

Quellenangabe: Zitty, 12/2003

Deep Sleep in a Sand Bag

“Thank you for sleeping with me! S.”, is the last Sentence in the guest book. The writing betrays definitively a female writer. The entrance is dedicated to the staff and there is lots of speculation : Who was the mysterious girl? And who mixed his job with a nice pleasure? The numbers of Backpacker Hostels in Berlin shoot up like rockets in the last few years-and no end in sight. Hostels have a head to head run especially in the district “Mitte”. Eight years ago there wasn’t even a handful of Hostels in the whole city, now there are more than 20. Start-ups, who rented old factory floors and fell down with the internet bubble, try now to get the buildings out of the red numbers with budget accommodation business. Furthermore, there are a lot of simple pensions who try to jump on that lucrative train: “clever pension owner, who have not invested a cent in their building in the last 30 years, put just the word “hostel” in front of their name and hope it works out”, says Juhle from “Mitte’s Backpackers Hostel”.

Next to small, family run guesthouses, financial forceful investors get into Berlin market. Among them are chains like “The Generator”, who have also a hostel in London, and “A&O Hostels”, who own already two huge houses in Berlin, one directly at the main train station “ZOO”. Low commercial rent in Berlin makes such an enterprise lucrative. Similar to the “Estrel”, a 1000 bed Hotel on the outskirts of Berlin-Neukölln, the british operator of the “Generator” choose a district on the verge of East Berlin. The concrete building is from the outside pretty ugly with its white-blue plastic cover, inside the architect focus on metallic techno look. Shiny counters, exorbitant air condition pipes and screwed down chairs show the concept. The staff wears uniforms instead of fashion clothes and the guest seem to like it.

The artistic Travellers go and stay in “Mitte’s Backpacker Hostel”. The house, with self catering kitchen, is situated in the Chausseestrasse. Lots of artists reconstructed the former hat factory with murals, sculptures and handmade furniture.

The accommodation prices are really low budget: from 10 to 20€, with a max. of 20 people in one dorm, sexes are not separated. In most hostels you can also book a double room. Facing the utilization of the low budget Hostels, conventional Hotel owners get envious. In summer the “Clubhouse” for example is almost 100% booked, in winter it is still 50%. Also the marketing strategy is totally different from the Hotel industry: a main impact is on the internet presence, because backpackers use the world wide web frequently. Very effective is the mailing of flyers to other hostels in Europe, because travellers plan their trip always a bit in advance and check the flyer boards in other hostels.

But its not only the backpacker, who stays in the Hostel, its more and more guest with suit case, who don’t mind that there is no mini bar or phone in the room. They all just enjoy the budget price and a bunk bed is almost nostalgic.