

SPA SPECIALISTS

**An interview
with LV
Riviera SPA**

Duo Lionel Vinciguerra and Mike Blackmann are a young and dynamic team. In just four years, they have come to manage some of the French Riviera's most prestigious spas such as Èze's iconic Chèvre d'Or and the Five Seas in Cannes – their first project.

By ELSA CARPENTER

THE GOLDEN TULIP SPA IN
SOPHIA ANTIPOLIS IS THE
LATEST RETREAT TO JOIN LV
RIVIERA SPA
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We're meeting in your latest venture, the Golden Tulip Spa in Sophia Antipolis. Can you explain the LV Riviera SPA concept?

Lionel Vinciguerra: We either rent a facility or manage a spa in a hotel. Our role is to guarantee a way of service that is beyond reproach and to ensure the profitability of the spa.

Mike Blackmann: It can be very difficult to make a profit on a spa within a hotel. It is a financial blackhole for some establishments: 40 to 60% of revenue goes towards salaries, 20% on VAT, 5 to 15% on linen and electricity and water can be as much as 5 to 25%. If you add the cost of products and marketing, it can be all too easy to go over budget.

If a spa means a loss of profit, why would a hotel want to maintain one?

LV: Essentially because having a spa in a hotel sells more rooms. It acts as a showcase for what the hotel can offer, is a way of communicating with clients and is an investment in developing the main purpose of the hotel: selling rooms.

MB: If a spa is well-managed, and I insist on the good management part, it can increase sales dramatically. If a hotel has a turnover of two million euros, a spa can boost that by 140,000 euros. One of the hotel's we work with has seen increases of 20% in reservations. If you add in meals and raised prices for rooms, the profit is even larger.

Is this the same for gyms and fitness suites?

LV: Yes, certain clients will choose a hotel because of the gym. The differences are that a gym has neither the constant costs of a spa nor the number of staff.

MB: When choosing between two similar hotels, around 5% of client decisions are based on whether the establishment has a fitness suite or not, while more than half are swayed if there's a spa.



How does LV Riviera SPA ensure a profit when managing a spa and how does the hotel benefit?

LV: Simply put, by running several spas. We are very careful what staff we hire, carry out unexpected visits, optimise the schedules of our teams, frequently analyse the figures, hold promotions and work closely with the hotel in terms of cross-selling, communicate with our client base, and constantly monitor our reputation online.

MB: The hotel is safe in the knowledge that the spa is being well-managed and is no longer acting as a loss for the establishment. The first clients we had in 2013 were calling us and saying: "I'm losing a lot of money here, the staff aren't reliable, we're receiving poor feedback, I've contracted freelancers but they are never available when they're needed..." Now it's very different.

What roles do you both play in the management of your spas?

MB: Lionel is a trained osteopath and was being regularly called upon to five-star hotels in Cannes for his work. It evolved to massages and he became very successful freelance. As a result of not being able to be in two places at once, he began to recruit a team of massage and beauty therapists to supply the demand. One day, the director of Five Seas called him for a masseuse. He supplied them once, twice, and then the hotel asked for a whole permanent team. That's how it all started.

LV: I've known Mike since we were 10 years old and he came on board to help me with finding new clients then became our sales manager. Last year, he joined us fulltime and we became associates. I manage the operational and management side while he is the point of contact for our clients.

How many spas do you currently manage?

MB: Today, we're in charge of six spas in the Alpes-Maritimes. We're proud that we've never lost a client or a contract; they've all been renewed.

LV: We have three very exciting projects coming up outside of the department in 2017 and are looking to develop our consulting business. By the end of the year, we also hope to become a reference in building and constructing spas. ▀

Editor's EXPERIENCE



By ELSA CARPENTER

Golden Tulip Spa in Sophia Antipolis



One of the best things about my work as editor of Riviera Insider is, of course, the perks. When Lionel and Mike invited me to the spa they manage at the newly opened Golden Tulip hotel in Sophia Antipolis, I expected a tour of the facility with a 30-minute treatment at most. Instead, I was lavished with a full hour's full body massage and another hour spent enjoying the Turkish hammam, sauna, pool and jacuzzi. I came away feeling light and refreshed, and particularly revived thanks to the careful attention the masseuse paid to my hands and wrists (ideal for a writer). While small compared to other spas the pair manages, the retreat is well laid out and suited to its environment at the business hub. Treatments start from 30 minutes – great for local people looking for a lunchtime treat – and extend to a four-hour 'Absolute Serenity and Well-Being' package, which includes an hour and a half's access to the spa, a 30-minute body scrub with essential oils, an hour's massage of your choice and an hour's facial tailored to your preferences. ▀

Left photo
MIKE BLACKMANN (LEFT)
AND LIONEL VINCIGUERRA
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Right top
SMALL, BUT AMPLE: GOLDEN
TULIP SPA
© DR