

Hilton checks in on Coast

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THE Hilton Hotels chain has secured pole position in central Surfers Paradise after signing up for the management rights to the Raptis Group's twin-tower Dolphin Arcade redevelopment.

The deal will be a first for the Australian market, with apartment owners in the \$700 million project able to access Hilton's 24-hour room service and all the trappings of hotel life from the privacy of their own homes.

The deal also cements [Jim Raptis's title as the Gold Coast's 'hotel king'](#) with the Hilton deal boosting his tourism strip portfolio to four luxury hotels.

Hilton has signed a management agreement for up to 20 years on the Dolphin Arcade property, its third hotel in Queensland alongside Brisbane and Cairns.

Robert Scullin, Hilton's vice-president of development for Australasia, said the company was comfortable pouring more resources into Queensland.

He said Hilton has had Surfers Paradise on its radar 'for quite some time now'.

"Queensland is absolutely growing. It seems to be kicking over at a great rate of knots, so for us it's a very important development market," said Mr Scullin.

He said the lack of hotel development on the Coast had stymied the world's most recognisable hotel chain from establishing a foothold here earlier.

The Hilton Surfers Paradise Hotel and Residences will comprise 170 hotel suites and 340 apartments in two towers -- one 32-levels and the other 57 levels -- spanning Surfers Paradise Boulevard and Orchid Avenue.

The first stage Boulevard Tower is due for completion in late 2009 and the Orchid Tower a year later.

Mr Raptis, who has taken a growing interest in the Gold Coast's luxury hotel market over the past few years, said Hilton was 'a very important brand' for the Gold Coast.

"The more international brands we have, the better for the city and for tourism," he said.

Mr Raptis said Surfers Paradise had seen a marked improvement in its image during the past five years, triggered by Raptis Group's Chevron Renaissance and Sunland's Circle on Cavill developments.

"(This project) will take Surfers Paradise to a new level," he said.

"This will add another dimension to where we are heading over the next five to 10 years."

The Raptis Group owns the Sheraton Mirage and the Holiday Inn Surfers Paradise, and has an interest in the Gold Coast International, pouring a combined \$260 million into purchasing the properties since 2005.

While Mr Raptis fends off the tag of Gold Coast hotel king, he said his company's investment in the sector was based on strong growth forecasts for the city's tourism market, in particular from China and India.

Mr Raptis said hotel construction had dried up on the Gold Coast since the golden era that began in the mid-1980s and stretched into the mid-90s.

"We haven't had new (hotels) for a long while and this is the beginning of the next 10-year phase (during) which I see most international brands coming to the Gold Coast," he said.

The last major hotel to be built in the city was the six-star Palazzo Versace at The Spit which was completed in June, 2000.

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