

# Hospitality

## Brand Promise



An Interview with Reto Wittwer,  
President and Chief Executive Officer, Kempinski

Kempinski Ambience Hotel Delhi

**EDITORS' NOTE** Reto Wittwer, who assumed his current post in 1995, began his career at The Westin Palace Hotel, Madrid and has since lived and worked in Paris, Tebran, Singapore, Hong Kong, Montreal, Acapulco, Indonesia, and Korea. He has worked for InterContinental, Mandarin Oriental, Peninsula, Le Méridien, and Hyatt and has been the CEO of three hotel companies – Swissôtel, CIGA, and Kempinski. Wittwer was educated at Switzerland's Hotel Culinary School and Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne.



Reto Wittwer

**COMPANY BRIEF** Founded in 1897, Kempinski Hotels ([www.kempinski.com](http://www.kempinski.com)) is Europe's oldest and most established luxury hotel collection. With more than 70 five-star properties in major cities and vacation spots throughout Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, each hotel or resort is a distinctive property that celebrates the cultural traditions of its location.

**How has the travel and tourism industry been impacted by the continued volatility in the global economy? What is your outlook for growth for Kempinski in 2013?**

The travel and tourism industry has been greatly impacted by the global economic downturn and the luxury hotel industry was no exception. Although Kempinski felt this impact, we fared better than many others due to our diversified portfolio – our geographical spread and the balance between business and leisure hotels reduced the impact significantly. Over the past three years, we were able to see signs of recovery within the industry and we expect 2012 to be among the group's best in terms of financial performance. We've continued to pursue business opportunities in target markets – Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East – and we have eight openings planned for 2013, in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

**How has the Kempinski brand built such a loyal clientele?**

Kempinski is a brand that enjoys strong recognition and awareness because of our brand promise. We value guests' individuality, but also the individuality of our hotels – there are no two Kempinski hotels that are alike, and yet our worldwide staff is equally committed to delivering the highest level of luxury service.

Our staff is an important part of what makes us successful. We can afford to be proud of our way of doing things, because we make huge investments in our staff, not only in terms of recruitment, selection, and training, but also in empowering our staff and unleashing their potential. They are trained to gain professional skills so they can be confident and empowered to respect our standards, but they are also encouraged to be genuine. What keeps guests coming back is the service they experience at the hotel.

Kempinski as a company places a lot of importance on innovation and recognizes that the best ideas can only flourish and come to life if staff – at all levels – feel empowered and free to share their ideas. This is why we are investing time and resources in group-wide innovation and the resulting initiatives.

**Would you provide an overview of the key markets for Kempinski and outline your plans for additional expansion into new markets?**

Our five main feeder markets are Germany, the U.S., the U.K., Switzerland, and Russia. As a global company, we consider business opportunities according to whether our client base will naturally go to a new destination on business or leisure. Our main focus is on Europe, where Kempinski claims its heritage. I'm really excited about our first property in Vienna, the Palais Hansen Kempinski, which opens in March 2013.

India, where we opened our first own-managed hotel in October 2012, is highly important, as is Africa, which is growing dramatically in terms of business, with countries like Ghana, Nigeria, and Angola seeing great economic growth. Africa is also home to a varied landscape that is inviting to tourists.

**Is there a standard look and feel for Kempinski or is the focus on how the property fits into the local market?**

Kempinski focuses on properties that will be market leaders and/or landmarks within their respective destinations. For each property, we incorporate regional traits into the guest experience, be it through our F&B offering or a special treatment at the spa, while maintaining the high standards of European luxury service that our guests have come to expect.

The Kempinski brand has a "red line" running through all of its hotels. No matter which hotel a guest decides to visit, the Kempinski

guest experience is consistent. We ensure that this "red line" of our Remarkable European Flair is present, while respecting and incorporating different cultures into our hotels according to each destination. The Lady in Red accompanies the guest throughout check-in; as the guest settles in, there is a range of gastronomic options waiting to be discovered from a quick business lunch to a three-course dinner or an afternoon tea. Kempinski The Spa, a spa brand custom-designed for Kempinski Hotels and operated by Resense Spa S.A., offers treatments exclusively designed for Kempinski Hotels and makes a Kempinski hotel recognizable to guests.

**How has Kempinski been able to provide such consistent service? How do you ensure that your service standards are driven throughout all of your properties?**

Kempinski places a strong focus on service standards, professional skills, and true understanding of the reasons behind service standards. High standards of luxury service are part of the training our hotel staff receives all over the world, but we also empower them to make decisions for themselves and to be genuine when they deal with guests. This is part of our corporate culture.

One of the most important things one must learn in the luxury hospitality business is attention to detail and that is what we teach our staff. We have dedicated training teams at the hotels that hold training sessions and a corporate training team that follows up on training sessions and offers support and guidance when necessary. We hold polls and competitions internally online to educate and motivate our worldwide staff.

In addition to the staff at our hotels, Kempinski has also created management training modules for higher management so that the managers of today can guide and develop the managers of tomorrow. We're investing in top talent, sending them to a Kempinski Executive MBA programme in partnership with the Reims Management School. All-round business acumen is vital.

**What makes a successful general manager today?**

The role of the general manager is no longer to be the boss, but to be a leader, and most important to me is personality and soft skills. But above all, general managers must be inventive; they must have a fresh take on luxury hospitality and recognize a winning idea or innovation when they see it. There has to be enthusiasm for innovation within hotel operations and this must be led by the GM. ●