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First Tru by Hilton Opens in Oklahoma City

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Yesterday was the opening of the first Tru by Hilton property in Oklahoma City, Okla. Owned by Champ Patel at Champion Hotels, LLC, the 86-room Tru by Hilton Oklahoma City Airport represents the culmination of a whirlwind 16 months of planning, development, and construction for Hilton's new midscale brand. It also bears the recognition of being the 5,000th Hilton property.

Hilton officially announced the launch of the Tru brand in January 2016 at the Americas Lodging Investment Summit (ALIS). Since then, Hilton has signed deals for more than 425 Tru properties, making it the fastest growing brand pipeline in the history of the hotel industry.

The Tru by Hilton Oklahoma City Airport exhibits the brand's key features, including modern guestrooms with oversized windows, bright and airy bathrooms with premium amenities, and a reimagined lobby with lots of space for social interaction. "The lobby at the Oklahoma City Airport Tru is 2,880 square feet," describes Tru Global Brand Head, Alexandra Jaritz. "People walk in, and their first reaction is 'Wow.' We see these kinds of larger lobbies in the upper-midscale and upscale segments, but bringing it to midscale is something new." Additionally, all Tru hotels are new-build to better drive consistency across properties.

Hilton has also been extremely focused on ensuring that Tru offers high-tech amenities that attract tech-savvy guests. This includes mobile check-in, Digital Keys, free WiFi, remote printing, a social media wall, super-charging stations, and lots of accessibility to outlets. "The consumers we're targeting with this brand are very technology focused, so we knew we needed to be the same. Features like mobile check in and the other activations in the lobby make sure we meet those consumers' needs when it comes to technology," Jaritz says.

Beyond Tru's physical characteristics, Hilton created a new service style for the brand. "We call this 'Tru Spirit,'" Jaritz says. "We want to be known as an imaginative, flexible, and energetic team, exhibiting the same qualities as the brand itself. The Tru team knows when to engage with guests, but are also very empathetic to their needs and know when to leave people be. So far, our team members have been really fantastic at delivering the Tru Spirit and experience."

Of course, as with any first property, the Tru by Hilton Oklahoma City Airport was a learning experience for the Hilton team. "Having so many hotels in the pipeline is fantastic, but at the same, every hotel goes through changes during the construction stage. So we had to make all of the changes we felt necessary very quickly, and then communicate them to the other hotels that are currently under construction. If we can't do that, we miss an opportunity to drive consistency across all Tru hotels and apply the lessons we learned to our other hotels," Jaritz explains.

One of the biggest issues that the Tru Oklahoma City Airport faced was a last minute adjustment of the lighting, which, according to Jaritz, was simply too bright in some of the corridor and lobby spaces. "Over the last four weeks, we removed and changed several light fixtures to reduce the amount of lighting we had inside the hotel," she describes. "But luckily we have a fantastic partner in Champion Hotels and they were really willing to just roll with the punches."

There are between 10 and 15 Tru by Hilton hotels due to open this year, with the next hotel opening on June 15 in McDonough, Ga. Approximately 80 will open in 2018. The demand is very high, and the developers pursuing Tru all exist in wildly different markets. "From highway locations to small towns, to airports, we're seeing a lot of demand for this brand in a lot of different locations types, which is really exciting. We believe that Tru will be the industry mega brand," Jaritz says.