

BEST PRACTICE GERBEHOF

Submitted by : ITKAM



CIRCULAR
ALBANIA
TOURISM



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SECTION 1: BASIC INFORMATION

- Title of the Best Practice: Gerbehof
- Website of the Practice: <https://www.gerbehof.de>
- Social Media links: https://www.instagram.com/naturresort_gerbehof?igsh=aWNiaWlpd3QxeTNt,
<https://www.facebook.com/gerbehof>
- Location: Friedrichshafen, Germany

SECTION 2: PRACTICE OVERVIEW

- Short Description of the Practice

The Gerbehof Naturresort, located near Lake Constance in southern Germany, is an organic-certified guesthouse that achieves near-zero waste through creative, low-tech solutions embedded in its daily operations. For example, compostable materials, such as coffee grounds, napkins, and eggshells, are fed into its composting system by mixing them with stable manure. After decomposition, the resulting compost is used as fertiliser for meadows and fruit trees, closing the nutrient loop in a true circular cycle. Paper and glass are sorted on site and taken to a recycling centre, while minimal packaging is ensured by purchasing products with little or no packaging or receiving them in reusable containers. Refillable bottles (Pfandflaschen) are used predominantly. Residual waste is minimal and delivered in person to the landfill by the team, with costs paid by weight, incentivising further waste reduction.

- Implementation Period: Ongoing (current operational model)
- Status:

☐ Planned ☐ Pilot phase ☐ Fully implemented ☒ Ongoing and evolving

- **Thematic Areas Addressed:**

☒ Farm to Fork / Sustainable Food Systems

☒ Waste Management

☒ Resource Efficiency

☐ Other: _____

Describe how the practice aligns with the selected Thematic Areas.

Gerbehof's approach to waste reduction is grounded in simplicity, practicality, and ecological consciousness. The hotel closes the organic waste loop with the compost produced, which nourishes meadows and fruit trees, reinforcing soil health and biodiversity while eliminating the carbon footprint tied to transporting organic waste off-site.

Proactive purchasing policies further limit waste: By choosing products with minimal packaging or delivery in reusable containers, Gerbehof minimises the generation of lightweight packaging waste, such as plastics, composite materials, and certain metals, thus reducing reliance on city waste-collection services. Refillable, deposit-return bottles are the norm, cutting down on single-use packaging in beverages. Any remaining residual waste is transported in person to the landfill by staff, where they pay by weight. This creates a strong incentive to reduce waste generation at the source.

These measures align with circular design principles: they prolong material usage, reduce reliance on new resources, and reintegrate organic outputs into productive cycles. The model integrates waste reduction with onsite ecology and stewardship, paving the way for resource efficiency. The visitors can directly witness this by participating in sustainable practices during their stay, from sorting their own waste and seeing compost put to use in the gardens, to enjoying fresh products grown with the resulting fertiliser. Consequently, Gerbehof distinguishes itself as a hands-on example of sustainable hospitality that leverages low-cost, high-impact solutions.

- **Explain how this activity fits within the tourism sector**

Waste reduction at Gerbehof is deeply integrated into the guest experience. In the kitchen, organic waste from meals is collected for composting, which contributes to soil fertility and supports plant health across the property. Packaging-conscious sourcing, reusable bottles, and visible recycling stations reinforce the resort's environmental commitment in guest areas. By embedding these practices into everyday operations, Gerbehof turns routine management into a living example of circular tourism, allowing guests to appreciate how sustainability shapes its identity.

- **What learning value for VET training, curriculum development or capacity-building of professionals does the practice offer?**

Gerbehof's model provides a clear, low-barrier template for hospitality educators and practitioners. It teaches how to integrate composting, packaging-conscious purchasing, and operational waste minimisation with no major technological investments. The strategy promotes active staff engagement, encourages environmental responsibility, and offers concrete results that could be transferred to rural lodgings, guesthouses, and agritourism in Albania.

SECTION 3: CHALLENGES AND ALIGNMENT WITH CIRCULAR ECONOMY PRINCIPLES

- **What challenges or barriers were addressed (based on the report findings)?**

- ☒ Waste management and disposal
- ☒ Energy/resource use
- ☒ Infrastructure limitations
- ☐ Seasonality
- ☒ Skills and capacity gaps
- ☒ Low awareness of CE
- ☐ Behavioural resistance
- ☐ Financial or funding constraints
- ☐ Other : _____

- **How were these challenges overcome?**

Gerbehof addressed its waste management challenges by creating a closed-loop, low-tech system that integrates seamlessly into daily operations. In the kitchen and dining areas, all compostable waste is collected and combined with stable manure from the property's horses. This mixture is left to decompose naturally and later applied as nutrient-rich fertiliser to the meadows and fruit orchards, visibly completing the organic cycle on site.

To deal with recyclable materials, the team implemented strict waste sorting. Paper and glass are separated at the source and regularly delivered to the local recycling facility, ensuring these resources re-enter the production cycle. Procurement practices were also adapted: When sourcing food and supplies, Gerbehof deliberately chooses products with little or no packaging, or requests delivery in reusable containers. This significantly reduces the volume of lightweight packaging waste collected by municipal services.

For beverages, refillable deposit bottles are used almost exclusively, limiting single-use plastics and packaging. The small amount of residual waste that remains is not left for external collection; staff personally transport it to the landfill, where fees are paid by weight. This practice reinforces a culture of accountability, as every kilogram of waste has a visible cost and a tangible environmental impact.

Through this combination of composting, recycling, mindful purchasing, and hands-on waste management, Gerbehof not only reduces its waste output to a minimum, but also embedded waste mindfulness into the culture of the property, involving staff and inspiring guests to adopt similar practices.

- **Which circular economy strategies does this practice address?**

- ☒ Waste reduction / reuse / recycling
- ☒ Renewable energy / energy efficiency
- ☐ Water conservation
- ☒ Circular product/service design
- ☒ Sustainable food systems / short food chains
- ☐ Eco-certifications or green standards
- ☐ Repair, refurbishment, or reuse of infrastructure/furnishings
- ☐ Digital tools for circularity or sustainability

- **Describe why this practice can be considered as a 'best practice' and how it contributes to one or more circular economy principles:**

Gerbehof excels by turning unavoidable waste into productive resources, minimising waste at its source. Here, guests are surrounded by fertile landscapes regenerated through compost use, as organic waste is composted and returned to the soil, improving the green areas surrounding the hotel. Guests can directly experience the results of this cycle when walking through the gardens, joining outdoor activities, or enjoying products grown with compost. By linking daily operations with tangible ecological outcomes, Gerbehof turns sustainability into a practical and engaging experience for visitors.

- **Describe why this practice can be considered as innovative. What new, creative or underused approach brings added value to circular tourism development?**

The combination of traditional composting with procurement strategies and hands-on staff involvement creates a holistic circular model. Procurement focuses on sourcing seasonal and local products, working with suppliers who reduce packaging and prioritise reusable containers. These choices not only cut waste but also support local SMEs and provide practical examples that can be transferred to VET learning contexts. Rather than introducing high-tech systems, Gerbehof relies on people, place, and ecology to deliver circular outcomes.

SECTION 4: COLLABORATION

Describe any collaboration that were involved in the development of this practice? Did this practice involve local authorities or other groups?

These practices are largely driven internally by the Gerbehof team (kitchen, groundskeepers, management), supported by local recycling infrastructure and collaboration with the municipal waste system for pickups and hazardous waste handling.

SECTION 5: RESULTS AND REPLICABILITY

- **What measurable results or outcomes were achieved?**

According to their website (<https://www.gerbehof.de/>), Gerbehof operates at nearly zero levels of organic and packaging waste, thanks to comprehensive on-site composting and minimised reliance on single-use materials. Soil enrichment through closed-loop composting supports the health of meadows and fruit trees across the property. Procurement policies focus on unpackaged or reusable materials, significantly reducing packaging consumption. The hotel also reports higher environmental engagement among staff and guests, fostered through its immersive wellness experiences and nature-based programming. Quantitative data or external verification is not publicly available at this time; however, these outcomes reflect the resort's practical and visible alignment with circular economy objectives.

- **Why is this practice relevant to the Albanian tourism context?**

In Albania, many rural tourism destinations, such as eco-lodges in mountainous areas, coastal resorts in less urbanised regions, and agritourism enterprises, face persistent challenges in organic waste management. Limited local infrastructure often means that waste must be stored for extended periods or transported long distances to disposal facilities, increasing costs, greenhouse gas emissions, and hygiene risks. Seasonal tourism peaks only aggravate the problem by generating large volumes of organic waste in short timeframes, overwhelming existing services.

Gerbehof's approach is directly relevant because it eliminates the need for frequent waste transport. It also processes organic material on-site into a valuable resource for agriculture and reduces reliance on single-use packaging. Applying such a model in Albania could offer a low-maintenance, low-cost, and high-impact solution, improving environmental performance. Lastly, this practice could align with the growing demand for sustainable and authentic tourism experiences, particularly in remote or infrastructure-limited areas.

- **What is the practice's potential for further expansion? How can it be applied or adapted to other Albanian tourism destinations or businesses?**

The practice is highly adaptable across Albania's rural tourism sector. On-site composting could turn kitchen scraps into fertiliser for olive groves, vineyards, or vegetable gardens attached to the property, reducing waste while producing food for guests. Packaging-conscious sourcing might involve buying cheese, honey, or preserves directly from local farmers in reusable jars, or purchasing bulk dry goods from regional markets to avoid single-use plastics. Staff empowerment could include training housekeeping and kitchen teams to manage waste separation and composting, with clear roles and visible results, such as guests being served fruit grown in orchards nourished by the compost. By combining these elements, Albanian tourism businesses can reduce waste, support local producers, and offer visitors an authentic, eco-friendly experience rooted in the destination's landscape and traditions.

- **What advice would you give others looking to implement a similar initiative?**

Start with small-scale composting using kitchen and garden waste. Try to adopt purchasing habits that minimise packaging and avoid plastic whenever possible. Then, source from local producers, as their products typically require little to no packaging compared to long-distance suppliers. Engage staff in waste tracking and reuse culture, showcasing also visible results to the guests (e.g., signage about compost and recycling efforts) to foster awareness and pride.



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