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## 21/01/08 - Hilton chain to open hotel in Cape Verde

The Hilton international hotel chain will open its first resort in Cape Verde on the island of Sal. The hotel, which is slated to open in December 2010, will feature 268 rooms and suites, three restaurants, a swimming pool, a deluxe spa and business center with 14 top-of-the-line conference rooms. In the opinion of the president of corporation Vela Verde, which will build the hotel and signed a management contract with the Hilton group on January 9, this will be the country's "first truly 5-star hotel" and a "key that will open many doors" for tourism in Cape Verde.

Hilton, one of the best-known hotel chains in the world, was "convinced" by the archipelago's potentialities and hopes to be a "pioneer" in top-notch hotels in Cape Verde. "We're going to be the first 5-star hotel in Cape Verde, but according to Western standards, since all of the hotels here announce that they have five or six or seven stars, but this is bad in the long run," affirms Jacques Monnier, the president of the tourist promotion and real-estate corporation Vela Verde, which went through "18 months of hard work" to achieve its partnership with Hilton.

The contract was signed in Paris on January 9 between Monnier and Hilton group vice-president Deepack Seth, in the presence of Cape Verde's ambassador to France, José Duarte. The total monetary worth of the accord was not revealed. Minister of the Economy José Brito confirmed the conclusion of the deal, calling it "yet more proof that investments in quality tourism are making progress."

Monnier explains that the chain decided to move into the Cape Verdean market to fill a gap in the luxury hotel segment geared towards businesses. "I travel a lot and I know people, from lawyers to engineers, who ask me where I usually stay when I come to Cape Verde. And I really can't recommend anything. Normally, the hotels on Sal use the 'all included' system, and there are places like the Riu Funaná that function well, but I want more. Many people who visit Cape Verde want to be in an atmosphere that meets their expectations. The Hilton will not just be a hotel for tourists, but for businessmen as well."

Jean-Paul Herzog, the president of Hilton Hotels for the Middle East and Africa, declared, in a press release issued after the signing of the accord, that "expansion into Africa is a key strategy in the company's growth, as well as the identification of new destinations such as Cape Verde."

The enterprise, which will be located near the Hotel Djasal, in Santa Maria, will be the ninth Hilton in Africa. The chain has 2,900 hotel units throughout the world.

Jacques Monnier says that it was not easy to persuade the group to sign the contract, which, he says, is more than 100 pages long. "I felt like I was 'evangelizing' Cape Verde, forging a new path. At Hilton, at the beginning no one knew where the archipelago was located, what the country's political situation was like, what its climate was, if there were storms. And I had to sell the country. Later, the group's consultants came and carried out various market studies on a wide range of factors, from the environment to the political system, etc., and obtained very good results."

With the contract signed, the owner of Vela Verde says that now is when "the problems begin." "Now we have to begin building and the problems are going to start. It's not easy to build in this country, there are always delays, but we committed ourselves to opening the hotel in December 2010, and we're going to meet the deadlines," guarantees Monnier, who will be one of the hotel's owners, in partnership with other investors (whom he did not identify), when construction is finished. Construction work, estimated at 50 million euros, will begin in October of this year.

In addition to the hotel building, the French businessman is willing to finance other projects that would contribute toward improving the surrounding area, as well as the town of Santa Maria itself. "I don't want to build a ghetto for the rich. I want my guests to walk around the town, visit the beaches, walk on the streets," says the president of Vela Verde. Monnier believes that investment and tourism promotion agency Cabo Verde Investimentos should create a standard for the style of hotels that can be built in Santa Maria, as, he says, many of the existing resorts have a "decrepit" air, and the zone looks like a construction material storage site. "If the government asks me to contribute toward making a road in Santa Maria, I'll write the check there and then, because I think it's also our responsibility, that of tourism entrepreneurs, to be concerned with the future of the space around the hotels, with the environment, with what people who are going to come visit us once and may not return will think," he says.

In response to the affirmations on the part of the French businessman, Minister of the Economy, Growth and Competitiveness José Brito said that by 2010 Santa Maria will have some of its "current problems resolved." "The municipal chamber and the government are investing in the construction of roads. We've been hearing from the business community for a long time that they'll lend us their support, but then there's no follow-up. We're open to all contributions," said Brito.

Source: A Semana