

Felicity Black-Roberts, senior vice-president of development at Hyatt, tells **Andy Hillier** that the US hotel giant is eager to expand over here

H Hyatt has a problem. While the US multinational is a major force in the global hotel market, it is a relatively small player in the UK. Its UK portfolio comprises 3,800 rooms across 18 properties, which is considerably fewer than rivals Marriott and IHG Hotels & Resorts (IHG). Felicity Black-Roberts, senior vice-president of development at Hyatt, says its current limited footprint in the UK stems from the fact the firm has not historically considered Europe a core growth market. "One of the things that kept us quite small was we didn't franchise any of our brands in Europe," says Black-Roberts, a Brit who is responsible for the firm's growth in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. "So our first franchise in the UK, which was also the first one in Europe, was in 2017." Traditionally, Hyatt has focused on the top end of the market, with some of its hotels considered the most

luxurious in the UK. For example, a stay in a suite at the Hyatt Regency in Marylebone can cost around £2,000 a night. Until recently, its most affordable brand was Hyatt Place, which operates in the 'upscale' segment of the hotel market. "We didn't have a contender in that upper, mid-scale space like Holiday Inn or Hampton by Hilton," says Black-Roberts. "We didn't have the brand and we didn't have franchising, so other brands were able to grow a lot quicker than we did in the UK." That has changed over the past three years with the introduction, initially in the US, of two new brands: Hyatt Studios, which is mainly longer-stay accommodation; and Hyatt Select, a more budget-friendly hotel chain that launched last year. In the UK, Hyatt is particularly focused on rolling out the Select brand, Black-Roberts says. "It is at a slightly lower price point compared with our Hyatt Place brand and, importantly, it has a lower cost of construction and lower cost of fit-out," she explains. "What that will enable us to do is to grow our brand at scale in the UK. That's something that we've wanted to achieve for a

Regency style: the Hyatt Regency Manchester opened in 2020 and has more than 200 rooms



"We want a network of UK hotels"



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long time, but our brands were too expensive to build and the positioning of them meant that they just didn't fit into a lot of UK locations."

Two years ago, Hyatt hired Anna Corkill as regional vice-president of development for the UK and Ireland. Corkill was previously development director for the UK and Ireland at IHG, whose brands include Holiday Inn and Crowne Plaza. Black-Roberts says Corkill has been tasked with growing Hyatt in the UK predominantly through franchising, but also through the use of management contracts.

In terms of locations, Black-Roberts says Hyatt is eager to expand regionally. The firm already has a hotel under its Regency brand in both Birmingham and Manchester but says there is "no reason" it couldn't have more Hyatt product in both cities.

She cites Edinburgh, Glasgow, Bristol, Cardiff, Oxford, Cambridge and Southampton among the other cities on its radar. "These are all locations where our competitors are and we're not," she says. "The whole proposition of a brand like Hyatt is to have a network and we're missing that right now in the UK."

Hyatt is operating in an increasingly competitive market. Last year, hotel owner Whitbread revealed plans to create 12,000 additional Premier Inn rooms in the UK and Ireland by 2030. Rival operator IHG sold at the start of the year that it planned to add 380 rooms to its UK and Ireland pipeline in 2026 alone.

The fact that more hotel operators are expanding does not necessarily mean there isn't space for more Hyatts, according to Black-Roberts. "There's a lovely statistic that tells us for every market outside London that we want to be in [in] the UK, our competitors have more than six hotels," she says. "We've done the research. Our competitors are almost over-penetrated in our view. But we're bringing a product to the market that isn't already there."

She cites the example of Bristol. "If you put a Hyatt into Bristol, you're going to be the first and probably the only Hyatt in Bristol for quite some time," she says. "You can't say that about our competitors because they've already got numerous hotels in the city."

Recognisable brand
One thing Hyatt has in its favour is brand recognition. Despite it having a relatively small number of properties in the UK, it passes the "school-gate test" of parents recognising the brand, largely because it is so well established internationally, according to Black-Roberts. "Our foundations to grow in the UK are solid," she says. "We've just not embraced the opportunity."

Black-Roberts believes growth can be best achieved through converting existing hotels into Hyatts, rather than through new builds, which can often be time-consuming and come with unpredictable costs.

In London, it is converting a previously independently run hotel in Paddington into an 87-room Hyatt Place, due to open in early 2027. "It's going through a huge transformation and it is a very exciting opportunity," says Black-Roberts. "We don't have product in that bit of west London."



On a bigger scale, a 204-room Hyatt Regency will open later this year as part of Yoo Capital's £1.3bn redevelopment of London Olympia. The Regency brand is largely aimed at the upmarket business traveller and so including one as part of the regeneration scheme "makes a lot of sense for the investors," says Black-Roberts. "What they've done at Olympia is out of this world," she adds. "We're right in the centre of that with Hyatt Regency."

Last year was a strong one for the Hyatt Group. It generated gross fees of \$1.2bn (£903m) globally in 2025, an increase of 9% compared with the year before, and revenue per available room was also up 2.9% across the full year.

Suite spot: Hyatt House in Leeds (above) specialises in studios and one-bedroom suites with kitchens and offices



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"We've seen since the pandemic occupancy rates have been on a steady upward trajectory," she says. "I think that's starting to stabilise now."

With greater uncertainty creeping into the travel market as a result of world events such as the Iran war, Black-Roberts says it is important to ensure that Hyatt provides a level of service in line with the rates it charges across its brands. As a result, she says the business is "very focused on service and personalisation right now."

In the UK, rising energy and employment costs have been tough on the hospitality industry. A report published last month by industry body UKHospitality says that one in five hospitality businesses fear collapse in the next year because of mounting costs.

Costs challenge

Black-Roberts will not be drawn into the debate about the rights and wrongs of increased taxation on the hotel industry, but she says rising costs make it particularly challenging to operate regionally as room rates "drop off steeply" outside London.

Over the past decade, Hyatt has pivoted away from owning hotels to managing them on behalf of investors and franchising its brand. In the final quarter of 2025, it generated \$140m (£105m) globally from selling three properties to investors and entering into long-term management agreements on the properties instead.

In Europe, it manages around 70% of its hotels, while the remaining 30% are franchised. Black-Roberts says this asset-light strategy enables it to invest in the customer experience and support its network of asset owners and franchisees.

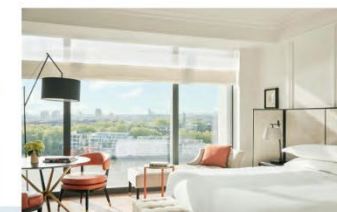
"Because we are smaller [in Europe], we have really developed a programme of serving franchisees individually," she says. "Most of our franchisees, if they wanted to pick up the phone and call our group president, they could, and he would answer."

"We're servicing people who want to sleep in our hotels but we're also servicing our franchisees and our owners. That's an equally important client for us."

The UK hotel industry has evolved in recent years, with concepts such as lifestyle and capsule hotels coming to the market. Two years ago, Hyatt purchased lifestyle hotel operator Standard International, whose assets include The Standard, London, a quirky 266-room hotel near King's Cross that features a range of bars and restaurants. Black-Roberts describes the purchase as an exciting development for the Hyatt brand that helps to consolidate it as the "lifestyle group of choice" for investors.

Black-Roberts will not be drawn on what parts of the market Hyatt could look to enter next but says it "doesn't stop evolving".

Overall, she is keen to impress on investors and potential franchisees that Hyatt wants to grow its UK portfolio. "I don't think people believed we were committed to the UK, but we are," she says. ■



Central perk: The Standard hotel (above) makes the most of its King's Cross location

A cut above: the Park Hyatt London River Thames (left and below) offers understated luxury

