

First Haiti Hotel Destroyed by Earthquake Rebuilding

The Hotel Villa St. Louis was once a thriving business in Bourdon, Port-au-Prince, Haiti. For more than 30 years, the 60-room boutique hotel, a beloved family-run business in the Port-au-Prince community, served as a gathering place for locals and tourists alike, hosting leisure and business travelers, small groups, reunions and weddings.

But like many small businesses in the area, the hotel, along with the adjacent St. Louis family residence, was destroyed after collapsing in the earthquake of January 2010, and no insurance proceeds were available to rebuild this once flourishing business.

Because of the magnitude of the earthquake's destruction, Port-au-Prince lost more than 50 percent of its hotel room inventory, and the economic impact has been tremendous. Business meetings and conventions have been postponed or moved elsewhere due to the lack of accommodations in the area, resulting in a significant loss of potential income across all industries.

But there is hope.

A U.S.-based team of experienced hotel operators, designers and architects have come together to help the St. Louis family rebuild its cherished business, leading to hundreds of long-term job opportunities and, ultimately, a revived hospitality sector and economy for the once devastated community of Port-au-Prince.

New Beginnings

With an opening date set for early 2012, the new Hotel Villa St. Louis is positioned to be Port-au-Prince's first hotel to re-open its doors after being destroyed by the January 2010 earthquake. The new property will be reconstructed upon its original foundation on Avenida John Brown (Avenue Pan Americaine #101). Although the hotel originally consisted of 60 guestrooms and suites, the proposed new development calls for 78 guestrooms and suites, 22 extended stay studio suites and loft apartments, a state-of-the-art fitness center, a comprehensive business center and boutique retail space. Like the original Hotel Villa St. Louis, the new hotel will feature a full-sized restaurant and bar, ample banquet and meeting facilities and a spacious pool. Other modern upgrades will include energy efficient and water saving installations, renewable energy technologies and locally sourced building materials, furniture and décor.

"The new design takes into account Haiti's beautiful natural resources and surroundings and also pays tribute to the local culture," explained Daniel Adache, chairman of Adache Group Architects, the new hotel's design and architecture firm. "At the same time, we have fully modernized the plans for this hotel, utilizing new technologies to conserve two of our most precious resources: energy and time. For this project, urgency is key, as the community will greatly rely upon a quick reopening to speed up overall recovery."

A Beacon of Hope

The family looks forward to what this new development will bring to Port-au-Prince, in terms of its impact on both the local economy and the community's spirit. Their mission is to rebuild an even better hotel where past guests can come to reminisce while new generations can make their own memories and envision an even brighter future for Haiti.

As the first hotel to be fully rebuilt and reopened since the January 2010 earthquake, the new Hotel Villa St. Louis looks forward to serving as a leader for the local hospitality industry, providing full-time employment opportunities for many of the currently out-of-work hotel workers.

The immediate impact of job creation during the design and construction of the new Hotel Villa St. Louis will be significant, providing some 500 to 600 urgently needed employment opportunities. Local consultants, designers and labor workers will also be given preference. An estimated 100 opportunities for employment will be created by Haitian vendors, suppliers and professional service providers, who will support the construction of the project. Additional employment will be created indirectly by purchasing local building materials, artwork and crafts.

During its initial years of operation, the property will create 100 to 120 full-time permanent employment opportunities. Twenty percent of these roles will be management or supervisory positions. Another 30 part-time employment opportunities will also be available for servicing banquets, meetings and other special events. Operations will also lead to an estimated 100 to 200 indirect work opportunities in related hospitality activities.

"The redevelopment of the Hotel Villa St. Louis will deliver sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits, all of which will provide a positive impact on the wider community and region," explained Nikolas Eastwick-Field of NEF & JM Associates, the new hotel's development management company. "This

redevelopment will not only create substantial local employment during construction but also provide direct and indirect job opportunities for Haitian nationals in the immediate and long-term future.”

Former President Clinton, now UN Special Envoy to Haiti and co-chair of the Interim Haiti Reconstruction Commission (IHRC), in speaking to the Caribbean Investment Conference in San Juan earlier this year, stressed the importance of the hospitality sector in the overall rebuilding process and new job creation for Haiti.

“Tourism is critical to the sustained economic growth and sustainability for Haiti’s long-term recovery,” he stated.