

ATQ: Eko Hotel & Suites is voted as the best Hotel in Nigeria today, how was that achieved?

A. Chatel: First of all please allow me to thank the Travellers Award committee for the great honour to select Eko Hotel & Suites as the best hotel in Nigeria for 2004. I would also like to thank all the international and local travellers that supported and voted for Eko Hotel & Suites. Since my arrival to Nigeria 18 months ago, there has been a lot of hard work that went into a concerted effort to establish the highest international standards for Eko Hotel & Suites. With the great support and continuous encouragement of our owning company Eko Hotels Limited and in particular its Managing Director Mr. Antoine Zammarieh, we were able to achieve the present state of the Hotel that is attracting the prestigious recognition of the Travellers' Award for best Hotel in Nigeria for 2004. We could not have achieved this without the excellent management team and staff that work with me.

ATQ: What are the specific management inputs that were made to effect this upgrade?

A. Chatel: When I first arrived, although the hotel was running good occupancy, I realised that we would need a lot of effort to come up to the international standards that we were supposed to have. I also realised that we would need to proceed with great care tackling one issue at a time. Following this strategy and with the continuous support of the owning company and the committed work of the management team we managed to be where we are today receiving this award.

ATQ: In the area of services what has been done to give top quality services to the guest?

A. Chatel: The most important element in hospitality business is employees. I am a great believer in the value of the human element of service and also in the value of continuous training and improvement of skills for all staff at all levels. To that effect we have implemented various programmes that were prepared by internal and external sources that helped us improve our staff's understanding of what is quality service, what the guests expect and how we can satisfy and exceed the guests' expectations. The programmes focus on both attitude and skill. This year we have already doubled the amount spent on training comparing to the budgeted amount. Myself and some of my department heads personally conducted extensive training programs that had a very positive impact on our staff's behaviour and consequently on the service provided.

ATQ: Recently in March 2004 Eko Hotel dispensed with the Le Meridien brand. Why?

A. Chatel: In the beginning of the year the owners asked me whether I would be prepared to manage the Hotel on their behalf as the five year agreement with Le Meridien was about to expire. I spoke with my team both expatriate and Nigerian and they all agreed to stay with me and manage this great Hotel. I received enough assurances from the owners about their commitment to the Hotel and to

our effort to make it the best in Nigeria and one of the best in Africa. So here we are, an international team with great aspirations, managing a great Hotel towards even higher achievements.

ATQ: Eko has had frequent brand changes –Holiday Inn to Meridien to Accor to Meridien and off again. What is responsible for this revolving door policy?

A. Chatel: Good potential hotels are always watched by international companies and often change from one brand to another at the end of the management contract. This happens all over the world. The different brands are just expressions of different management companies that during the course of the Hotel's history have served the purpose of assisting the owners of the Hotel each time to achieve their goals. This time again, several of the great international hotel management companies were ready to take over from Le Meridien and made some offers! The owner this time was very happy with the team they had and decided to keep them all!

ATQ: The new brand what does it signify? What does a guest expect? If Le Meridien is good service with a “French accent” what is the new face?

A. Chatel: I hope I have not lost my French accent!! Our new vision is **“Nesting International Standards with African Hospitality”** With the new brand Eko Hotel & Suites entered a new era; an era of accelerated growth and development. The significance of the new brand is multifaceted: Closer ties between management and owners; higher aspirations in achieving international standards that will be coupled with warm African hospitality values; faster response to the ever changing environment both in our immediate proximity but also globally. Ninety five per cent of our guests are booked through local companies in Nigeria and we want to be closer to them. We do not really need them to be booked through a central reservation office located in Hong Kong or Amsterdam!!! Our guests are going to be the great winners from these developments as they will receive ever improving facilities and services.

ATQ: Though Lagos is believed not to have many top level hotels, the future promises some competition. How do you plan to respond?

A. Chatel: This is actually the most important factor of all! Competition is needed and healthy! We are not afraid of competition and this is not due to arrogance. It is rather due to the fact that we have a plan that will help us to be always at the cutting edge of hospitality. We will actually welcome competition as we believe it to be a sign of health for the economy and the country as a whole. We will not wait until the competition comes before we respond. We respond now by upgrading our product, refurbishing our facilities, build new ones and constantly improve our services.

ATQ: Will Eko Hotel & Suites still be the best in Nigeria next year? How will you maintain and surpass standards?

A. Chatel: Eko Hotel & Suites will be even better next year!! We believe that the other hotels competing for the award will have to try twice as hard. I believe that we have not reached this point accidentally and our plan is to continue delivering excellence and hospitality of international standards. Change is part of our culture now and we are not afraid to go the extra step to be and remain ahead of our competition. With continuous commitment to excellence we will strive to provide facilities and services that will satisfy even the most demanding international traveller.

ATQ: Your WiFi (hotspots) is commendable but will you put computers in the rooms as done by Chelsea in Abuja?

A. Chatel: First of all I would like to say that all our rooms are equipped with direct Internet access. We are the first hotel in Nigeria to establish a WiFi network and our guests are already enjoying fast internet access without having to bother about cables or be restricted to a certain location. In the past we equipped around 15 rooms with computers, however, the demand for these rooms was minimal. We realised that the guests who need a computer on the go usually bring their own portable computers. All they require from us is the provision of fast and reliable access to the Internet. So all our rooms are now Internet ready and the WiFi network provides extra flexibility to our guests. We also have a very well equipped business centre where our guests can also access the Internet and do any other computer related work.

ATQ: What exactly were the facilities that were added or improved?

A. Chatel: As I told you earlier since my arrival and with the support of the owning company, the Hotel entered an era of accelerated development. The facilities that have been added and improved are too numerous so I will concentrate only on the most significant. The jewel in the crown is the development and opening of Eko Suites. A beautiful hotel that has been exquisitely crafted and appointed to achieve a degree of luxury to satisfy the senses of every guest from anywhere in the world. Spacious bedrooms lavishly furnished, stunning granite bathrooms, relaxed atmosphere and seamless service make Eko Suites the pinnacle of hospitality in this country. The existing programme of bedroom renovations was also accelerated so that the needs of our guests for comfort and relaxation are fully satisfied. Our Grand Ballroom underwent a major overhaul and after 12 months of refurbishment is now the ultimate venue for conferences and meetings in Lagos. Half a million Euro were invested this year in a new water treatment plant put in operation providing clean water for the whole Hotel. The Foods of Sun restaurant was fully refurbished and is now a beautiful gourmet restaurant complimented by the new Steakhouse at the Eko Suites. All air condition unit in each room is been replaced as well this year with an upgrade of the central unit. We have already mentioned the WiFi network as well as the internet access in all the rooms, the interactive and internet enabled Pay-TV system as few of the many facility additions and improvements.

ATQ: May we know a little bit about you, your favourite destination in Africa and in the world, your favourite dish including African dishes?

A. Chatel: I am an Hotelier and I never imagined that I would enjoy my life so much when I took up a waiter apprenticeship at the age of sixteen! I have since been working in twelve different countries all around the world and I am today very proud that Eko Hotel & Suites receive this prestigious award! A few of the countries I worked in are England, Dubai, Oman, Indonesia, Egypt, Senegal and most recently Tahiti in French Polynesia. Eleven years have been spent on the African continent and they are certainly some of the most interesting ones. Business wise, Lagos is definitely the best destination I worked in and I am convinced that it will even further improve with all the investment put in Eko Hotel & Suites. Having a Japanese wife, I have been converted to Japanese food but do like any good food from anywhere around the world. Pepper soups and good suya are among my favourite African dishes together with Senegalese Tiebou Dien and Chicken Yassa.