

JW Marriott Hotel: evacuating migrant employees from Tripoli



JW Tripoli Marriott Hotel staff at the airport for their evacuation to Jordan, in 2011.

The five star JW Marriott Hotel Tripoli opened in the city's Central Business District on 15 February 2011, just days before the civil war in Libya began. At the time the Hotel was hosting the first guests and 185 migrant employees from over 20 nationalities had come to Tripoli in pursuit of new careers with Marriott.

As intense fighting broke out, hotel management quickly realized that they needed to evacuate the few guests who were in the hotel, as well as the staff.

The evacuation was coordinated by the Marriott regional operations team and senior leadership crisis team at headquarters. A daily flow of intelligence between the hotel management team in Tripoli and the Marriott headquarters in the United States ensured regular coordination and information analysis.

As a first step, all migrant employees were moved from the workers compound to the hotel while the evacuation operations were organized. Phones were distributed and

workers were able to communicate with each other and with their families. The hotel had sufficient cash on hand to ensure the payment of salaries and for hotel security.

To prepare for the evacuation, management had to ensure that the migrant employees were able to confirm where they would be evacuated to, and that they had identity documents and exit visas. The passports of several of the migrant employees were, at the start of the conflict, still with the Libyan government for registration, as was standard practice for a period of X days, so management had to work to retrieve them. Exit visas were eventually obtained for all of the staff, just hours before the evacuation.

Evacuation by boat was not possible due to inclement weather at ports, and many commercial airlines suspended flights in and out of Tripoli or were not able to land or provide sufficient space for the guests and migrant employees. Marriott chartered a plane from Royal Jordanian Airlines and was able to obtain a landing permit in Tripoli for it.

The JW Marriott Hotel Tripoli closed just two weeks after the beginning of civil war in Libya. The evacuation was an extremely complicated operation. A special bus convoy left the hotel at around 6am on the day of the evacuation; a trip that would normally take 30 minutes took an hour because of road blocks. At the airport, confusion reigned; some 15,000 non-nationals had gone to the airport, often without a pre-arranged plan, to seek or wait for evacuation. Despite this, several planes were taking off from Tripoli with some empty seats. Because of the congestion, the Marriott bus unloaded its passengers a kilometre from the airport. Exit procedures at the airport took some 10 hours to complete, and the plane eventually left Tripoli at 6pm.

Marriott had pre-arranged a transit stop for the plane in Amman, Jordan, but some of the migrant employees required transit visas for Jordan. Marriott was able to arrange assistance from the Jordanian immigration officials in advance, and received their assistance in expediting issuance of visas.

Despite the struggle and uncertainty, the Tripoli evacuation was successful in keeping guests and migrant employees safe. Marriott kept in contact with the evacuated employees, and in little time, all of them were offered positions in other Marriott locations.

Credit: Marriott International