



HEN 25
HOTEL EXPO NIGERIA

WHY FOREIGN
PARTNERSHIPS
MATTER

IS BETTING ON
HOSPITALITY
A RISK?

THE POWER OF
STORYTELLING
IN HOSPITALITY

5 DECADES
OF HOSPITALITY

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NOURISHING GOODNESS



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Hotel Expo Nigeria, the Premier West African Exhibition, Sales, Networking, and Conference event for the hospitality and tourism industry is the go-to hub for industry stakeholders.

As we gather for the sixth edition, we do so with a clear vision: to Strategize, Connect, and Invest in the future of our industry. This year's event is dedicated to bridging the gap between policy and practice, encouraging stakeholders to explore new opportunities and forge meaningful partnerships. We believe that by coming together, sharing insights, and strategizing for the future, we can create a more resilient and thriving industry.

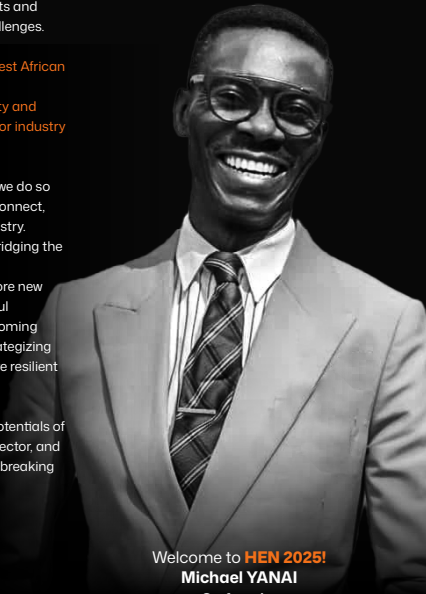
We remain optimistic about the potentials of Nigeria's hospitality and tourism sector, and to the world. There are no limits to breaking barriers.

“

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

~ Lao Tzu.

”



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Co-founder



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Panel Session 1 - Refreshed by Nestle Purelife X Malta Guinness X Nomba

**DESIGNING THE FUTURE OF GUEST EXPERIENCE:
MERGING TECHNOLOGY, PERSONALISATION AND HUMAN WARMTH.**

11:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Sampson Sunday Omogoye | HM EBONYLIFE PLACE - WHITE ORCHID HOTEL,
Vera Ohioma | CEO, GATEHUB,
Ntewak Umoh | HOSPITALITY BUSINESS & INVENTORY MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT/TRAINER.

BED MAKING COMPETITION

12:15 – 1:30 PM

PRODUCT DESIGN

2:00 PM – 2:10 PM

Panel Session 2 - Refreshed by Nestle Purelife X Malta Guinness X Nomba

**RISK, REWARD, AND REALITY:
IS HOSPITALITY STILL A SMART INVESTMENT?**

2:15 PM – 2:55 PM

Dami Adepoju | MARRIOTT SENIOR DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR,
JS Anand | FOUNDER & CEO, LEVA HOTELS,
Francis Ogosi | HOSPITALITY MANAGER, IKOGOSI WARM SPRINGS RESORT.

NETWORKING & B2B EXPERIENCE

THE NOMBA EXPERIENCE PRESENTATION

11:20 AM

CEOS TALK - Refreshed by Nestle Purelife X Malta Guinness X Nomba

11:40 AM - 12:40 PM

Uzo Oshogwe | CEO, TRANSCORP HOTELS PLC,
Adenike Macaulay | CHIEF CEO, WAKANOW,
Rasheeda Wumi Jurbril | CEO, THE SRS COLLECTION.

PRODUCT DESIGN

12:45 PM - 1:00 PM

BED-MAKING FINALE

1:00 PM - 1:50 PM

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HEA BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE WITH NOMBA

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FIVE DECADES, ONE LEGACY: CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF HOSPITALITY LEADERSHIP

Towering 6 feet tall, with a stern look that belies an underlying charisma—easily mistaken for that of a Western actor in a Hollywood blockbuster—stands a respected and bona fide hospitality expert who has cut his teeth in the service industry. It is no wonder we are dedicating our first personalized front cover event brochure to a teacher, a mentor, and an all-round jolly good fellow. – **Paul Kavanagh.**

The Shieling Hotel, as it was formerly known in Raheny, Dublin, will forever remain a pivotal start to his golden journey into the world of hospitality. In a social media post marking his 50th anniversary, he recalled his beginnings: *"It was my first hotel job. Little did I know at the time that all these years later I would still be working in the industry, and that today, September 10th, 2025, would mark my 50th anniversary!"*

Paul, who holds a First-Class BA degree from Middlesex University alongside other qualifications, is often referred to in Nigeria as the 'Oyinbo (White) Eagle'. His passion for hospitality has taken him across countries, time zones, work environments, and adventures—building hotels from the ground up and working with diverse people. While Dublin, his hometown, attracts nearly half of its tourists to the Guinness Storehouse, Paul chose to broaden his horizons, serving as General Manager for over 12 international hotel brands.

His journey spans African countries such as Ghana, South Africa, Egypt, Morocco, and Nigeria, where he has shared his wealth of knowledge, built thriving businesses, shaped future leaders, and distinguished himself as a multiple award-winning figure in the industry.

Reflecting on his career, Paul says: *"Today marks fifty years since my first hotel job. Half a century has taken me around the world, living a 'hotel life.' There have been highs, lows, pain, and so many amazing memories. Too many beautiful people to name—and some I would rather forget. Yet even after 50 years, every new day is another adventure and another opportunity to learn."*



Close associates in the industry affirm that behind his firm looks lies a soft, humorous, easygoing, and supportive man who pours himself out to ensure others succeed. In his 50th-anniversary post, he humbly shared: *"I have been awarded copious awards—119 in total. From GM of the Year to Hotel Personality awards and several technical ones. I even won one for how I look, and another for how I dance! I never took these things too seriously; they are nice, but they are not a career. The ones that touched me most were those for 'making a difference,' Social Impact awards, and training and teaching awards. Yet my greatest achievement, across five decades, is seeing awards won by others—11 people who once worked with me and are now GMs in their own right. Their successes have given me the greatest joy."*



THE OLD SHIELING HOTEL RAHENY, DUBLIN.

WHERE PAUL STARTED FROM



will set, and 'hotel life' will continue. The next guest will arrive as though nothing happened, and we will smile, laugh, and move forward."

We wish you the very best, Mr. Paul Kavanagh. You have touched more lives than you can ever imagine. Cheers to 50 years and still counting!!!

As Hotel Expo Nigeria marks its 6th edition, we proudly celebrate Mr. Paul Kavanagh for his continuous support and remarkable contributions to the hospitality industry in Nigeria and Africa, and for his instructive yet supportive role in shaping the next generation of professionals.

As a respected voice in the industry, Paul believes that the hospitality sector has the potential to grow far beyond its current state, attracting significant investment and positioning itself as one of the best globally, given Nigeria's population and size.

Paul concludes with wisdom: *"I will enjoy this moment, reflect, and embrace whatever adventure the day brings. Perhaps that is the greatest lesson I have learned. Good days, bad days, average days—they are all the same 24 hours. The sun will rise, the sun*

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THE POWER OF STORYTELLING IN HOSPITALITY: CREATING EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS.

I want to start by asking you to imagine the most tired and, possibly, unsmiling traveler that has ever stepped into your lobby? What did you think they felt in that instant? Well, ideally, they should have felt welcomed, understood, and at “home.”

This readily points to the fact that the way we weave our brand’s narrative around a guest’s stay can turn a routine check-in into a beautiful memory. In hospitality, the power of storytelling *“isn’t just in the telling; it’s in the connection, differentiation, and community it can build”*. When you become intentional about crafting a compelling narrative, you will turn your routine ordinary service into an experience that guests will remember and want to be part of again.

So, what do we mean by storytelling in a hotel? It is more than reciting some rehearsed, feel-good, corporate poetry about founding dates or listing amenities. As one industry guide explains, it’s about creating **a narrative that resonates with guests**. Every detail, you see, from the architecture and decor to the menus we serve and the way our team greets guests, becomes part of this larger story. When these stories are authentic, they give our brand a human face, and trust comes easily. When a guest begins to feel that the hotel “understands them and their needs,” their emotions take over, and your bottom line improves.

We also know from research and experience that emotional connections are key to driving business success. Emotions are primary drivers of decision-making. By forging emotional connections, a hotel can almost guarantee guest loyalty and expect repeat bookings, whilst transforming them into brand advocates. In practice, this means that when guests feel a genuine connection to your story, they don’t just spend a night; they come back, again and again. Loyal guests choose hotels based on how those hotels make them feel, not just on the amenities offered. Storytelling cultivates a sense of belonging that turns one-time visitors into lifelong fans.

Let me share how we apply this at Eko Hotels & Suites. Five years ago, we launched and trademarked our **Tropical Christmas Wonderland** as more than just a holiday party. We wanted it to be a story of family and culture. As I always explained in the beginning, this event was designed to literally keep people in Nigeria during the festive periods. It is no longer about having a weekend where families come in and check in and eat food. Eko Hotel has become a massive ecosystem where so many activities happen. In other words, we turned Christmas into a narrative of African celebration.

At a roundtable of tourism leaders, I once mentioned that a few years ago, we were inspired by a child's suggestion to deliberately shift the theme to African storytelling. We started choosing to tell African Christmas stories. We merged universal holiday themes with uniquely Nigerian folklore: musicians, dancers and even Santas in agbada. Our Tropical Christmas is not just an event; it is a story we are living each year.

But storytelling at Eko is not confined to the festive season. We have turned our hotel into a stage for creativity year-round. Throughout July 2025, we are hosting Broadway-style musicals and other heart-stopping theatre productions that will leave you breathless. These productions – *“The Jewel”* and *“The Return of Queen Fara”* allow us blend African literary classics with futurism. I bet that, just by hearing this right now, your imagination is already captured. Imagine what it then feels like to be in the moment of the live action. Simply indescribable!

I remember telling our guests who commended our storytelling through Theatre: “We are the new oil and gas. Performing and creative arts is the next level. Nothing is going to stop us.” We recorded an estimated 250 families coming from around the world to experience the Christmas events. What does this mean for the brand? By framing these cultural experiences as part of our brand's story, we offer guests something unforgettable.

You can also extend your storytelling through strategic partnerships. For example, we teamed up with Wakanow, Africa's leading travel agency, to handle ticketing for Tropical Christmas Wonderland. Wakanow's CEO described it as “not just a ticketing deal, it's a true partnership” for creating the best possible experience. By aligning with partners who share our vision, our story reaches travelers far beyond Lagos.

Consequently, everyone from local families to international visitors becomes part of the same narrative. Inside the hotel, our people bring the story to life. We train every team member to be a storyteller. Front-desk agents learn about small bits of interesting information to share with guests. Chefs talk about the cultural inspirations behind dishes. Housekeepers and drivers know the cultural significance of the art in our corridors.

As experts point out, “train employees to understand and communicate the brand's narrative effectively. Their interactions with guests are a critical touchpoint where the brand story can beshared”. At Eko Hotels, our staff are part of the story, too. Leadership also has a part to play in storytelling. Our MD once told the press that “we are not just a hotel; we are here to give back to the community.” For example, we have sponsored the ChessMasters youth tournament with the goal of developing future leaders. This wasn't because chess was the “in thing”; no, it was because education and empowerment are key themes of our story. When a hospitality organization backs an initiative that

impacts society positively, it signals to its stakeholders that its story is not just about lavish rooms, but also about showing guests that they are staying at a hotel with heart and vision.

In closing, storytelling in hospitality drives loyalty and growth. When guests leave happy, smiling, and fulfilled, they are telling you, "That was an incredible story," and they have become your ambassadors. As one branding expert notes, hotels that successfully use storytelling to create emotional connections often benefit from "increased brand loyalty." In our experience, guests are not only more likely to return, but they are also more likely to recommend the hotel to others. In other words, a guest who takes home a great story is a guest who will come back and bring new friends. Storytelling has transformed Eko from "just a place to stay" into a memorable experience that stands out in a crowded market. Thank you for letting me tell you stories today. I hope these examples inspire each of you to weave storytelling into your own hotels and forge those emotional connections that keep guests coming back. I look forward to your questions and to hearing the stories you are writing with your guests.

DR. IYADUNNI GBADEBO
(PHD, MSC, BA, ARPA)
DIRECTOR OF SALES
AND MARKETING,
EKO HOTELS & SUITES.



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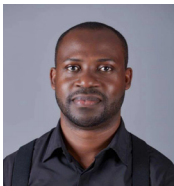
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PANEL SESSION 1

**DESIGNING THE FUTURE OF GUEST EXPERIENCE:
MERGING TECHNOLOGY, PERSONALISATION
AND HUMAN WARMTH.**



SAMPSON SUNDAY OMOGOYE
HOTEL MANAGER, EBONYLIFE PLACE –
WHITE ORCHID HOTEL.

Sampson is a highly accomplished and results-driven Hotel Manager with over 16 years of experience in the hospitality industry, specializing in boutique and luxury hotels. He has played a key role in the pre-opening and consulting of several boutique hotels across Nigeria, including The Art Hotel, Civic Centre Hotel, Chrome Hotel, and Adaline Lagos.

A graduate of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Sampson is known for his hands-on, interactive training approach, blending real-world industry insights with practical learning techniques. Throughout his career, Sampson has developed a proven track record in hotel pre-opening, operational management, and team leadership. Sampson is also highly skilled in the use of leading Property Management Systems (PMS), currently uses 7 PMS's including Opera, Biodux, HotelPlus, WinHMS etc. enabling him to manage hotel operations seamlessly and efficiently.



VERA OHIOMA
CEO, GATEHUB.

Vera Iremuah Sharon Ohioma is a tourism enthusiast, advisor and expert dedicated to growing the African Tourism industry sustainably. She is the founder of GATEHUB, a company based in Lagos, Nigeria. GATEHUB provides services in consultancy, advisory, project management, marketing, business development, coaching, writing and public speaking in the tourism and hospitality space. She has a proven track record of 18+ years of professional experience in leadership, management and marketing of tourism products and services, evolving as a vision board coach, helping entrepreneurs and companies to set SMART goals – she has worked successfully with 15+ clients.

She served as a mentor at the “GrowHer” mentorship program as a volunteer.

She is the lead initiator of project :Tourism Invest Africa (TIA) in collaboration with 2 experts, an initiative to leverage on AFCFTA to expand the tourism sector by connecting investment with sector opportunities, and showcasing investment-ready tourism businesses at trade fairs such as the intra-African trade fair (IATF) to network with global leaders, investors and sign deals.



NTEWAK UMOH
HOSPITALITY BUSINESS & INVENTORY
MANAGEMENT CONSULTANT/TRAINER.

Ntewak Umoh is a leading Hospitality Business & Inventory Management Consultant and Trainer with over 17 years of experience driving excellence in hotels and restaurants across Africa. She is the Founder of Hotel Emergency Room (Hotel ER), with her team, they deliver pre-opening, intervention, training, and turnaround services for hospitality businesses. She also

leads the Hospitality Inventory Collective as Founder & Convener, driving initiatives and training programs that equip storekeepers, cost controllers and inventory teams with practical skills in inventory management, food costing, pricing, and back-of-house operations. Renowned for her operational strategies, employee-focused programs, and passion for service culture, Ntewak is a trusted authority helping hospitality leaders achieve efficiency, profitability, and world-class standards.

PANEL SESSION 2

RISK, REWARD, AND REALITY: IS HOSPITALITY STILL A SMART INVESTMENT?



JS ANAND

FOUNDER & CEO, LEVA HOTELS.

JS Anand is a prominent leader in the hospitality sector, with over twenty years of experience showcasing his exceptional leadership and innovative spirit. After earning a diploma in hotel management, he developed his managerial expertise through various roles in esteemed hospitality organizations. His illustrious career is highlighted by multiple accolades, including being a

finalist for the Lifetime Achievement Awards 2023 by Hotel and Catering News M.E. and recognition as one of Dubai's Most Powerful Leaders by Arabian Business.

Anand's influence extends beyond the regional scene, earning him a spot on Forbes' Top 100 Hospitality Leaders lists for both 2023 and 2024. He has also been listed among the Power 50 - Most Influential Leaders by Hotelier Middle East and the Executive Power List 2023: The Most Influential Hotel Leaders in the Middle East. His leadership is characterized by hands-on management, integrity, transparency, and accountability. Under his guidance, LEVA Hotels is setting new benchmarks in excellence and innovation within the industry.



FRANCIS OGOSI
HOSPITALITY MANAGER,
IKOGOSI WARM SPRINGS RESORT.

Francis Ogosi is a leading figure in African hospitality with a legacy of excellence spanning more than two decades. As Hospitality Manager at Ikogosi Warm Springs Resort, he oversees the daily operations and service delivery of Nigeria's most iconic eco-tourism destination.

Francis is the founder of BlueByte Hospitality Ltd., established in 2009 to elevate hospitality operations and service standards across Nigeria and West Africa. He has managed and revitalized over 15 properties. A Fellow of the Institute of Hospitality (UK) and Tourism and Hospitality Consultants, Francis is known for combining strategic foresight with guest-first thinking to deliver hospitality assets that are both operationally sound and emotionally resonant.

At Ikogosi, his leadership plays a central role in service excellence, staff empowerment, and long-term guest satisfaction aligned with Glacient's mission to build sustainable, world-class hospitality brands in Africa.



DAMI ADEPOJU
MARRIOTT SENIOR
DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR.

Dami currently holds the role of Senior Director of Lodging Development, West Africa at Marriott International, leading the company's growth efforts in the region. Her previous experience includes hospitality advisory at W Hospitality Group, Lagos, where she supervised feasibility studies for new hotel, residential, commercial and mixed-use developments in over 25 African

markets. She also ventured into entrepreneurship establishing Hausse Hospitality, an African-owned and inspired boutique hospitality firm providing advisory and operational services in the hospitality industry.

Dami honed hotel acquisition skills with RLJ Lodging Trust, a US hotel REIT, where she was responsible for underwriting hotel acquisitions in domestic US markets. And has also gained hotel asset management experience whilst helping to oversee a portfolio of hotels across the Central and Eastern Europe region at Orco Property Group, Prague.

She began her professional career with staff accountant roles at Marriott International and Tishman Speyer Properties. Dami holds a B.Sc. Accounting degree from Hunter College of the City University of New York and an MBA in International Hospitality Management from ESSEC Business School, Paris.



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UZO OSHOGWE
CEO, TRANSCORP HILTON HOTELS.

Uzoamaka is the Managing Director/ CEO of Transcorp Hotels Plc. where she oversees the Company's strategic objectives through its subsidiaries; Transcorp Hilton Abuja, and its digital hospitality platform, Aura by Transcorp Hotels. Prior to joining Transcorp Hotels Plc, Uzoamaka was the MD/CEO of Afriland Properties Plc. She brings more than 30 years of professional

experience, having held leadership positions at the United Bank for Africa Plc and Accenture UK.

Uzoamaka holds a B.Sc. Degree in Chemistry from Ambrose Alli University, Edo State, an MSc in Information Systems Design from the University of Westminster, London and a professional certificate in Real Estate Management from Harvard Business School, USA. She is an RICS accredited Civil and Commercial Mediator and a Fellow of the Institute of Management Consultants. She is an Alumni of the Lagos Business School and IESE, Spain having attended the Advanced Management Programme (AMP) and Chief Executive Programme of the institutions.



ADENIKE MACAULAY **CHIEF CEO, WAKANOW.**

Adenike Macaulay is a transformational leader with over 16 years' experience in the Travel Industry and a unique expertise in leading multinational organizations through accelerated growth and profitability. Thought leader with a deep understanding of the Sub-Saharan Africa market environment as well as European and Middle Eastern business cultures.

She is currently the Chief Executive Officer of Wakanow.com, Africa's leading travel agency and travel technology firm. Prior to joining Wakanow, she was the first female and first African General Manager sales for Lufthansa Group in Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea. Recognized worldwide as a prominent voice of African travel and tourism as one of the Top 30 Tourism & Hospitality influencers in Africa by the PYNE awards, and as one of the 100 most powerful persons in Africa Hospitality by the International Hospitality Institute in 2022, amongst other awards.



RASHEEDAH WUMI JURBRIL **CEO, THE SRS COLLECTION.**

Rasheedah Jubril is a hospitality executive and wellness strategist known for her work in building luxury residences, spas, and lifestyle guest experiences in Nigeria. Over the past five years, she has played a pivotal leadership role at The Seattle Residences and Spa, helping to shape what is now the broader SRS Collection, a portfolio that includes Pier Harbour Residences and Spa,

Clayhall, two destination spas, and a waterfront restaurant, The GoodLife Restaurant. Her expertise spans hotel and brand launches, wellness programming, and curated long-stay experiences that blend calm luxury with intentional design. With almost a decade of experience at Starwood Hotels & Resorts, including regional business development roles within West Africa, Rasheedah brings a global mindset and deep strategic insight into guest engagement, partnerships, and property positioning.

She holds an MSc in International Business and continues to champion lifestyle-led hospitality across Africa through thoughtful storytelling, emotionally resonant spaces, and wellness-forward hospitality models.

BETTING ON HOSPITALITY

LEVERAGING DEMAND, DATA AND STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS
FOR PROFITABLE HOSPITALITY INVESTMENTS

by Bukola Benson

In a world where economic uncertainty often tempers investor enthusiasm, Nigeria's hospitality sector stands out as a paradox: high-risk, yet high-reward. For decades, the industry has been viewed with cautious optimism; an alluring bet that only the bold dare to place. But today, the odds are shifting. With strategic planning, data-driven decisions and collaborative investment, hospitality in Nigeria is no longer a gamble. It's a calculated move.

According to the 2025 Hotel Chain Development Pipelines in Africa Report by W Hospitality Group, Nigeria ranks third in Africa for hotel development, with 7,320 rooms across 48 hotels in the pipeline. This is not just statistics; It is a strong signal of investor confidence in Nigeria's underserved and untapped travel and tourism market.

Lagos alone, a city of over 20 million people, has fewer than 20 branded hotels. Compare that to Nairobi, with a population of 5 million and over 30 branded properties. The gap is glaring and the opportunity is immense; still budding when compared on the global stage, however the market it is fast maturing. Marriott leads the development race in Nigeria, with eight hotels and 1,228 rooms in progress. Other global brands like Radisson, Hilton and Accor are also expanding their footprints, betting on Nigeria's rising growing business travel and increasing demand for quality accommodation.



Radisson Blu Hotel, Abuja CBD, scheduled to open in 2026 featuring 104 rooms, a piano bar, an all-day dining restaurant, fitness and wellness facilities, and 245 square meters of meeting and event space

Source: hospitalitynet.org

Table 4: Hotel Chain Development Pipelines in Africa 2025
Top 10 Countries by Number of Rooms

	Hotels	Rooms	Average Size
1	Egypt	143	33,926
2	Morocco	58	8,579
3	Nigeria	48	7,320
4	Ethiopia	33	5,648
5	Cape Verde	16	5,365
6	Kenya	26	4,344
7	Tunisia	17	4,236
8	South Africa	28	4,026
9	Tanzania	29	3,452
10	Ghana	22	3,125
Total	420	80,351	191

Source: 2025 Hotel Chain Development Pipeline in Africa Report by W Hospitality Group

A Bumpy Road: Nothing good comes easy

This is particularly true when venturing into the hospitality or hotel development landscape in Nigeria. Undoubtedly the opportunities are there, so are the myriad of problems. The road to hospitality success is not without potholes. Infrastructure remains a major hurdle poor roads, unreliable power supply and limited public transport can deter both developers and guests. Regulatory bottlenecks, land acquisition issues and financing constraints further complicate the landscape.

Even among countries with robust pipelines, actualization rates remain low. Egypt, for instance, opened only 3 of its 12 scheduled hotels in 2024, according to the the 2025 Hotel Chain Development Pipelines in Africa report. Nigeria must learn from such patterns and prioritize execution over ambition.

Strategies for Success

- **Local Partnerships:** Collaborating with indigenous developers and operators ensures cultural alignment and smoother navigation of regulatory terrain.
- **Feasibility First:** Rigorous market studies and ROI modeling must precede any groundbreaking.
- **Brand Fit:** Not every city needs a luxury resort. Matching brand positioning with local demand is key.
- **Government Incentives:** Tax breaks, land grants, and infrastructure support can catalyze development.
- **Technology & Sustainability:** Smart hotels, green buildings, and digital guest experiences are no longer optional; they are expected.

Bukola Benson is the Managing Director of Guava Hospitality, a Hospitality/F&B Consultancy firm based in Lagos

Not every city
needs a luxury
resort. Matching
brand positioning
with local demand
is key.

Connect, Strategize, Invest: The Expo Advantage

Hotel Expo Nigeria 2025 is more than a showcase, it is a springboard; where ideas meet capital, where strategy meets execution and where stakeholders across the value chain developers, investors, architects, operators, and policymakers come together to shape the future.

As I keenly follow developments and comment on trends in the hospitality space, This year's expo theme, Connect, Strategize, Invest, couldn't be more apt. The Expo offers a rare chance to forge partnerships, share insights and commit to projects that will redefine Nigeria's hospitality landscape.

Betting Smart

Hospitality in Nigeria is not a blind bet. It is a smart wager backed by data, driven by demand and ripe for disruption. The pipeline is growing, the market is hungry and the time is now.

To those still sitting on the sidelines: the cards are on the table. Are you ready to play?



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Boosting Nigeria's Hospitality Sector through Foreign Partnerships

By Bidemi Ademola-Bello, SAN

I have had the privilege of seeing Nigeria's business landscape evolve across industries—from energy to professional services—and one truth is clear: sectors that embrace collaboration thrive. The hospitality sector, with its vast untapped potential, is no exception. Nigeria's cultural wealth, vibrant cities, and tourism assets make it an obvious growth market. But to truly unlock this potential, local businesses must look beyond our borders and embrace foreign partnerships, while government creates the enabling environment for growth.

Why Foreign Partnerships Matter

Foreign partnerships do more than inject capital; they reshape industries through perspective, networks, and credibility.

• Access to Global Networks:

Nigerian hospitality operators can leapfrog competitors by plugging into international distribution platforms and customer bases. For a hotel in Lagos or Calabar, affiliation with a global network immediately widens reach to international tourists.

• Technology Transfer: From booking

platforms to guest management systems, foreign players introduce operational efficiency. This transfer of know-how is invaluable in a sector that often struggles with consistency and service delivery.

• **Brand Enhancement:** Association with global names improves perception overnight. A local hotel under an international brand's umbrella often commands higher trust, loyalty, and even financing opportunities.

These dynamics mirror developments in other industries. In fashion, for example, runway events have consistently transformed local designers into global names by linking them with foreign buyers, investors, and media. Hospitality needs its equivalent "runways" to showcase Nigerian excellence to the world.

One of the most promising platforms is Hotel Expo Nigeria (HEN). Founded in 2019 by Joe Hanson with co-founders Michael Yanai and Toni-anne Uwaifo, HEN has grown rapidly in just six years. What began as a hospitality trade show has expanded into a cross-sectoral hub, attracting exhibitors from tourism, technology, finance, and manufacturing, with roughly a thousand participants per edition. Its value lies not just in exhibition but in knowledge-sharing, partnership building, and sector visibility. Hotel Expo is, in effect, Nigeria's hospitality runway.

Similarly, cultural festivals such as the Calabar Carnival—Africa's largest street party—and Lagos's traditional Eyo Festival (Adamu Orisha Play) generate massive economic activity. These festivals attract

foreign visitors, showcase Nigeria's cultural capital, and create multiplier effects for hotels, restaurants, and transport. Globally, parallels abound: New York Fashion Week, for instance, injects nearly \$900 million into the city's economy each season. Nigeria's hospitality expos and cultural festivals can achieve comparable impact if properly promoted and supported.

Policy Levers for Growth

For these initiatives to translate into sustained sectoral growth, government must provide targeted support. The policy agenda falls into three broad categories:

1. Regulatory Facilitation

- Streamline licensing and approvals for hospitality investors.

- Adopt international safety and quality benchmarks.

- Introduce event-linked visa fast tracks, allowing foreign delegates and tourists to secure entry within days.

2. Investment Incentives

- Provide tax waivers on expenses directly tied to events (venues, accommodation, imported equipment).

- Offer grants or low-interest loans to organizers of major expos and festivals, encouraging world-class production.

- Link incentives to measurable outcomes such as job creation, training, or foreign direct investment inflows.

3. Public-Private Platforms

- Institutionalize Hotel Expo Nigeria and similar initiatives as flagship industry-government partnerships.

- Collaborate on joint marketing campaigns ("Visit Nigeria") that spotlight both cultural festivals and hospitality expos.

- Invest in infrastructure upgrades—transport, security, and utilities—around event hubs to enhance visitor experience.

Comparative lessons are clear: South Africa's visa relaxations during the 2010 FIFA World Cup boosted tourist inflows, while Rwanda's simplified visa-on-arrival regime positioned it as Africa's top conference destination. Nigeria must replicate this pragmatism by tying temporary waivers and facilitation directly to its high-profile festivals and expos.

Conclusion

Nigeria's hospitality sector is sitting on untapped gold. Foreign partnerships are the spade that can dig it out, while government incentives and platforms like Hotel Expo Nigeria are the water that can make it grow. When cultural festivals double as tourism magnets, when expos serve as runways for our hotels and resorts, and when government policy lowers barriers to entry, the synergy becomes transformative. From my experience across Nigeria's corporate and regulatory landscape, the formula for success is consistent: collaboration, clear policy alignment, and global integration. The hospitality industry can and should be Nigeria's next big story not only for visitors but also for sustainable jobs, investment, and national economic diversification.

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