



LEADING WITH PASSION IN HIGH TATRAS



KATHRIN NOLL
General Manager,
Grand Hotel Kempinski
in the High Tatras

Kathrin Noll has been with the Kempinski hotel chain for 25 years, with the last 15 spent at the Grand Hotel Kempinski High Tatras. She began her career on August 1, 1999, at the Kempinski Hotel Airport in Munich as Assistant Groups & Events Manager. In 2004, she moved to the Kilimanjaro Kempinski in Tanzania, overseeing the Food & Beverage department, followed by a similar role at Kempinski Ajman in the UAE. Kathrin joined the Grand Hotel Kempinski High Tatras in 2010 as Operations Manager, was promoted to Hotel Manager in 2012, and has served as General Manager since March 2013.



Grand Hotel
Kempinski
HIGH TATRAS SLOVAKIA

After 25 years with Kempinski, what are the most significant moments and challenges you've experienced throughout your career?

At Kempinski, in every hotel I've worked with, it has always been about people and teamwork. There's a strong sense of belonging, with everyone feeling like part of the Kempinski family. Each hotel is unique in style, with amazing teams behind them.

In Africa, it was inspiring to see how expats supported one another. The most memorable moments were the large events, where collaboration across teams created beautiful results. These events truly highlighted the power of teamwork.

Meetings, whether regional or global, reinforced our sense of belonging and were always productive.

The greatest challenge in my career was the COVID-19 crisis, followed by the 2008 economic downturn when I was in Ajman, Northern Emirates. But these challenges taught me that adversity can be a great learning experience. They reminded me never to get too comfortable, as growth comes when you push yourself beyond your comfort zone.

What do you think are the most important lessons you've learned in your two-and-a-half decades with Kempinski?

- You don't have to work in the Trophy hotels to be seen.
- Be honest, straightforward, and hard working —your

efforts will eventually be rewarded.

- Always stay true to yourself, because in truly challenging situations, you're often left to rely on your own strength and resolve.

How do you think the philosophy and values of Kempinski have evolved during your tenure with the company?

Kempinski has its 5x Brand Values and I embrace all of them on daily basis:

1. Passion for European Luxury
2. Creating Traditions
3. Straight Forward
4. People Oriented
5. Entrepreneurial Performance



Be honest, straightforward, and hard working —your efforts will eventually be rewarded.

By embodying these values, you can thrive in any region where Kempinski operates, delivering its unique services worldwide.

While Kempinski provides Standard Operating Procedures and Policies, there is always room for personal touches and enhancements, allowing for a more personalized and elevated guest experience.

Kathrin Noll, General Manager of Grand Hotel Kempinski in the High Tatras, celebrates 25 years with Kempinski, with the last 15 spent leading the iconic hotel in Slovakia's mountain region. In this exclusive interview, she shares her journey, leadership insights, and vision for the future of luxury hospitality in the High Tatras.



What led you to move to the High Tatras 15 years ago, and what were your first impressions of the region?

After nearly six years in Africa and the Middle East, I wanted to return to Europe. Having never experienced Eastern or Central Europe, I was eager to explore this part of the world. One day, I received a call from the Corporate Office offering me a position in the High Tatras. At the time, I didn't even know where the High Tatras were! 😊

I knew of Pressburg/ Bratislava from the fact sheet announcing the opening of a Kempinski hotel, and initially, that was where I wanted to go. However, I never accept an offer without seeing the property, so I flew in for a weekend to see if the High Tatras could be my next step.

I arrived in mid-January 2010, and after not seeing snow or experiencing four seasons for nearly six years, I was captivated by the peaceful nature and the stunning hotel setting. The warm welcome from the staff sealed the deal, and I decided to accept the offer.

What keeps you motivated and inspired to continue working in this beautiful

mountain environment?

Without a doubt, it's the people I work with every day who keep me motivated and inspired. Additionally, it's the guests—about 30% of them are repeat visitors, and we've created a "welcome back home" atmosphere that reinforces a sense of belonging, even for me.

Lastly, while there's some routine, each day brings something new and unexpected, which keeps things exciting and dynamic.

What key factors do you believe are essential for success in the hospitality industry, particularly in managing a luxury hotel?

Passion is number one—you must love what you do. In hospitality, it's not just about the money, and it's never just an 8-hour job. You need to stay focused, open-minded, authentic, and true to yourself.

How do you maintain high service standards and continuously improve the guest experience at Kempinski?

We focus on continuous training, including on-the-job, communication, and behavior training. Kempinski aims to provide each employee with 8 hours of training per month,



and we receive regular updates on Standard Operating Procedures. We also conduct daily quality checks through our Manager on Duty.

Additionally, a Mystery Shopper Audit occurs twice a year, checking all our Service Standards and ensuring we're always prepared. Feedback from guests is invaluable, and we continuously learn from our own shortfalls to improve.

What leadership qualities do you think are crucial to running a hotel like Kempinski High Tatras?
To be open-minded, to be open to change, and to be strict but fair.

When hiring new employees, what key traits and skills do you look for that fit the Kempinski culture?
Actually, the attitude of the person applying with us for a Rank & File position is the most important factor for us. Product and work knowledge skills can be learned and practiced on daily basis. Of course we are also seeking employees who have already worked abroad and have experienced another high profile environment, however this kind of experience is not necessary.

How do you ensure that your team not only meets but exceeds the high expectations of Kempinski guests?
Again, it comes down to the attitude of the employees. I am able to say that all our employees are proud of working at the Grand Hotel Kempinski High Tatras. As they love the environment,

they bring passion to their work. They also see that I support them in every way I can, which helps drive their commitment to excellence.

In your opinion, what makes a hotel truly exceptional, and what elements are critical to achieving this level of excellence?

The location of the hotel plays a crucial role, along with the setup and design of the hotel itself—what we call the hardware. However, what truly sets a hotel apart is the people—the software—who work in the hotel. They are the ones who make the real difference. Many of our staff have been with us since the pre-opening, and even though we are recognized as the best hotel in the High Tatras region, we all remember where we started. Even I myself - I was not born a General Manager.

To achieve and maintain this level of excellence, consistency in daily work is essential. Additionally, regular maintenance, renovations, and hardware upgrades are vital to ensure we keep delivering the highest standards of service.

What makes Kempinski High Tatras stand out and what special services or experiences do you offer guests that reflect the uniqueness of its location?

We offer a very personal approach to each guest. We are discreet, caring, and attentive to the well-being of everyone who stays with us. For example, we can create tailor-made excursion programs to suit individual

guest preferences. During the summer, one of our management team members leads morning runs around the lake for those who enjoy an active start to their day.



These challenges taught me that adversity can be a great learning experience, as growth comes when you push yourself beyond your comfort zone.

We also host monthly performances by young artists as part of the Kempinski Concertini project, which takes place in our Lobby Lounge from October to June, in collaboration with the Jozef Adamovic Conservatorium in Kosice.

A standout experience we offer is the Tower Lunch or Tower Dinner in the View Tower, which is located at the highest point of the hotel. This exclusive dining experience is only available for two people at a time and includes a 5-course menu with a bottle of Champagne. Guests are attended by their own waiter, making it a truly

private and memorable experience. Another unique offering is a stay in our Romantic Suite, which features a rooftop Jacuzzi with a 360-degree view over both the High and Low Tatras.

Where do you find inspiration for constantly improving and innovating at the hotel?

I often visit other properties in Slovakia and neighboring countries to see what they are doing. The Kempinski network also provides a wealth of ideas, and I stay updated through hospitality newsletters and social media channels.

How do you assess the current state of the tourism industry in the High Tatras, and what trends have you observed in recent years?

The High Tatras are still something of a hidden gem within Europe. Most of our guests come from the local Slovak market, followed by visitors from the V4 countries, with many day tourists from Poland enjoying the hiking trails. However, due to global climate change, the High Tatras have begun to attract new markets such as the Middle East and Southern Europe, despite accessibility remaining a challenge.

We have also seen increasing interest from tour groups from Taiwan, Australia, and America. Australian and American guests tend to seek adventure and hiking experiences, while Taiwanese guests focus more on sightseeing, particularly the UNESCO World Heritage sites in the

nearby Spiš region. Since COVID-19, our hotel has also become more popular for family gatherings and celebrations, and we enjoy seeing young generations grow up with us.

What initiatives or projects do you believe are crucial for the continued growth of tourism in this region?

First, improving the infrastructure is critical. Compared to Zakopane, the High Tatras offer limited shopping opportunities, which could be expanded. Parking facilities throughout the region also need to be improved to better accommodate visitors. Additionally, the overall service culture needs enhancement, starting with the ability to speak languages beyond Slovak.

What can Kempinski High Tatras offer to business clients in terms of event organization or corporate experiences?

We have a highly experienced, helpful, and exceptionally friendly Groups & Events team, led by Miriam Lackovicova, our Director of Sales & Marketing. A key feature of our service is the Meeting Concierge, who acts as a single point of contact to ensure seamless communication from the initial inquiry through to invoicing.

One of our most popular offerings is the exclusive "King of the Castle" buy-out option, where clients can rent the entire hotel for private use. This has been particularly popular this year, which has seen many companies celebrating anniversaries.