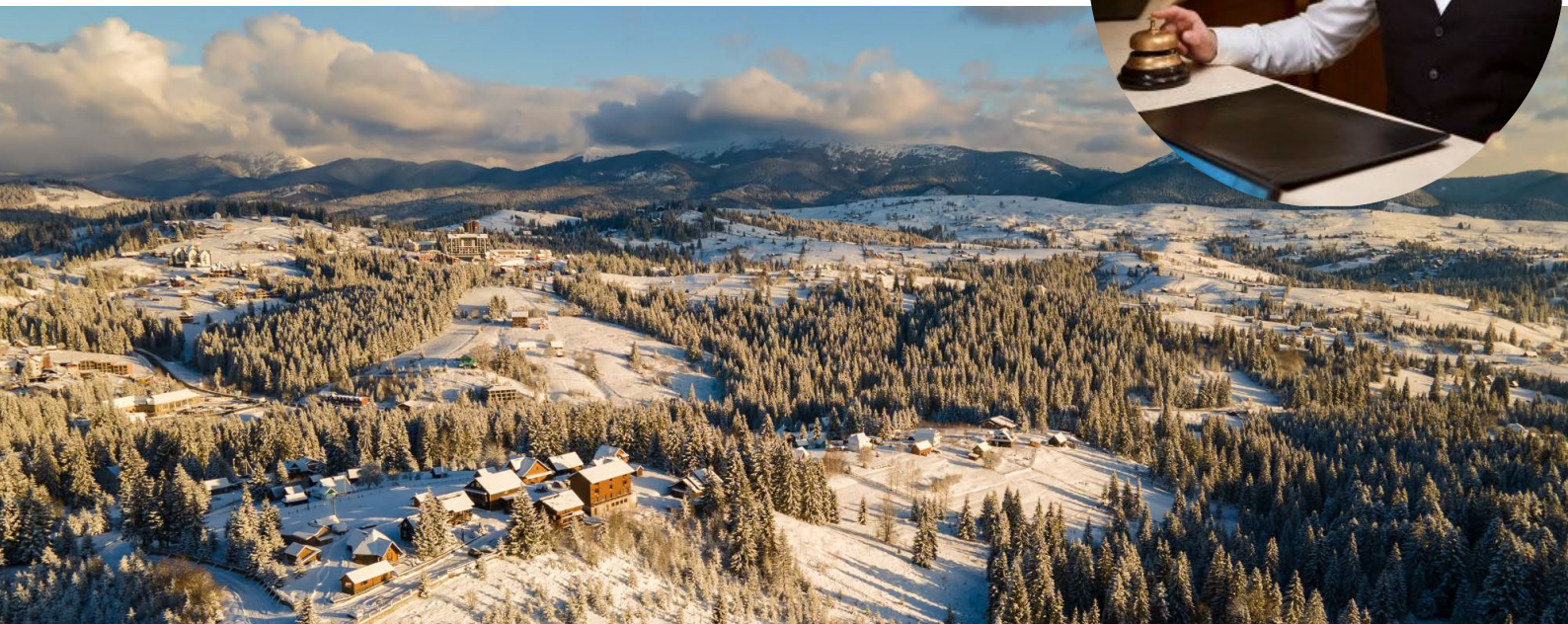




Hotel Elias – Sauerland Germany

Business in Numbers

Family owned for 3 Generations
48 Rooms and 4 Apartments
2 Pools (Heated with solar power)
Sauna and Steam Sauna
210 Solar Panels
Energy storage
4 EV Charging Points
3 Class Superior Hotel

Business Overview

Hotel Elias is a family-run hospitality business in rural Sauerland. Over the last several years, the hotel has made sustainability and digitalisation central to its development. Management has pursued both areas in a practical way, focusing on investments that improve long-term efficiency, reduce environmental impact, and support daily operations. The hotel combines ecological commitment with a clear business rationale and continues to professionalise this approach as market expectations evolve.

How is sustainability visible in daily operations?

Sustainability shows up in concrete operational decisions. Hotel Elias has installed 210 photovoltaic panels, a 50 kW energy storage unit, and a more energy-efficient centralised cooling system. Guest rooms are cleaned primarily with steam, which reduces chemical use in about 95% of cases. The hotel also heats its 2 pools via a solar-powered air-to-water heat exchanger. These measures were introduced not only out of ecological conviction, but also because management sees them as sensible long-term investments.

How is digitalisation used in operations and service?

Hotel Elias adopts digital tools when they clearly save time, reduce manual workload, or help maintain service quality. Current examples include service robots, the Smart Host CRM system, and a digital point-of-sale system. Management approaches digitalisation pragmatically rather than symbolically: technology is introduced when it solves a real operational problem, especially in a context shaped by labour shortages and efficiency pressure.

How are employees engaged in sustainability and digitalisation?

Employee involvement is still developing. Until now, sustainability and digitalisation have largely been introduced from the top down, with staff often using tools and systems without being deeply involved in the wider strategy. That is now beginning to change. As part of the GreenSign process, Hotel Elias plans seminars and department-level meetings to build awareness, strengthen ownership, and make sustainability a shared responsibility across the team.

What data is informing key decisions?

The hotel combines digital systems with close internal monitoring. Management uses CRM, POS, and automation tools, but also places strong emphasis on tracking operational indicators directly. The interview highlights a high level of internal data awareness, including manual monitoring of key figures such as gas consumption per guest. This allows management to evaluate investments and operational changes based on measurable performance rather than intuition alone.

What drives sustainability and digitalisation investments?

Three main drivers shape the hotel's decisions. The first is environmental conviction: management links its sustainability commitment to visible ecological change in the region. The second is economic logic: renewable energy and efficient systems are seen as financially sound over the long term. The third is operational necessity: digital tools help the hotel address labour shortages, protect service quality, and reduce pressure on daily routines. External market expectations also matter, especially when B2B customers increasingly expect visible sustainability standards such as certification.

How is sustainability communicated to customers?

Sustainability is communicated mainly through visible practice and increasingly through formal positioning. Operational measures such as renewable energy systems, low-chemical cleaning methods, and other efficiency investments shape the hotel's sustainability profile. At the same time, GreenSign certification has become more important because customers and B2B partners are placing greater weight on visible sustainability standards.

What are the main barriers to change?

The biggest barriers are financial pressure, uneven staff skills, and limited employee initiative in change processes. Major sustainability investments required significant capital, and many were financed without public support. On the digital side, staff digital confidence remains a challenge, including basic skills such as Excel. Some tools introduced by management were not fully adopted because usability, readiness, and training did not align well enough with everyday routines.

Describe the leadership approach

Hotel Elias follows a practical, opportunity-driven, and investment-oriented leadership style. Management acts early when a tool or solution seems useful, but keeps a strong focus on operational value. The interview also shows a reflective leadership mindset: peer exchange, observation of best practice, experimentation, and internal monitoring all play an important role in shaping decisions. The overall approach is entrepreneurial, curious, and strongly focused on practical improvement rather than formal rhetoric.

An example of leading through adversity

Hotel Elias has had to manage transformation under real constraints: high investment costs, skill shortages, limited external support, and the operational pressure of keeping a rural hospitality business competitive. Rather than waiting for ideal conditions, management has continued to invest, test solutions, and monitor performance closely. The case shows a business that moves forward step by step, using self-financed investment, peer learning, and constant adjustment to build resilience over time.

