

Hilton holds Oklahoma City celebration as it opens first Tru, 5000th hotel

By [Jack Money](#) | May 26, 2017

Hilton celebrated the opening of both its 5,000th hotel and the first hotel of its new mid-scale product, Tru by Hilton, in Oklahoma City on Monday.

Thursday's opening of the 86-room, \$10 million project at 802 S Meridian, developed by Champion Hotels, also closes a process where Hilton worked with customers and a group of its builder-owners to create a what its executives said is a unique concept.

"We've disrupted the mid-scale market with a game-changing brand," said Alexandra Jaritz, the global brand head for Tru by Hilton. "When you look at this, there is nothing else like it in the market today."

Jaritz said Hilton began working on the project less than two years ago knowing that travelers had come to believe they had to sacrifice quality to stay at a mid-scale hotel.

With research showing that 40 percent of travelers stay at either at mid-scale or economy hotels, Tru by Hilton aims to give them a better alternative.

What sets it apart

Jaritz said the lobby is larger than typical for a mid-scale hotel with space for gaming, a lounge, a central market to sell drinks and snacks, a breakfast bar-dining area and room for guests to get their work done before they play.

The hotel's public areas and guest rooms are equipped with power sources capable of supporting multiple devices, and guests can access on-site 10MB-per-second Wi-Fi at no charge and can print using wireless for free, from anywhere inside the hotel.

Jaritz said Hilton learned through the Tru development process that guests want tech-savvy hotels with larger social spaces because they don't want to spend so much time in their rooms.

Accordingly, Tru by Hilton's rooms (offering double queen-size or single king-size beds) are slightly smaller than other mid-scale offerings, but Jaritz said designers compensated for that by providing space for luggage under beds and furniture. Plus, its bathrooms are the largest offered in mid-scale hotels.

"Our modern, fresh, contemporary design is very appealing," Jaritz said.

The process

Jaritz said it was important for Hilton to know not only what guests wanted, but also, what builder-owners needed to be successful.

Hilton built a test lobby and a guest room, letting thousands of people tour it and tell them what they liked or didn't like, then routinely met with builder-owners to talk about what they had learned.

Jaritz said Hilton already has 425 Tru by Hilton projects being developed at locations across North America, and Champion Hotels, based in Norman and owner of the Oklahoma City Tru by Hilton, is working on building another dozen-plus, including five in the metropolitan city area.

Harshil Patel, vice president of Champion Hotels, said his father, Champ Patel, worked with Hilton as part of the development team, the first time his company ever has had that opportunity.

"The most beneficial side of it is the fact that you pick up a lot of questions and feedback from guests that you can share at these meetings," he said. "Hilton was really, really good at listening to developer feedback on everything from bathroom amenities to exterior color of the buildings.

"I've never seen it done before. They definitely hit the nail on the head."

Jaritz agreed, noting the process paid dividends to Hilton.

"We have the fastest new development pipeline in the history of the hotel industry," Jaritz said. "No other brand has been able to achieve this in such a short amount of time, ever."

About 450 people attended Thursday's opening. Guests included Christopher J. Nassetta, Hilton's president and CEO, and Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett.

Nassetta said the opening excited him because it both kicked off Hilton's new brand and was the 5,000th property the company has placed into service.

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"We are proudly living our purpose to be the most hospitable company in the world," he said.

Construction continues

Oklahoma City Convention and Visitors Bureau President Michael Carrier said Oklahoma City's hotel count stood at 166 hotels with 16,666 rooms at the end of April (including the Tru By Hilton), according to Smith Travel Research.

The bureau also received a recent estimate of hotels and rooms under construction for the metropolitan area, which stretches from Shawnee to El Reno and from Guthrie to Purcell.

Once those open, that will give the regional area more than 31,000 hotel rooms.

Still, Carrier said the market is not overbuilt.

"The gross room count is going to be up. And through April, we have sold 7,800 more hotel-room nights than we sold the same time last year," he said. "We definitely see the industry coming back overall."