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Four Seasons and Miami Developer to Open Vatican City Hotel

Fort Partners aims to have hotel in 15th-century palace open in 2025



The hotel will reside in the Palazzo Della Rovere, a Renaissance building.

PHOTO: VITO ARCOMANO/ALAMY

By *Craig Karmin* [Follow](#)

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A Miami real-estate developer is leasing land from a Catholic organization to transform part of a 15th-century Italian palace into a Vatican City boutique hotel.

Fort Partners reached a deal this month for a 30-year lease with the owner of the property, the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, according to a statement from Cardinal Fernando Filoni, who serves as Grand Master of the Order.

The developer has tapped luxury hotel operator Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts to manage a hotel at the site, which is just outside Vatican City and a three-minute walk to St. Peter's Basilica. The property will feature 55 to 60 rooms and a tree-lined courtyard restaurant, according to Fort Partners Chief Executive Nadim Ashi.

"It is a very serene place," Mr. Ashi said in an interview. "With views of St. Peter's Basilica, you're always reminded of where you are."

The hotel will reside in the Palazzo Della Rovere, an ochre-colored Renaissance building. The Catholic Church donated the building in 1999 to the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, a Catholic organization that operates in parts of the Middle East.

As part of the arrangement, Fort Partners has agreed to invest 54 million euros, equivalent to \$57.5 million, in the restoration of the property. Fort Partners is working with Italian architect Fabrizio Casiraghi from Milan.

The developer aims to have the hotel open in 2025, which is the year of the next Catholic Jubilee, or Holy Year for the forgiving of sins.

While the Four Seasons is a luxury brand that often sets the highest room rates wherever it operates, Mr. Ashi said he and Four Seasons haven't settled on what to charge for a night's stay at the palazzo.

But he said that "we have to respect where it is, we can't be too high." Visiting cardinals and priests would

receive a special rate, Mr. Ashi added.

The Vatican City project merges Mr. Ashi's interests in real estate, high-end hospitality and Catholicism. He was born in Liberia to Lebanese parents before moving to Paris. He studied engineering in the U.S. at George Washington University, later relocating to Miami where he got into the real-estate business.



A rendering of the hotel near Vatican City that Fort Partners aims to open in 2025.

PHOTO: FORT PARTNERS

His firm is known for its partnerships with Four Seasons on luxury hotels and residences, including the Surf Club in Surfside, Fla., and three other Four Seasons locations in South Florida.

A lifetime Catholic, Mr. Ashi said he has visited the Vatican more than 10 times. About five years ago he was in Rome scouting locations for a different Four Seasons, and he learned that the Order was interested in bringing a hotel back to the Palazzo Della Rovere, where the more modest Hotel Columbus had closed in 2018.

In 2020, the Order put out a new call for someone to lease and operate a hotel at the site. Dozens of hotel operators expressed interest, but Fort Partners prevailed and brought in Four Seasons, which will also operate Mr. Ashi's hotel in central Rome that is slated to open in 2026.

The Italian palazzo isn't the first Four Seasons hotel to operate in a historic setting. Part of its hotel in Florence is also located in a former Renaissance palace, while England's Four Seasons Hotel Hampshire in a manor where Henry VIII met one of his wives. A Four Seasons hotel in Istanbul was converted from a notorious Turkish prison.

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