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Marriott CEO to join Obama in Cuba

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Arne Sorenson, CEO of Marriott International, will accompany Obama on March 20 when the president becomes the first leader of the USA to visit Cuba in almost a century. Sorenson is vice chair of Obama's Export Council.

His participation in the Obama trip was first reported by the Wall Street Journal and confirmed by Marriott.

"Arne is part of the Administration delegation traveling to Cuba," Marriott spokesman Thomas Mader said in an email to USA TODAY. "We are optimistic that we are going to get a green light soon from the US government to have hotels under the Marriott flag in Cuba."

The Journal reported that Marriott and Starwood Hotels and Resorts, which will soon become one company when they merge later this year, have applied with both the U.S. and Cuban governments to invest in businesses in Cuba. As of now, U.S. hotel companies and most other businesses are not allowed to do so.

"Starwood has applied for authorization from the U.S. Treasury Department to operate hotels in Cuba," Starwood spokeswoman Carrie Bloom said in an email. "We see many opportunities for the expansion of our brands into Cuba at this inflection point, and look forward to building long-term relationships and welcoming travelers into our hotels in this dynamic market."

Obama has resumed relations between the USA and Cuba, allowing U.S. citizens who fall under 12 approved categories to travel to the island nation. Recently, the USA and Cuba reached an agreement to resume commercial air travel between the two countries for the first time in more than 50 years. All the major U.S. airlines have applied for permission to fly to Cuba.

A few U.S. hotel executives have made the journey to Cuba to lobby for permission to invest there. Choice Hotels CEO Steve Joyce recently visited to meet with Cuban entrepreneurs.

Sorenson visited Cuba last summer.

“Hotel companies from Latin America and Europe have been doing business in Cuba for decades,” Sorenson wrote in a [blog item](#) after his trip. “With travel to Cuba now surging, existing Cuban hotels are full and hotel companies from other countries are racing to tie up as many of the new hotels as they can before the likes of Marriott and our U.S. competitors show up.”

Marriott is in the process of buying Starwood Hotels and Resorts. Once both boards of directors approve the sale on Mach 28, Marriott will have more than 1.1 million rooms and 31 brands.

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