Darmstadt, December 6th 2018 *** If the year draws to an end, we look back and ask ourselves: What did the year bring for the environmental protection? And how has sustainability developed within the travel industry? In general, the subject sustainability was in everyone's mouth in 2018. Whether it was about the ban of disposable plastic in the EU, fossil-fuel phase-out or in general around climate change and how we deal with that. More and more people see and understand the problems and would like to change; also the impact tourism has on travel destination becomes more and more evident to people. Logically, sustainability also plays an important role when it comes to travel planning. Green Pearls® deals with the sustainable initiatives and activities of our partners every day and we are often overwhelmed by the creativity and innovation. In general, the most important subjects in 2018 probably were overtourism and plastic.
Fighting over-tourism

An important factor is to recognize over-tourism and develop strategies to handle mass tourism. Some destinations already reacted with upper limits or closings, thus, e.g., the famous Maya Bay in Thailand that should remain closed for the time being only four months to recover from the tourist impacts. In the meantime, some animals have returned, a positive development. The Croatian city Dubrovnik wants to permit the tourist arrivals in 2019 and accept less cruise ships in the harbor. The motivation for action is especially up here; finally the UNESCO threatens to take away the World Cultural Heritage title from Dubrovnik. Thailand Tourism Authority continues to promote community-based tourism which should lead the travelers away from the hot spots to more unknown sites and at the same time grant the people on site a respectable livelihood. However, even if some destinations set good examples, in many places strategies how to deal with the worldwide rising tourist figures are still missing. Nevertheless, travelers can change their behavior by avoiding overcrowded spots in the high season.
Towards a plastic-free future

Almost daily we are confronted with news of the huge plastic pollution worldwide. The gigantic amounts of plastic garbage end up in nature, ashore and in the water. To fight the problem, two strategies must be pursued at the same time: Not only the use but also consumption of plastic products must be reduced drastically, and plastic has to be correctly disposed of or recycled. In Australia 1.5 milliard bags could be saved within three months after the two biggest supermarket chains have banned plastic bags. Though, in Germany the number of the used plastic bags has decreased, for food (in particular fruit and vegetables), there is an increase in the amount of plastic packaging. Here, industry and politics are called upon – till then it is up to the consumer to decide for products free of packaging whenever possible.

Strategies to handle plastic

Up to now some hotel chains not known for their sustainable philosophy could get a lot of attention for their announcements to reduce plastic. For example Iberostar wanting to substitute disposable plastics within 36 Spanish hotels with biodegradable materials and Marriott wants to ban plastic straws. The tour operator Thomas Cook plans to save 70 million disposable plastic parts until November 2019 and Wikinger Reisen offers the first plastic free trip in 2019. Statements with hopefully signal effect.
Concrete implementation

Every year, Green Pearls® partners prove anew how these measurements can be realized: The Zeavola Resort in Thailand, for example, bottles its own drinking water in glass bottles for the guests since August, 2018 and saves up to 95,000 plastic bottles per year. There are similar systems with the Maldivian Resorts Reethi Beach and Gili Lankanfushi with its "No Plastic Policy", as well as at the hotels CGH Earth in India. The Tongsai Bay on Koh Samui all along uses drinking straws from lemon grass - only one of the many small measures of a sustainable lodging. To use less packaging, the SCHWARZWALD PANORAMA offers a butter donator on its breakfast buffet making it easy to portion and avoiding single-packed butter.
Clean-up of the ocean

Everybody has heard of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch between Hawaii and California. There were positive news this year from the first project fighting the garbage patch: The Ocean Clean Up project could take the "ocean cleaner" to its planned location in the Pacific in September where it had begun to collect plastic from the sea. Updates are published directly at The Ocean Clean Up.

Of course sustainability in the touristic industry is not limited to avoiding plastic and reducing over-tourism. We will also keep you updated next year with all the exciting initiatives of our partners. Until then, we wish you a peaceful Advent season and a happy start in the New Year!

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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