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TOURISM

BUSINESS

Winter Park-based hotel company to launch high-end hotel brand next year

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Greg Spencer, CEO of [Timbers Company in Winter Park](#), is a traveling man. Between work and three to four family vacations per year (when there isn't a pandemic happening), he estimates he racks up 250,000 miles annually.

So he has advice for tourists looking to get the most out of their trips: take up jogging.

"It's a great way to see cities," Spencer, 51, said. "You get to know the area better. It's super cool to experience things that way."



Greg Spencer, CEO of Timbers Resorts in Winter Park, in front of a photo mural of one of their properties in Kaua'i, Hawaii, photographed December 10, 2021. The hotel and condo developer is launching a new brand called Soleil. (Joe Burbank/Orlando Sentinel)

Travel gives Spencer an eye that he brings to his job managing a high-end brand of luxury resorts around the world. His company is planning to launch a new hotel brand called Soleil, with the first one opening in Kauai, Hawaii, next year.

Timbers has a Kauai resort already, as well as ones in Italy, Mexico and throughout the U.S.

Currently, the only Timbers Resort in Florida is in Jupiter, a private community featuring 50 villas and a Jack Nicklaus Signature golf course. Timbers properties tend to be adjacent to popular destinations, but set apart to give the feeling of exclusivity.

“There has to be some narrative intrigue” to a Timbers location, Spencer said. He said the company looks for an intimate scale and stunning physical attributes. “We would work in Islamorada, not Key West or Marathon.”

A former Air Force captain, Spencer uses his own trips to find details he can include in his company’s resorts. “I’m always snapping pictures and asking can we do this here and make it fit our brand,” he said.

The attention to detail seems to pay off for the clientele. Properties listed on Expedia.com, for example, garner mostly rave reviews. “The staff made this a world class stay, so pleased! Beautiful property!” one visitor wrote about Timbers’ [**Rancho Valencia resort in California**](#).

Spencer says the only place Timbers would fit in Orlando is Golden Oak, the luxury estates inside Disney property where the Four Seasons Hotel is, but the company has no plans for one.

Finding places for Timbers resorts is one of Spencer’s biggest challenges. “We look at 70 to 90 deals a year, there’s six that would fit with our brand, and we pursue two,” he said.

Soleil, on the other hand, is being designed as a more accessible brand. “We wanted something that gave us a little broader site-selection criteria,” Spencer said.

Rooms at the new resorts will start around \$350 per night, and there will be a mix of hotel property and residential ownership.

Spencer said that a Soleil could actually fit somewhere in metro Orlando's footprint, though it would still be high-end for the area. Where a Timbers condo might sell for \$1,500 per square foot, Soleil would be just north of \$700.

"Our owners [at Timbers] have friends and family members that can't afford the same level," Spencer said, adding that Soleil would give them a chance to vacation together.

Of course, that will mean differences in service. At Timbers, guests are contacted before check-in about their needs, rooms are stocked with groceries and events and sightseeing can be planned by resort staff. Soleil will still offer guest services, but the amenities will be closer to a traditional do-it-yourself vacation.

Spencer, who became CEO in 2014, was part of the push to move Timbers from its headquarters in Colorado to Central Florida. He says he was drawn by the talent pool in the area.

"You fish where there's fish, and from a hospitality resources point of view this was a pretty deep pond," he said.

The company employs about 50 people at its Winter Park office, with plans to expand to more than 60 in the coming year.

"We're already worried about running out of space," Spencer said.