

Adapting to the 'new normal' will remain a priority for the foreseeable future

 By [Robin Fredericks](#)

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As part of our #LockdownLessons series, Bizcommunity is reaching out to South Africa's top industry players to share their experience of the current Covid-19 crisis, how their organisations are navigating these unusual times, where the challenges and opportunities lie, and their industry outlook for the near future.



Tim Cordon

Here, we chat to Tim Cordon, Radisson Hotel Group's Senior Area Vice President for Africa and Middle East, to get his take.

■ ***What was the Radisson Hotel Group's initial response to the crisis/lockdown and has your personal experience of it been different to what you expected?***

With the pandemic and the resulting countrywide lockdowns and curfews across the globe, we've had to consider many factors from an operational perspective, including repurposing some of our hotels for essential service use, adapting new strategies and approaches to secure a strong reopening once tourism restarts, expanding hygiene, sanitation and precautionary measures, social distancing implementation,

■ ***Comment on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on your organisation or economy as a whole. How has it impacted investment and development?***

The tourism and hospitality industry has very evidently been impacted by the crisis, leading to the majority of hotels across the globe choosing to temporarily close due to low occupancy or governmental restrictions. However, for the hotels that remain open, it has been a great opportunity to learn to quickly adapt and be flexible to accommodate different kinds of business, outside of the norm.

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Even though the hotel industry has been severely impacted, we are determined to continue our expansion across the African continent and therefore are maintaining our target announced in 2018 – to open 130 properties by 2022, representing 23,000 rooms.

■ **Comment on the challenges and opportunities**

While the current situation has had a profound impact on daily operations, we are taking advantage of this time to refine various elements and procedures to ensure our teams and hotels are fully prepared to maximise their potential when the gates of travel reopen.

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There are many factors we've had to consider from an operational perspective, including repurposing some of our hotels for essential service use, adapting new strategies and approaches to secure a strong reopening once tourism restarts, expanding hygiene, sanitation and precautionary measures as well as social distancing implementation.

■ **How is your organisation responding to the crisis?**

One of our highest priorities at Radisson Hotel Group is the continued health, safety and security of our guests, team members, and business partners, which is why we recently launched the Radisson Hotels Safety Protocol, a new program of in-depth cleanliness and disinfection procedures, in partnership with SGS, the world's leading inspection, verification, testing and certification company.

These enhanced protocols, operational guidance and comprehensive health and safety procedures validated by SGS, will be adapted based on local requirements and recommendations, to ensure guests' safety and peace of mind from check-in to check-out. We will soon be announcing an extension to our brand commitment which includes 20 Steps and an additional 10-Step protocol for meetings and events.

■ **How has the lockdown affected your staff?**

I could not be prouder of our teams, from each and every team member in our hotels to our support offices and beyond – they have shown commendable agility and resilience and through it all, remain positive and optimistic.

■ **What measures has the Group put in place for its employees?**

It is important that hotels incorporate long-term, forward-thinking strategies that address how operational efficiency can be achieved when the impact of Covid-19 subsides. One example of a long-term strategy is the upskilling of team members.

We have extensively rolled out our Radisson Academy online training portal and educational courses. The Radisson Academy Online offers several self-paced online training courses and as well as virtual classrooms. We have expanded and adapted the training offering to ensure our employees have plenty of opportunities to grow and develop further.

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We recently launched special Virtual Masterclasses inviting guest speakers who facilitate interactive workshops around skills that are relevant to the current context. Team members can actively participate during the masterclasses through collaborative activities.

We conducted the first Radisson Academy Virtual focused on Innovation in Critical Times, with top speakers from London Business School. We have more coming soon on a weekly basis including topics like Navigate Crisis, Stop Planning – Start Preparing, Team Dynamics or Influencing. All this content is available for our team members no matter their working scheme.

■ What are you busy working on? Any initiatives/campaigns relating to the coronavirus?

Apart from the above-mentioned Radisson Hotels Safety Protocol which is currently being rolled out, we are also focused on assisting our communities as being a responsible business is part of our DNA. We are passionate about caring for others, and that extends beyond the walls of our hotels as we believe in positive and meaningful action.

Our team members have been supporting this philosophy, from individual hotels to our corporate offices via various initiatives relevant to the needs of our local communities, from blood donations and meal deliveries to donating cleaning products, masks and gloves for healthcare and other frontline workers. In different countries, we have seen extraordinary measures of kindness, compassion and dedication.

■ Has this global crisis changed your view of the future of the hospitality and hotel industry in any way? Any opportunities you think will emerge as a result?

The future of most industries, if not all, in the way they operate, will certainly be different as our priorities shift to focus more on expanded hygiene and distancing. Going forward, travellers around the globe will certainly be a lot more conscious and cautious regarding the various aspects of travel. Safety and security have always and will always remain a key factor for travellers.

Playing an equally significant and reassuring role will be sanitation and hygiene measures, which will need to be reinforced in our communication towards guests.

Moving forward, technology will be a key tool in the revival of travel, with electronic passports and IDs, boarding passes, medical screening, and robot cleaners being deployed. As we enter this new era of travel, we will all need to implement various methods to ensure travellers maintain their personal space, making them and others feel safe and at ease.

■ Any trends you've seen emerge as a result of the crisis?

Due to the various lockdown's and restrictions across the globe, we are naturally seeing an innovation spike related to businesses across sectors adapting their business models to a contactless approach and further advancement in delivery of goods and virtually reaching their target audiences.

■ Your key message to those in the hospitality and hotel sector during this time?

Covid-19 has brought out many positive attributes in people around the world. It has been uplifting to see communities come together in support of key workers and medical professionals, rallying around each other.



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We have seen this especially in the hospitality industry which has been one of the most affected, where we have been opening our doors to medical professionals who are working tirelessly on the front line, donating PPE to hospitals, ministries of health and local charities, donating food and complimentary meals and offering cleaning products and toiletries to healthcare workers.

My hope is that we don't forget this remarkable resilience, commitment, integrity, and unfailing 'Yes I Can' spirit and, most importantly, kindness and generosity towards the local communities where we operate and live.

▀ **What do you predict the next six months will be like?**

The good news is that our colleagues in Asia are already seeing positive results and changes within the hospitality sector as restrictions begin to ease. It is becoming clear that it will take some time for our hotels to resume back to "normal" operations.

However, the "new normal", will in the short-term focus on domestic demand with a completely revised sales and marketing strategy for 2020, that will give pride of place to the continent's customers. Expanded hygiene and sanitation, across sectors, within the workplace, public areas and our homes will certainly remain a priority for the foreseeable future.

ABOUT ROBIN FREDERICKS

Editor at Bizcommunity.

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