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## \$100m Atlantis expansion leads to 90 new jobs

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Revealing a disappointing 2011 first quarter for bookings across the Bahamian hotel sector, Atlantis executives have confirmed that the resort is pushing ahead with its \$100 million upgrade program, which has so far created 90 permanent jobs and will cause at least another 250 to 300 new hirings before the end of this year.

George Markantonis, president and managing director of Kerzner International (Bahamas), said bookings at Atlantis and throughout New Providence for the January, February and March period have "not been as good as [the hotel industry] had expected".

However, he added that beyond this, hotels are seeing a booking pace which suggests Atlantis and others could yet see a "record April", with the potential for occupancy rates over 80 per cent. After an annual average occupancy rate for 2010 in the "low 60s", the flagship Paradise Island resort is predicting a yearly occupancy rate average in the "high 60s or low 70s" for this year.

"One month does not make a year, but it's a good sign," said Mr Markantonis of the April projections.

"Easter has moved to the end part of April, so it's expanded the higher-rated tourism business, and we have seen the bookings coming in at a much higher pace than they ever had. When I say a 'record', if we go over 80 per cent for the month it's going to be amazing, and that would be amazing for the city."

Mr Markantonis said Kerzner International's \$100 million expansion and renovation programme on Paradise Island started last year and is going "quite fine", with the most high profile new addition to Atlantis's amenities being the 'Teen Club', called 'Crush'. The high-tech facility, initially budgeted to cost \$7 million, ultimately cost \$11 million.

### Teenagers

The club is for teenagers in the 13 to 17 year-old range, and features a 'Mocktail' bar, a video-gaming 'tree', interactive table tops from which teenagers can place orders for drinks and food, and a DJ booth and dance floor fit for a high-end New York City nightclub.

Ninety new staff members were taken on to run the facility, which opened on December 20, 2010. "It's mind boggling and worthy of adults, really," said Mr Markantonis, who said the overrun came about as the company just "kept adding stuff" to the space. Meanwhile, another major development set to come on stream in 2011, which is projected to cost Kerzner International a further \$10 million, will be a 'Virgil's BBQ' restaurant in the Coral Towers, in the space where the former Water's Edge restaurant once was.

"It's a giant new restaurant concept we are bringing in from New York. I think all of our local fans are going to love this place as much as the tourists. It's the same group as Carmines. It's a monster BBQ restaurant and we are building a 650 seater one right here. It will be the world's most beautiful barbecue restaurant," said Mr Markantonis.

The restaurant will require around 250 to 300 new staff to be taken on, he projected.

Other plans for 2011 include renovations to the casino and renovations to the Atlas restaurant, although the latter of these is still to be "finalised", added Mr Markantonis.

He revealed that guest satisfaction levels, measured by an independent research company, JD Powers, continued to climb through 2010, with each month setting a new satisfaction record.

"That's a great tribute to our staff and their efforts, but also to the training programs," said Mr Markantonis.