

Global Spa Summit

JOINING TOGETHER. SHAPING THE FUTURE.

Individualistic Luxury

General Session: Keynote Speaker

Monday, May 18th 2009 11:45am – 12:30pm

La Salle Cote Jardin, Victoria-Jungfrau Grand Hotel & Spa, Interlaken, Switzerland

Reto Wittwer, President & CEO, Kempinski Hotels, Switzerland

Scribe: Benjamin Robert (Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne)

Anna Bjurstam introduces Mr. Wittwer

Reto Wittwer, who is a graduate of the Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne, has worked in many different countries. I am inspired by his passion. In my opinion, it is important to have people like him in the industry.

Reto Wittwer

The first Kempinski opened in 1897. The business model of the company is to manage hotels. The key focus is to determine what results are the most meaningful. It is important to decide what business you are in and as an executive of a company it is our job to make sure that we manage the future.



People need luxury for status, recognition, experiences, etc. There are different groups of people seeking luxury. Each group has different expectations in terms of what their needs and wants are. For example there are those people who are affluent and purchase luxury as their lifestyle as it was something they were born into, there is another luxury consumer who is affluent due to newer resources of income, and then there is the consumer who is not necessarily affluent but who purchases luxury as an occasional celebration. It is important for a hotel to differentiate these groups, identify their needs. The goal of luxury is not to merely meet, but to exceed expectations, however different they may be. Luxury is different things to different people in different places at different times.

The definition of luxury in North America is found in standardization which is mostly driving the hospitality industry, in Japan it is “Zero-Error” but in Europe it has always been about individuality. For the most part, Europe has always been the epicenter of the luxury industry. Therefore for Kempinski, luxury is individualization. Each hotel in our portfolio is a masterpiece in its own; each one is “one of a kind.” At Kempinski, it is not about standardization. This emphasis on individuality is carried on to our employees. We do not want employees to act out a script, but want them to be authentic and genuine.

The Spa industry interacts with the luxury market in different ways. The Spa industry is dominated today by Asian concepts but was born in Europe. I cannot understand why European companies have Asian Spas. Kempinski is rooted in Europe and will follow the European traditions of wellness.

However the spa industry has evolved, in the 1960’s the ultimate luxury was a pool, today this is not enough. What hotels are selling today is lifestyle. In any case, the wellness elements being offered at any property must be measurable. With more and more people focusing on a healthy lifestyle today, it is important that our spas represent a lifestyle which our customers can relate to. They are also using up space, therefore they must be making money for the property.

Kempinski was looking for a partner to run their Spas and came together with Raison d’Etre to create a tailor made concept for us. The new company is Resense Spa S.A. which will be effectively managing two brands; one being Resense Spas based on European traditional wellbeing and also manage Kempinski The Spa brand which is a herbal spa concept.

[Answering to the question whether the Kempinski Spas make money]

Any business has to make money. Every square meter of a property that can be commercialized must be used adequately.

[In response to the question of what he thinks of medical Spas]

Although some of our properties have soft medical elements, which need to be taken into account; this is not our primary goal.



The Global Spa Summit is an international organization that brings together leaders and visionaries to positively impact and shape the future of the global spa and wellness industry.