

## **RISK FACTORS**

This section describes the principal risks that could materially affect the Group's business. The factors below should be considered in connection with any financial and forward-looking information in this Form 20-F and the cautionary note regarding forward-looking statements contained on pages 2 and 3.

Global economic conditions and particularly the economic outlook for the Eurozone remain uncertain. Accordingly, capital availability remains a challenge for current and potential hotel owners particularly in developed markets. This has put added pressure on existing and potential hotel owners, impacting on the current hotel estate and the delivery and growth of potential new hotels in the Group's pipeline. The geopolitical and civil unrest in the Middle East and Northern Africa remains and as the Group continues to grow its global footprint and expand in emerging markets, the Group may be increasingly exposed to safety and security incidents and major crises.

The risks below are not the only ones that the Group faces. Some risks are not yet known to the Group and some that the Group does not currently believe to be material could later turn out to be material. All of these risks could materially affect the Group's business operations, cash flow, financial condition, turnover, profits, liquidity and/or capital reserves.

### ***The Group is exposed to the risks of political and economic developments***

The Group is exposed to political, economic and financial market developments such as recession, inflation, availability of credit and currency fluctuations that could lower revenues and reduce income. A recession reduces leisure and business travel to and from affected countries and adversely affects room rates and/or occupancy levels and other income-generating activities. This may result in deterioration of results of operations and potentially reduce the value of properties in affected economies. The owners or potential owners of hotels franchised or managed by the Group face similar risks which could adversely impact the Group's ability to retain and secure franchise or management agreements. More specifically, the Group is highly exposed to the US market and, accordingly, is particularly susceptible to adverse changes in the US economy.

### ***The Group is exposed to the risk of events that adversely impact domestic or international travel***

The room rates and occupancy levels of the Group could be adversely impacted by events that reduce domestic or international travel, such as actual or threatened acts of terrorism or war, political or civil unrest, epidemics, travel-related accidents, travel-related industrial action, increased transportation and fuel costs and natural disasters, resulting in reduced worldwide travel or other local factors impacting individual hotels. A decrease in the demand for hotel rooms as a result of such events may have an adverse impact on the Group's operations and financial results. In addition, inadequate preparedness, contingency planning or recovery capability in relation to a major incident or crisis may prevent operational continuity and consequently impact the value of the brand or the reputation of the Group.

### ***The Group is exposed to the risks of the hotel industry supply and demand cycle***

The future operating results of the Group could be adversely affected by industry overcapacity (by number of rooms) and weak demand due, in part, to the cyclical nature of the hotel industry, or other differences between planning assumptions and actual operating conditions. Reductions in room rates and occupancy levels would adversely impact the results of Group operations.

### ***The Group is exposed to a variety of risks related to identifying, securing and retaining franchise and management agreements***

The Group's growth strategy depends on its success in identifying, securing and retaining franchise and management agreements. This is an inherent risk for the hotel industry and franchise business model. Competition with other hotel companies may generally reduce the number of suitable franchise, management and investment opportunities offered to the Group and increase the bargaining position of property owners seeking to become a franchisee or engage a manager. The terms of new franchise or management agreements may not be as favorable as current arrangements and the Group may not be able to renew existing arrangements on similarly favorable terms or at all.

There can also be no assurance that the Group will be able to identify, retain or add franchisees to the Group system or to secure management contracts. For example, the availability of suitable sites, market saturation, planning and other local regulations or the availability and affordability of finance may all restrict the supply of suitable hotel development opportunities under franchise or management agreements. In connection with entering into franchise or management agreements, the Group may be required to make investments in, or guarantee the obligations of, third parties or guarantee minimum income to third parties. There are also risks that significant franchisees or groups of franchisees may have interests that conflict, or are not aligned, with those of the Group including, for example, the unwillingness of franchisees to support brand improvement initiatives. This could result in franchisees exiting the system which would adversely impact overall system size.

In addition, changes in legislation or regulatory changes may be implemented that have the effect of favoring franchisees relative to brand owners.

***The Group is exposed to inherent risks in relation to changing technology and systems***

The Group is reliant upon certain technologies and systems (including IT systems) for the running of its business, particularly those which are highly integrated with business operational processes. Disruption to those technologies or systems could adversely affect the efficiency of the business, notwithstanding business continuity or disaster recovery processes. The Group may have to make substantial additional investments in new technologies or systems to remain competitive. Failing to keep pace with developments in technologies or systems may put the Group at a competitive disadvantage. The technologies or systems that the Group chooses may not be commercially successful or the technology or system strategy employed may not be sufficiently aligned with the needs of the business or responsive to changes in business strategy. As a result, the Group could lose customers, fail to attract new customers or incur substantial costs or face other losses.

***The Group is reliant on the reputation of its brands and the protection of its intellectual property rights***

Any event that materially damages the reputation of one or more of the Group's brands and/or fails to sustain the appeal of the Group's brands to its customers may have an adverse impact on the value of that brand and subsequent revenues from that brand or business.

In particular, where the Group is unable to enforce adherence to its safety or operating and quality standards, or the significant regulations applicable to hotel operations, pursuant to its franchise and management contracts, there may be further adverse impact upon brand reputation or customer perception and therefore the value of the Group's brands.

In addition, the value of the Group's brands is influenced by a number of other factors, some of which may be outside the Group's control, including commoditisation (whereby price and/or quality becomes relatively more important than brand identifications due, in part, to the increased prevalence of third-party intermediaries), consumer preference and perception, or other factors affecting consumers' willingness to purchase goods and services.

Given the importance of brand recognition to the Group's business, the Group has invested considerable resources in protecting its intellectual property, including registration of trademarks and domain names. However, the controls and laws are variable and subject to change. Any widespread infringement, misappropriation or weakening of the control environment could materially harm the value of the Group's brands and its ability to develop the business.

***The Group requires the right people, skills and capability to manage growth and change***

In order to remain competitive, the Group must employ the right people. This includes hiring and retaining highly skilled employees with particular expertise or leadership capability. The implementation of the Group's strategic business plans could be undermined by failure to build resilient corporate culture, recruit or retain key personnel, unexpected loss of key senior employees, failures in the Group's succession planning and incentive plans, or a failure to invest in the development of key skills.

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Some of the markets in which the Group operates are experiencing economic growth and the Group must compete against other companies inside and outside the hospitality industry for suitably qualified or experienced employees. Some emerging markets may not have the required local expertise to operate a hotel and may not be able to attract the right talent. Failure to attract and retain employees may threaten the success of the Group's operations in these markets. Additionally, unless skills are supported by a sufficient infrastructure to enable knowledge and skills to be passed on, the Group risks losing accumulated knowledge if key employees leave the Group.

### ***The Group is reliant upon its proprietary reservations system and is exposed to the risk of failures in the system and increased competition in reservations infrastructure***

The value of the Group's brands is partly derived from the ability to drive reservations through its proprietary HolidexPlus reservations system, a central repository of the Group's hotel room inventories linked electronically to multiple sales channels including the Group's own websites, call centers and hotels, third-party intermediaries and travel agents.

Lack of resilience and operational availability could lead to prolonged service disruption and may result in significant business interruption and subsequent impact on revenues. Lack of investment in these systems may also result in reduced ability to compete. Additionally, failure to maintain an appropriate technology strategy and select the right technology partners could erode the Group's long-term competitiveness.

### ***The Group is exposed to the risks related to information security***

The Group is increasingly dependent upon the availability, integrity and confidentiality of information including, but not limited to, guest and employee credit card, financial and personal data, business performance and financial reporting.

The reputation and performance of the Group may be adversely affected if it fails to maintain appropriate confidentiality of information and ensure relevant controls are in place to enable the release of information only through the appropriate channels in a timely and accurate manner.

### ***The Group is exposed to a variety of risks associated with its financial stability, ability to borrow and satisfy debt covenants***

While the strategy of the Group is to extend the hotel network through activities that do not involve significant amounts of its own capital, the Group does require capital to fund some development opportunities and to maintain and improve owned hotels. The Group is reliant upon having financial strength and access to borrowing facilities to meet these expected capital requirements. The majority of the Group's borrowing facilities are only available if the financial covenants in the facilities are complied with. Non-compliance with covenants could result in the lenders demanding repayment of the funds advanced. If the Group's financial performance does not meet market expectations, it may not be able to refinance existing facilities on terms considered favourable.

### ***The Group is required to comply with existing and changing regulations across numerous countries, territories and jurisdictions***

Governmental regulations affect countless aspects of our business ranging from corporate governance, health and safety, environmental, bribery and corruption, employment law and diversity, disability access, relationships, data privacy and information protection, financial, accounting and tax. Regulatory changes may require significant changes in the way the business operates and may inhibit the strategy including the markets we operate in, brand protection, and use or transmittal of customer data. If the Group fails to comply with existing or changing regulations, the Group may be subject to fines, prosecution, loss of licence to operate or reputation damage.