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## Ritz-Carlton Launches 'Reserve' Hotel Brand

By PETER SANDERS

Upscale-lodging operator Ritz-Carlton Hotel Co., hoping to take further advantage of the booming luxury travel business, will launch a new hotel brand called "the Reserve" that the company hopes will attract guests to smaller resorts and more out-of-the-way locales.

Ritz-Carlton, a subsidiary of Marriott International Inc. of Bethesda, Md., is planning to open the 125-room "Molasses Reef" on the island of West Caicos in the Caribbean sometime next year.

Unlike the majority of its current 62 hotels and resorts that generally exist in popular tourist and business destinations, the locations for the offshoot brand will likely be focused in largely undeveloped areas—"places in the world where not everybody has been," says Vivian Deuschl, Ritz-Carlton spokeswoman.

To that end, the company will continue to compete with longtime rival Four Seasons

Hotels & Resorts Inc. and other luxury operators that run small, expensive resorts like Kerzner International Ltd.'s "One&Only" brand. But the new brand's focus will shift away from a heavy focus on corporate travelers and group-meeting business that many of the existing Ritz-Carltons depend on for a large chunk of their business.

While the company uses the word "boutique" to describe the Reserve brand, Ritz-Carlton officials insist that the service element—long decried as the Achilles' heel of the boutique hotel industry—will, in fact, be enhanced. Indeed, as the luxury travel industry has remained strong in the past few years and shows few signs of cooling, the highest-end travelers continue to look for more exclusive options outside traditional resort destinations. Ritz-Carlton officials say they hope to open new Reserve properties elsewhere in the Caribbean and in Asia.