to break the world record of the highest ever game of cricket (at 5785m!).

Of course, the issues that the UNWTO present here are highly complex and they won't go away overnight. Conversation must continue and action must be agreed upon. For this reason we are planning on repeating our closed door meeting at this year's AHIF event. I have a formal invitation for all the Ministers here to be my guest during this time. I would add that attending the conference as well as the meeting is a good chance for Government's to listen to the private sector and understand where you can make yourself competitive.

During the course of the next two days I hope to meet as many of you personally so I can present this letter to you and understand more about your countries needs for investment.... I also have a current pipeline report from W Hospitality that outlines the current hotel chain development across Africa and is a useful snapshot of where the current developments are and which brands are leading the way...

Secondly, a set of presentational slides that were released by STR Global solely for use at our AB meeting but, which I have gained special permission, to pass on to you today. These slides will give you some valuable data on global demand, revPar growth in the continent, occupancy data and some specific global comparisons.

Finally, of course, please pencil in September 29th – Oct 1st into your diaries to hear more at AHIF this year directly from the industry... thank you for listening - I look forward to working with you and seeing you in Nairobi.