“A nudge, inspiring and experimental”

An interview with the Sustainability Officer at the hotel SCHWARZWALD PANORAMA

Darmstadt, May 30th 2018 *** Sustainability is becoming more and more important for hotels. At the Black Forest hotel SCHWARZWALD PANORAMA, even a new position has been created, dedicated exclusively to sustainable development. Green Pearls® talked to Stephanie Schießl about her new job, her goals and the integration of sustainability into the hotel routine.
Since the beginning of this year, there is the new position “Development of sustainability awareness” at SCHWARZWALD PANORAMA. What are your responsibilities?

The new position combines active environmental protection, social commitment and entrepreneurial thinking. Due to the USP of SCHWARZWALD PANORAMA and its corporate philosophy, it became more and more evident that it made sense to create a new role. And it also made sense to engage someone who is passionate about sustainability and has the necessary experience in hotel industry. The functions include: inspiration for a more sustainable behavior inside and outside the hotel by creating the desire to protect, improve and preserve the environment. Furthermore supporting the implementation of sustainability measures into core processes, providing information on all relevant issues, and attending relevant events, fairs and competitions.

It is important to meet the individual levels of knowledge concerning this issue – and they can vary widely, given the fact that there are 70 employees. And it is necessary to mobilize foresight and open-mindedness beside business operations.

This includes finding the best way to tackle certain issues while at the same time achieving a balance. The attitude plays an important role as well: from which point of view one communicates – not as an eco-missionary, but rather as someone who nudges gently, inspires and experiments.
How do you motivate the employees to act in a sustainable way?

At the moment, we are introducing these issues to the team using various channels, such as our ecoboard or internal mailings, providing information and raising awareness, thus creating a basis for a deeper awareness of the topic. By means of small operational measures, for example reusing paper printed on one side only, we actively integrate these issues into our departments.

Further initiatives, such as providing a library of DVDs with eco movies, are supposed to help to raise the need for environmental protection at home together with family or friends. In a way, the process runs by itself, because on the one hand employees come to my office to talk to me about their ideas, and on the other hand I often hear through the grapevine where there is a need for more sustainability.

Specific environmental campaigns, such as cleaning and smartening up the garbage area together, often have valuable side effects: team building as well as creating an appreciative environment for those who work in this place everyday. The 2019 training calendar also includes theme-based excursions (for example to organic farms or waste incineration plants) and visits of speakers (for example beekeepers or representatives of the organic-food association “Bioland”) to inspire employees through active experience.

Why is a sustainable hotel routine so important to you?
In addition to my private passion for this issue and my desire to advance in this field on a professional level as well, the focus is on preserving our business base – an intact environment – and making our contribution to environmental protection as a company. I think it is exciting to be one of the pioneers in our industry and to hold a position created especially for this purpose. For me, this is both a challenge and an honor.

What were the first steps on this path?

It was a good way to start by gaining first insights into each department for one week and for example talking to their executives. So I did not only have the opportunity to introduce myself, but also to bring up the subject, and several of them addressed some interesting starting points, which we could take on together. This got the ball rolling ...

One of the most important steps was to respond to the current situation and the employees’ wishes and ideas. It was also important to obtain information on the topic and to become thoroughly acquainted with the subject and its practicability. What’s more, it’s all about getting started and giving things a try: the range of topics is vast and complex; sometimes you are quickly confronted with resistance, sometimes it works just fine. It is important to actively support change until all aspects are internalized and accepted as routine.
What are the measures you are planning for the future?

Our German Sustainability Code report (which involves a voluntary self-commitment) and the WIN Charta, which we have signed, as well as our philosophy define numerous goals, most of which have already been implemented and are continuously expanded: for example, we plan to reduce our carbon dioxide emissions by 5 % per year over the next 5 years. We want to keep the level of quality of our natural cuisine and increase the amount of organic products from 70 % to 100 %. And we are going to do everything we can to make sustainability even more important to our suppliers. Moreover, we cooperate with sustainable partners such as Green Pearls®, Bioland, WIN Baden-Württemberg and Climate Partner. Other examples are: the elimination of all packaging in the guest area, the introduction of veggie days, an active commitment to biodiversity and social commitment.
**How do private persons respond to your offer of a climate-neutral accommodation?**

Regarding the bookings through our homepage by private persons, there is a growing trend towards climate-neutral stays. However, it is still quite low if you compare it to the total booking volume, because on online portals it is usually not possible to activate this function and most bookings are generated there. In general, there is a growing awareness (especially with our guests). Nevertheless, it will still take some time for this issue to become routine in our industry and in the individual booking behavior.

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® GmbH 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® GmbH 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.

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