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Q&A; with Commune Hotels & Resorts CEO Niki Leondakis

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 Smyth Tribeca - A Thompson Hotel.

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In Recommend's [April Islands](#) issue, our editor-in-chief, Paloma Villaverde de Rico, spoke with **Commune Hotels & Resorts'** CEO Niki Leondakis about the company's three hotel brands—**Thompson Hotels**, **Joie de Vivre**, and **Tommie Hotels**—what makes them each unique in today's competitive hotel market and why travel agents should book with Commune.

Read the full [Hotel Desk](#) feature on Commune Hotels & Resorts [here](#).

Paloma Villaverde de Rico (PVR): What elements make each brand under the Commune umbrella unique and are they marketed differently to attract a type of client?

Niki Leondakis (NL): Commune's three brands, though distinct with their own signature personality, share a few things in common. All brands are inspired and driven by design, embrace the communities and cultures that surround their hotels, and offer guests thoughtful and transformative experiences. All brands provide unique and individualized hotels that are attuned to their location and communities, with service that's more personal and centered on guests as individuals. They offer a sense of place through creative interiors and thoughtful amenities, and experientially connect the guest to the local neighborhood.

Thompson Hotels offer a sophisticated luxury experience in a contemporary style that appeals to a worldly clientele, which is why we see Thompson Hotels in more urban centers, gateway cities and resort locations internationally. With its signature refined edge, Thompson Hotels caters to a discriminating and modern subset of leisure and business travelers—a psychographic group of like-minded individuals all over the world who seek a total lifestyle experience in their lodging that offers culture, hospitality and world-class dining and nightlife.

Joie de Vivre hotels are playful and one-of-a-kind and tend to focus on the local environment. The guest experience is as original as the hotels, which makes the brand attractive to a broad range of travelers, from families to millennials to business travelers. The new Tommie hotels will be innovative social destinations for millennials and free-thinking global travelers who like to integrate work and play. The brand will roll out in international gateway cities, with a debut in New York City.

PVR: Why should today's travel agent book their clients at any of the Commune Hotels?

NL: Today's travel agent should book their clients at Commune Hotels & Resorts because there is a brand and a hotel for everyone, no matter the client's purpose for travel or personal hotel preferences. At our core, we are wholly committed to creating transformative experiences for our guests, across all lifestyle segments.

PVR: What was the direction behind the new Tommie brand and why is it targeting "youthfully minded" guests?

NL: We believe there is a significant opportunity in the market for an affordable, design-savvy, and social hotel brand. Tommie fills a gap in the marketplace for an affordable hotel product that at once appeals to youthful travelers as well as the rapidly emerging psychographic of discerning travelers who are of means, but who are budget conscious and do not want to sacrifice experience for value. Naturally, the accessible price point, beautiful design and youthful spirit of the brand will appeal to millennials and Generation Y, but we think Tommie will also be intriguing to the luxury traveler.

PVR: I read on the Commune website that the first two Tommie hotels will be opening in NYC. Is the company looking to expand this brand abroad or within other key locales in the U.S.? And why was New York chosen as the destination to launch?

NL: Commune Hotels & Resorts will debut Tommie in New York in 2015 with the opening of two Tommie Hotels: a 250-room property on 31st Street and a 329-room hotel in West SoHo. These hotels will appeal to youthful, design-savvy, connected and discerning travelers seeking immersive experiences at a reasonable price. The efficiency of the Tommie business model was designed for gateway cities with high land and construction costs and where there's a strong youth culture and a thriving creative industry. Launching in New York gives the brand the best visibility and positioning to expand globally. Commune is looking to rollout Tommie on a global scale, with locations in Europe, Asia and other key domestic markets.

PVR: I also read that the Commune brand of hotels is looking to expand to Canada, Europe and Asia. Which one of the brands will be introduced in these markets and why?

NL: Our international growth for all three brands is focused specifically on Europe, Asia and Canada right now. We've identified target cities in each of these international regions that support our model of culturally and experience-driven hotels. Thompson Hotels currently has a presence in Europe with Belgraves in London, and in Canada with Thompson Toronto, but we're looking to grow the brand internationally, specifically with hotels in Canada and Asia. We are equally excited to bring the Thompson lifestyle experience to resort destinations with our projects under development in Los Cabos and Playa del Carmen.

Commune will also be introducing Tommie to Europe and Asia, following the New York hotel openings, to offer travelers an affordable option in gateway cities globally, including London, Hong Kong, Singapore and Miami. Joie de Vivre, as a soft brand, has tremendous expansion potential. The individuality of hotel style and lifestyle experience has resonance in both primary and secondary markets domestically and internationally.

 [The Shoreline Hotel in Waikiki \(A Joie de Vivre property\).](#)

The Shoreline Hotel in Waikiki (a Joie de Vivre property).

PVR: The Thompson Playa del Carmen is a big project. Is this the first of its kind for Commune? If so, why did the company decide to take this direction?

NL: Although we have Thompson properties that offer residences and multiple restaurant, bar and nightlife outlets, Thompson Playa del Carmen is our first hotel to anchor a major mixed-used development that includes international retail, cafes, and restaurants. We've definitely had our eye on the market and feel that the style and sophistication of the Thompson Hotels brand will translate well to a beach resort location. Playa del Carmen is the fastest growing resort town and is experiencing a development boom, especially in the luxury segment. It's now the place to be for upscale development in Mexico. We're fortunate to be working with leading Mexico developers, Thor Urbana, who specialize in retail and mixed-used assets in Mexico and, as such, are uniquely positioned to expertly navigate the permitting and zoning process and to bring in top-flight international labels.

Slated to open in 2015, Thompson Playa del Carmen will be Commune's second property expected to open in Mexico following Thompson Cabo San Lucas. The property occupies two coveted locations in the center of Playa and will feature 125 rooms and suites and distinctive amenities such as a meandering rooftop pool and world-class spa. It will be the only hotel in Playa to have both a central 5th Avenue and beachfront location. This project is definitely a first for Commune as it marks the first branded, lifestyle boutique hotel in Playa.

PVR: It seems today's savvy travelers want more from a hotel besides a place to rest their heads. From design elements to onsite restaurants, events or luxury spa facilities, it seems the hotel industry is responding to this trend by offering services that will entice guests to stay longer and also experience not only the city but the hotel as well. How does Commune fit into this growing trend with its lifestyle brands?

NL: Our goal is to deliver our discerning and sophisticated guests a total lifestyle experience, inclusive of stylish design, stimulating programming, thoughtful, localized amenities and world-class dining and entertainment options across its three brands and more than 34 properties. Commune Hotels & Resorts offers layered, transformative experiences so guests can stay and socialize from day to night without having to leave the property — whether they are at an intimate hotel wine hour, or a highly-activated, multi-outlet lifestyle complex. We strive to provide exceptional experiences that matter most to our guests with a new and fresh perspective.

PVR: What's in store for Commune in 2014?

NL: We have both domestic and international growth plans. Joie de Vivre hotels have a strong presence in the West Coast, and the company is working on expanding the brand on the East Coast with several hotel openings on the horizon. Thompson Hotels can be found in major U.S. cities, and we believe that the Thompson brand would translate well to urban cities and resort destinations in international markets. As mentioned earlier, we're currently exploring growth opportunities in Europe, Asia and Canada. We are also looking forward to bringing the Thompson lifestyle experience to other resort destinations, and to working with some exciting, new culinary and nightlife partners. More to come later this year!

PVR: Does Commune offer travel [agent incentives](#) like travel agent training programs or cash incentives for bookings made?

NL: Commune Hotels & Resorts offers travel agents a commission rate of 10 percent, though it always look for opportunities to create preferred relationships that at times will have a higher commission structure.

PVR: Where are the majority of your guests coming from? The U.S., Canada, Europe? Or does that depend entirely on the brand?

NL: A majority of our total Commune guests are from the U.S., but it really depends on the brand, the individual market, and the neighborhood in which the hotel is located.

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