Behind the Scenes: Green Chefs

Posted on

Fresh, seasonal, regional – and organic as much far possible. This is the guiding principle in all restaurants of the Green Pearls® partners and their chefs. Sustainable cuisine is the strongest foundation for healthy, creative, and high-quality top-class gastronomy. After introducing some chefs and their cooking philosophies in the first part of our article (published in Explore Sri Lanka May 2022), today we look behind the scenes – or instead into the kitchens – of more Green Pearls® partners.

Mariya Un Noun – Farmhouse Smiling Gecko
For Mariya Un Noun, a lot of love goes into every meal. The 31- year-old chef of the Farmhouse Smiling Gecko in Cambodia has had an impressive journey. She grew up in the slums of Phnom Penh and only went to school for three years. Since then, she has worked her way up with ambition and perseverance, partly due to her love of nature and food. Since the opening of the Farmhouse Restaurant in 2015, she has been part of the team and is responsible for further developing the range of dishes. The young Cambodian makes the local cuisine shine in her own creative way with a lot of intuition and soul and fuses it with European cuisine.

The dishes at the Farmhouse Restaurant are mainly prepared with ingredients from the restaurant’s own agricultural production. In addition to organic fruit and vegetables, eggs, and fish, bread and pastries from the Smiling Gecko bakery are also used. Even the meat products come from Smiling Gecko’s own butchery. Recently, Mariya has been supported by top chef Andreas Caminada, who is enthusiastic about her talent. The partnership with his foundation “Fundaziun Uccelin” enables young European chefs to work with Mariya at the Farmhouse and bring the beauty of Cambodian cuisine to the world.



Mariya Un Noun.

Luca Sordi – LA VIMEA

The chef at Italy’s first vegan hotel is Luca Sordi, a former engineer who already focused on sustainability during his studies through his and work. He can definitely be considered self-taught – after his studies, he decided to follow his greatest passion and dream and become a professional chef. With motivation and determination, he pursued his goal of becoming a top-level plant-based chef. Along the way, Luca gained experience in some award-winning restaurants such as “Soul Kitchen” in Turin, the oldest British vegetarian restaurant “Hendersons” and as a chef at “Saorsa 1875”, the first vegan hotel in the UK. He then founded La Vimea in South Tyrol in 2017. A place where he has developed as a chef, kitchen manager, and individual. “Cooking for me is a very deep activity where body and mind have to work together. It’s often hard work, but I have a lot of fun with it.” His passion is exploring different techniques, textures, and temperatures and trying new things. But what he likes most is the intuitive part: “When the mind is free to create

something new… it’s like jazz.” Wild-grown ingredients, open fires, and outdoor cooking characterize his cooking and reflect his love of nature. As does fermentation! An approach to flavor development that he is constantly working on and studying to produce delicious, sustainable, and healthy dishes. Hannes Müller – Genießerhotel Die Forelle Hannes Müller, the owner of the Hotel Die Forelle and head chef of the restaurant at Lake Weissensee in Carinthia, is one of the pioneers of extraordinary creations with local herbs and wild plants. Under the guiding principle of Berg.See.Küche, he uses only regional products for his cuisine and follows the seasonal harvest calendar. Therefore, strawberries in winter or asparagus in autumn are not on the menu at Forelle. Instead, Hannes Müller stands for high-quality creations made from products prepared according to the highest standards for the respective season. Regional, refined, authentic. The philosophy behind this is based on the belief that when everything is always and at all times available, recollection and reduction are the special things. Many of the foods served at Forelle are home-grown and pickled, frozen, dried, or fermented after harvest. The sustainable concept of Die Forelle also includes working directly with local farmers, using as many parts of a product as possible, composting food scraps, and even producing biogas. The kitchen can be largely supplied with electricity from the in-house PV system. Hannes Müller likes to pass on his knowledge of the local flora to his guests during herb walks, cooking courses, and workshops.

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Hannes Müller and his Justine Rist – Naturhotel Aufatmen

At the Naturhotel Aufatmen in Leutasch, Justine Rist holds the chef’s scepter, or rather the wood spoon. Justine is not only eats vegan, she also lives it. And for her, cooking is more of a calling than “just” a profession – she has been passionate about cooking since childhood. After her years of learning in upscale restaurants and Michelin-starred restaurants in France, the 30-year-old was drawn to the big world. After working in Japan and Australia, Justine spent more than a year on the NGO Sea Shepherd Ocean Conservation ship as a volunteer. Here, too, she provided the entire crew with vegan delicacies. In addition to animal welfare, the products she processes must be organically grown and nearby if possible.

“The game of preparing vegetables in many different ways and continuously

discovering new ways is my world," says the young Frenchwoman and proves how colorful and varied vegetarian and vegan dishes can be with her menus. Young, lively, and original at the same time. At the 2021 Pastry Contest in France, Justine was awarded third place.



Luca Sordi.





Mauro Massei & Grazia Bianchi –Paradiso Pure.

Living A duo leads the contemporary vegetarian-vegan cuisine of the first vegetarian hotel in the Dolomites: Mauro Massei and Grazia Bianchi. The two have been working together for many years and are an accomplished and well-coordinated team. Mauro has a classic professional hotel background complemented by training in Michelin kitchens. His personal sensitivity to the vegan world has led Mauro to take the vegan path and manage the kitchens of several plant-based hotels, such as Lord Bio or LA VIMEA. Grazia gained professional experience working alongside celebrity chefs such as Niko Romito, chef of the Ristorante Reale in Rome. Finally, she arrived in the plant-based kitchen and at Lord Bio alongside Mauro Massi. She specializes in gorgeous high-end vegan pastries as well as baked goods and fermentation. Both are all about conscious food choices and holistic wellbeing and a pure vegetarian-vegan approach that respects nature. They would like to convey this to their guests in Paradiso Pure. Living as well: “Our goal is for our guests to take their experiences with our creations home with them, and for a change in their everyday lives through conscious food choices.” Grazia and Mauro are constantly working on expanding the variety of offerings. They have added tempeh to the menu, developed different types of homemade kefir and

kombucha, and experimented with fermenting fruits and vegetables. “Fermented foods have incredible nutritional value and provide us with a dose of healthy probiotics. A vegetarian-vegan lifestyle is very beneficial for the body and mind and invaluable for the entire planet,” both vegans are confident in this.

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Davide Cretoni – CERVO Mountain Resort

In the Italian restaurant of the CERVO Mountain Resort ‘Madre Nostra’, the Roman Davide Cretoni is in the lead. In his opinion, sustainable cuisine is based on three important pillars: reduce, recycle and reuse. That means only buying as much as you can actually consume and recycling and reusing what is left over. This is what he and his team at CERVO in Zermatt, Switzerland, base their actions on. “Sustainable cuisine represents a new era that also pays respect to the consumer through transparency. More and more guests are interested in what ingredients are used, where they come from, and how they are prepared. A conscious understanding of what is on the plate contributes to a responsible approach to food.”

Rudi & Dedi – Puri Dajuma

Like all the staff at the Puri Dajuma eco-resort on Bali, the two chefs, Dedi Putra Susila and Rudi Setiawan, come from the neighboring village. They lead a team of five chefs and are responsible for the resort’s exotic and varied food selection. They are masters of both: Balinese specialties but also international classics. And always based on fresh and seasonal ingredients from the local markets’ farmers and fishermen. The imaginative creations of Rudi & Dedi impress with authentic recipes inspired by traditional Balinese cuisine and by the island’s location at the crossroads of different cultures. The experienced chefs’ most popular dishes include the famous Balinese-style Rijstafel, their own variation of Nasi Campur, and Seafood Casserole.

Radenko Jovicic – Hotel Outside

“Cook what the gourmet region of East Tyrol has to offer,” is the kitchen philosophy. Radenko Jovicic has been working in the kitchen of the 4-star-superior Hotel Outside

in Matrei for almost 20 years and is responsible for the daily afternoon snack and the evening 6-course gourmet menu and the weekly gala dinner. His culinary work is grounded in traditional regional foods, which he prepares in a contemporary and unexpected way. Originally from Bosnia- Herzegovina and now a Tyrolean, he impresses guests with his down-to-earth and imaginative creations. Plus a daily vegan and vegetarian work of art: “We want nothing less than to surprise the senses and impress the palate. And do so sustainably.” To meet this high standard, the quality of the ingredients is crucial. They are sourced from organic producers or from the garden of the nature hotel. Homemade products are also on the tables in the restaurant. For example, the brown bread made from East Tyrolean ancient wheat is baked in-house, and the hotel makes its own jams and syrups. It is important to Radenko and his team that the path of the food remains traceable. “The shorter the route, the fresher the vitamins. The closer the (mountain) farm, the better the taste.” Simple as that, and so good!





Mauro Massei & Grazia Bianchi.





Radenko Jovicic.