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HD **Hotel groups eye off Aquis**
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INTERNATIONAL luxury hotel brands not yet seen in Australia are eyeing the proposed \$4.2 **billion** Aquis Great Barrier Reef Resort.

Among them are Banyan Tree and Jumeirah, while other names, such as Le Meridien, Westin, Hyatt and InterContinental, would be fresh faces in the Far North.

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Aquis is keeping its discussions with hotel groups under wraps, though it is understood there have not been any formal meetings or agreements reached.

Showing interest are believed to be the Starwood Hotels and Resorts Group (Sheraton, Le Meridien, Westin), Hyatt, the InterContinental Hotels Group, the Shangri-La Group and Accor (Sofitel, Novotel, Mercure).

Emerging Asian brands such as Angsana, Banyan Tree and Jumeirah - owner of the iconic Burj Al Arab - are also expected to be part of the process.

The brands also are not revealing their hands. Starwood's regional sales and marketing director Daniella Tonetto said at this stage she had no information on any hotel planned for the Aquis development.

Queensland Hotels Association Far North accommodation division chairman Nic O'Donnell said the association did not know which hotel groups had expressed interest in Aquis.

"The development, if approved, would provide wonderful benefits to the people of the Far North, not only in the hospitality sector but in many others," he said.

"The QHA absolutely supports the concept of the proposal put forward and we are very keen to see the outcome of the assessment in whatever shape or form it may be."

Several Singaporean hotel operators are showing interest not only in the Aquis project but in Australia in general and Queensland's Far North in particular.

Listed Singaporean operator Hotel Grand Central has finalised the **purchase** of the Novotel Palm Cove, north of Cairns, for \$10 **million**.

The transaction follows several Singapore-listed developers targeting Australia's property market with a focus on hotels and tourism. Singapore-based Banyan Tree is exploring opportunities. And earlier this year, Singapore-listed Far East Orchard finalised a \$450 **million** tie-up with the private Toga Group and will look to expand **operations** here.

Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts is negotiating to build a resort in the Margaret River food-and-wine region of Western Australia with a couple of investors, including local financiers, in tow.

The ambitious **company** has spent the past couple of years scouring Australia for a future Banyan Tree Hotel complex under its plan to transform itself from a boutique group to a global operation.

Much of its development focus is on **China**, where it operates nine Banyan Trees among the 29 global properties it runs. But Australia has been one of its key targets.

Apart from Margaret River, where Banyan Tree plans to build a resort of about 200 rooms and suites, it is also eyeing capital cities for further expansion, says its chief executive officer Abid Butt.

"We would love to be in Sydney, the **Gold** Coast, Melbourne, Brisbane, Canberra. We would love to be in all the key destinations," he said.

"Australia has a tremendous amount of potential.

"We would love to be in Australia. It's a fabulous place from a tourism perspective."

In the next couple of years, Banyan Tree plans to open up to 20 new properties, the majority in **China**, where it hopes to cash in on a booming middle classes.

Apart from **China**, Banyan Tree operates resorts in India, Mexico, the Middle East, Thailand and the Seychelles.

In Australia, it operates the Angsana Palm Cove at Palm Cove.

Jumeirah Group's hotels and resorts are among the most luxurious and innovative in the world and have won many international travel and tourism awards. The **company** was founded in 1997 with the aim of becoming a hospitality industry leader by establishing a top-flight portfolio of luxury hotels and resorts. In 2004 it became a member of Dubai Holding, a collection of leading Dubai-based businesses and projects, in line with a new phase of growth and development.

Its most famous property is the landmark \$730 **million** Burj Al Arab in Dubai - sometimes referred to as "the world's only seven-star hotel".

Its other properties are in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, the Maldives, Shanghai, Germany, Rome, Istanbul and London.

The group's expansion plans include projects in the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, **China**, Jordan, Qatar, Thailand, Egypt, Morocco, Indonesia, Azerbaijan and the Caribbean.

The \$10 **billion** Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide group is an American hotel and leisure **company** based in the state of Connecticut. It is one of the world's largest hotel companies, owning and/or operating 1169 properties under nine brands, including Sheraton, Le Meridien and Westin, employing more than 171,000 people, in 100 countries.

The group has 343 new hotels planned or under way throughout the world, although none in Australia at this stage.

The US-based Hyatt hotel conglomerate employs 45,000 people at 535 properties in 47 countries. It has five hotels in Australia but none in Queensland since businessman and politician Clive Palmer took over the Hyatt Coolom Resort.

The InterContinental Hotels Group, based in the UK, is the world's largest hotel **company** with 679,000 rooms at more than 4600 hotels in 100 countries.

Its brands include InterContinental, Candlewood Suites, Crowne Plaza, Even, Holiday Inn, Holiday Inn Express, Hotel Indigo, Hualuxe and Staybridge Suites.

Shangri-La has one hotel in the Far North, the Shangri-La at the Marina, and is a **Hong Kong**-based **company** with five-star properties in Asia, the Middle East, North America, Oceania and Europe.

Accor is the biggest hotel operator in Australia and the largest in the Far North, with more than 4000 hotels in more than 90 countries. It has more than 14 brands and there are 12 hotels with more than 700 staff in Cairns, Palm Cove and Port Douglas, including five Pullmans.

CO	hotinv : Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide Inc inhogr : InterContinental Hotels Group PLC
IN	i6651 : Hotels (except Casino)/Motels i66 : Hotels/Restaurants i665 : Lodgings ilea : Leisure/Arts/Hospitality itourm : Tourism
NS	gtour : Travel gcat : Political/General News glife : Living/Lifestyle
RE	austr : Australia dubai : Dubai apacz : Asia Pacific asiaz : Asia ausnz : Australia/Oceania gulfstz : Persian Gulf Region meastz : Middle East uae : United Arab Emirates wasiaz : Western Asia

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