

Training the Rostock way is a fun affair



Kücki (W Kühhirt) realised a dream when he built the Rostock Ritz in the Namib Desert nine years ago. He is confident that a second dream will come true by the end of the year, from when the lodge will be managed by local staff only.

He started managing the lodge again in June last year with the sole purpose of training staff to run the operation with no foreigners in his employ. "By the end of the year one of my waiters, Bonnie Haimbondi, will move from assistant manager to manager."

Kücki, who underwent six years of training in Germany and Switzerland before starting Kücki's Pub in Swakopmund, takes responsibility for the training himself. He is particularly proud of the fact that Rostock Ritz is one of the few establishments in the country with an à-la-carte menu, especially being so far away from any main centre.

Kücki says he has managed to break down some of the misconceptions that existed during the apartheid years. "The most important is the fact that Namibians are very trainable, although they don't have the social background of going on holidays and eating in restaurants." He admits it wasn't always an easy task. He found the best way was to seat staff members and serve them. "I took their orders and served their food to give them the experience."

Although most of his 15 staff members never had the advantage or opportunity of further schooling or training, he found they were generally very eager and more than capable of climbing the ladder. "It was surprising what happened when I removed the division between management and staff. I gave them more responsibilities and they simply bloomed." He



saw so much eagerness and willingness to learn and achieved immediate results. "It was fun to see that happening."

According to Kücki, his training not only focuses on management tools, but also on language skills and small aspects such as how to clean a swimming pool. "The cleanliness of a pool is usually an indication of how effective management is," he believes. He is also a firm believer in his staff being able to serve clients in their own language. All his employees are fluent in English and have a basic knowledge of German, as 80% of his guests are from Germany. "We'll still get into French and Italian." Computer training was the only aspect he contracted out, commissioning consultants to take staff through the basics, from using a mouse to producing an invoice.

Kücki feels that the hospitality industry in general is starting to realise the importance of training, but "not before it had developed into a crisis. It came to a point when establishments that weren't taking responsibility for their staff's skills, realised they would not keep guests coming if their staff remained unskilled. "Quality service is important. There needs to be a standard."

He also believes that unskilled staff feels insecure, since they were never

taught to do the job properly. This leads them to withdraw and then they come across as unfriendly or even arrogant. "A lot more needs to be done at ground level."

The good news is that progress is being made. He says returning guests, some of whom come back every two years, have mostly positive comments on how service is improving in the country. "That is very good to hear. It means we're heading in the right direction."

For Kücki in-house training, especially for remote lodges, remains the most practical option. While poaching of well-trained staff is a problem, he says that if you look after them, they will remain loyal and stay with you. "It's very important to give them a good salary and benefits, and enough time to visit their families at home."

With an empowered, dedicated and loyal staff, Rostock Ritz with its unique desert-adapted igloo-like units will continue to offer more quality for guests and give them proper service for the price they pay.

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