Darmstadt, April 27, 2017 *** The United Nations, under the leadership of the UN world tourism organisation (UNWTO) have declared 2017 the International Year of Sustainable Tourism. „Strengthen the consciousness for contributions to sustainable tourism and promoting changes in politics, economy and the behaviour of the travellers“, is the declared goal. Even though sustainable tourism is still a niche market, the future of the tourism lies unambiguously in sustainability. More and more travelers worldwide are seeking for eco friendly and socially acceptable destinations and hotels and do not want to calm their green awareness with a cup of Fairtrade coffee. However, what exactly implies sustainable tourism or conscious travelling? Which criteria, for example, must a hotel meet to operate a property in a sustainable way? In general sustainable tourism must be environment friendly and fair for all involved people.
Sustainability is based on three pillars: Environment, social factors and economy. Meanwhile there are more and more offers for conscious traveling and efforts to communicate this to an interested audience. There are about 200 different certificates and labels on the market. How can a traveler find these unique green hotels and destinations in the plenty of touristic offers?

Green Pearls ® Unique Places - Act sustainable and talk about it

Already in 2012, Green Pearls® Unique Places has perceived the trend towards sustainable tourism and offers a collection of more than 100 hotels and destinations worldwide who are following a sustainable approach. All these hand-picked hotels operate intrinsically according to their green philosophy. Their mission is the preservation and the protection of the environment for the following generations. The requirements of Green Pearls ® Unique Places are based on the criteria of the Worldwide Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC). The following factors are relevant for the assessment: Management plan, architecture, environment, water consumption, garbage management, housekeeping, food, social compatibility, social projects, cultural obligations and communication to the guest. The focus is on the people of the region. The aim is to hire locally and work with local craftsmen and suppliers on site,
to support local social and cultural projects. The hotels have to fulfill at least 80 percent of the Green Pearls® requirements. All member hotels have a direct booking link to their booking system, as Green Pearls® considers a direct booking as being sustainable. Also destinations face the challenge to look at their unique flora and fauna and also the integration of the locals under the aspect of sustainability. The situation is much more complex and need to be looked at more differentiated. From pioneer's work up to the aim to operate climate-neutral the challenges could not be more different.

Gili Lankanfushi and the
Coral Line Projekt

In March, 2014 the marine biologist Vaidotas Kirsys initiated the Coral Line project at Gili Lankanfushi. The Gili Lankanfushi became the first resort on the Maldives to use a system with low technology, but much success to let corals grow. In May of the same year the marine biologist Deborah Burn joined the team to improve and develop the project with her immense professional competence until today.

Coral reefs belong to the most threatened and richest biodiverse ecosystems of the world. With a conscious behavior everybody can contribute to the protection the coral reefs. The Coral Line project pursues four goals: to offer the guest an unforgettable experience by direct encounter with the corals, to make a contribution to the investigation of the corals, to support social - as well as environmental projects, and finally it helps the regeneration of a small coral reef. Last but not least it is a matter of sharing this knowledge and of providing information to those who are involved in raising coral reefs.
Trendsetting: Climate-neutral town trip

The Creativhotel Luise in Erlangen was founded in 1956 and is today managed by the third generation. It is known as a forerunner of the green hotel industry in Germany. The hotel received numerous honourings and is one of the most ecologically friendly town hotels in Germany and Europe. With only 9.78 kg CO2 per stay and night, this is about one third of the average consumption of a hotel of the three-star category, this corresponds to the best climate-efficiency class A.

The hotel proves sustainability in practice with their renewable hotel rooms and have been awarded with the ADAC Bavarian Sonderpreis for sustainability in 2017 and the Goldene Palme of GEO SAISON (3rd price in the category responsibility in tourism). Some rooms were refurbished with renewable raw materials. Thus, for example, all carpets, curtains or taps are either recyclable or biodegradable.

"Sustainability in the hotel business does not imply renunciation, but to create a process in which people, materials and nature are matching“, hotel owner Ben
Förtsch explains the philosophy at the Creativ Hotel Luise. 28-year-old Ben Förtsch continues the pioneer work of his parents by adding modern ideas of sustainability.

Socially sustainable: Vacations in the midst of an authentic village community

The Kasbah du Toubkal is a small authentic lodge in the midst of a local Berber community. The mission since the opening in 1995 is to protect the Moroccan Imlil valley against negative effects of mass tourism developments. Guests from all over the world should be
given the unique opportunity to learn more about the culture and the life style of the Berbers. "Kasbah du Toubkal is no hotel in the common sense, it is rather an enlargement of the hospitality of the Berbers who pursue it." Owners Maurice and his woman, Hajja Arkia, manage the property. Only recently the first trekking Lodge was opened in addition in the area. The couple focuses on the employment of local employees. 95 percent of the employees come from villages of the region and 80 percent from the vicinity of two kilometres. The salaries exceed the legal norms and many investments are channelled into the continues education of the employees. In particular women should be motivated to work in addition to manage the household and to earn their own money. A foundation - financed by an overnight surcharge at the rate of five percent - supports the social projects of the local community. Thus every guest can take part in the conservation of the Berbers culture and tradition.
Sustainable countries - impossible?

To implement Sustainable Tourism within a destination is a big challenge. Two examples of the East Frisian Island Juist and Thailand show how different the approaches can be. Juist aims to be climate-neutral till 2030 and was recently certified by TourCert as the "first sustainable destination“ in Lower Saxony. Already in 2015 it had been awarded for his environmental engagement with the German Sustainability prize. No cars but horse carriages and bicycles, sustainable garbage prevention and disposal, tap water instead of imported glass bottles, even a "green" child university to educate already the smallest in sustainability. These are only some initiatives of the engaged spa administration and the local people. Thailand is from the ecological view in a lot of parts still rather a developing country. However the responsible actors in the tourist industry and government are aware and know that mass tourism will not be the future. A way in the right direction is the so-called "Community based Tourism" - from and with locals. Whether it is spending the night at Homestays, market visits with a local cook, learning the traditional dances with former active dancers - there is a big variety of possibilities. Locals receive a large part of the income, travelers participate in unforgettable experiences which are remembered for a long time.
The examples make clear that sustainable tourism already exists and is pursued for years and decades. Decision-makers in the touristic industry start to rethink of new ways and make courageous decisions. Economic added value and social and ecological management do not exclude themselves. On the contrary. In the Eco Tourism a fair remuneration and the sensible distribution and use of the profits lead to a demonstrable strengthening of the regional economic power and creates jobs for locals. At the same time small and local suppliers are supported with sustainable effect and travellers get access to new experiences. The International Year of the Sustainable Tourism should serve as an initial ignition to manifest strategically a global sustainable tourism concept to protect and maintain unique places and nature for the coming generations.

The German Green Pearls GmbH with place of business in Darmstadt, Germany unifies international tourism companies that support environmental protection and demonstrate social commitment. Thereby, Green Pearls is the first holding company worldwide that consolidates sustainable hotels, destinations and restaurants in a global data source.

Among the criteria of admission to Green Pearls® Unique Places, are a sustainability plan on management level, sustainable architecture, comprehensive water, energy saving and waste recovery measures, the use of seasonal and regional ingredients in the kitchen, as well as a large commitment for the social balance in each of the vacation regions.