

UNCERTAIN FUTURE OF THE LUXURIOUS FLOATING HOTEL



A luxury hotel ship has been moored at its original destination for just over a year: the John Brewer Reef in Australia, about 70 kilometers from Townsville, Queensland. The floating hotel has 200 rooms, clubs, bars, a gym, a sauna and two restaurants. A tennis court was also added. And although the luxurious hotel was anchored just outside Townsville, it left a lasting impression there.

The ship, which bore the somewhat unwieldy name The Four Seasons Barrier Reef Resort, was the idea of Doug Tarca, a project developer from Townsville. His original plan was to have three cruise ships permanently anchored in the Great Barrier Reef - but this idea was rejected.

Direct access to the Great Barrier Reef

Together with a Swedish company specializing in floating living spaces, he designed the floating hotel. The construction of the ship was subject to various conditions: since it was to be anchored permanently in the Great Barrier Reef, the ship had to be specially built.

So a special non-toxic paint was used to paint the hull. There is a filter system for the wastewater and the cleaned water is dumped back into the sea several miles outside the Great Barrier Reef. Each form and each type of waste had to be transported to the mainland.

Bankruptcies, bad luck and breakdowns

The construction costs of the ship, which was completed in 1987, amounted to around 40 million dollars. However, due to inconsistencies in the contract, the Singaporean company did not deliver the ship until January 1988. Then the ship was hit by a cyclone, which delayed the opening for another two months.

When it finally opened in March, the season was already over. The guests who came anyway did not have an easy journey: they were transported by water taxis 70 kilometers from the mainland to the hotel - when there was a storm, the transport was hardly possible, and the guests became seasick. Then the main catamaran, which was used to transport the visitors, caught fire on the mainland. All these circumstances, combined with poor marketing and management, meant the sinking of the floating hotel.

Second chance in Vietnam

After just over a year the hotel was closed and sold to a company in Vietnam. In 1989 it was towed 5000 kilometers to Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) and opened there as the "Saigon Floating Hotel". But despite the tourism boom that Vietnam was experiencing at the time, the owners had financial problems after only a few years and were forced to sell the luxury hotel.

This time the ship was sold to North Korea and towed to the holiday region Kumgangsan ("Diamond Mountain") on the border between North and South Korea. In 1998, it opened under the names "Sea Kumgang Hotel" and "Hotel Haegumgang" for tourists from South Korea.

Tragic incident

In North Korea, the floating hotel was quite successful: between 1998 and 2008, over one million guests came to the hotel. Until a tragic incident sealed the fate of the hotel: in 2008, a North Korean soldier accidentally shot and killed a South Korean tourist while she was on the edge of a military restricted area.

The hotel was closed, tours in the region forbidden for a short time. Although the floating hotel is still anchored off the coast, it has been abandoned for more than ten years. The "Supreme Leader" of North Korea, Kim Jong-un, is currently demolishing various buildings in the region. The future of the luxury ship, which has travelled more than 14,000 kilometers in 30 years, is uncertain.

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