

# HOTEL OF DREAMS

**Hotel of Dreams was selected for the Silver Wolf Competition at IDFA Documentary Film Festival in Amsterdam 2005.**

## Synopsis

After 25 years in Europe, Jeannot returns to his native Senegal to realise his childhood dream of building a HOTEL in the heart of the coastal village of Popenguine. The village has been subjected to foreign overfishing and drought. There is need for economic development – but is tourism the answer? Opinions differ. Values are put to the test.

Although Jeannot wants co-operation and development he is a changed man after 25 years in Europe and his dream of “returning home” is hard to realise. It is not easy to build a hotel, encourage the tourists to come and to become part of the reality he left long ago. In Popenguine they say that “If you don’t come to us then we won’t come to you”. Karim the schoolteacher is critical of the hotel and the negative consequences of tourism. Birane the taxi driver sees the potential and tries to encourage dialogue.

BLACK and WHITE are set in motion in Jeannot’s soul and in the little community, which is subjected to the entry of global tourism.

When “Hotel of Dreams” was finished, the film’s director Helle Toft Jensen returned to Popenguine to show the film on the village square. Read below.

- Director Helle Toft Jensen
- Producer Signe Byrge Sørensen
- Editor Niels Pagh Andersen
- Image and Sound Helle Toft Jensen, Serigne Drame, Jean Diouf Line Producer Fatoumata Kandé Senghor
- Sound Design Bjørn Vidø
- Assistance Amadou Sene, Abdou Aziz Fall, Korthe Lund
- Participants Jean Marie Da Sylva, Abdou Karim Ndiaye, Birane Faye
- Thanks to all participants in Popenguine and Bruxelles.
- SPOR MEDIA Co-production NDR / Arte • YLE Coproductions
- *Produced in co-operation with* TV 2 / Denmark • RTBF • ETV • TSR Production *Produced with support from* The Danish Film Institute The European Commission – DG Development • DCCD • Danish Ministry of Education • Danida

ARTICLE by Helle Toft Jensen, director of the film

**Hotel of Dreams – World premiere in Popenguine**

By Helle Toft Jensen

Right from point when we started filming – four years ago – I have spent a lot of time considering my/the team's relationship with Popenguine. I knew I would be filming several times in the village, and that I wouldn't automatically pay people for taking part. For that reason, my Senegalese line producer Fatou Kande Senghor and I decided from one shoot to another how we would give individuals and groups of people something in return for their co-operation.

### **A second "family"**

The imam always got sugar and tea and a sack of rice, which he shared with the village poor. The elders got rugs to sit on in their yard, the sacristan got wine, the women got Viking jewellery. After a while, though, the contributors suggested their own needs ...: Payment of their electricity bill, Viagra for the old men, contraceptive pills and condoms for the young adults, vitamin tablets for the children, chalk and compass for the school, de-lousing treatments and medicines for several people who needed them....We thus developed a "family-like" relationship with the town, and everyone knew that we didn't just come to help ourselves, but made exchanges. Only the school teacher/project developer Karim and taxi-driver Birane were paid for their loss of earnings they incurred while working for us. The protagonist Jeannot were given handicraft products from Denmark.

At the outset I promised the imam and all the contributors that I would return and show them the film when I had finished making it. People had, however, been made many promises by "Toubabs" – whites passing through – and most of the photos never turned up.

SPOR MEDIA and I believe it is very important for us as film makers to behave properly in the global village, when we roll up to tell our stories about people in other cultures. Apart from the fact that the barter trade is already distorted, it is very healthy to stand face to face with people and show them the story you have assembled about their lives.

### **A necessary dialogue**

We decided to show the film on the village's central square, using the Hotel wall for the giant screen. Technicians arrived from Dakar with the best video equipment we could get. The women's groups organised green plastic chairs, cakes and soft drinks. A lady "GRIOT" (storyteller/harbinger) went from door to door to tell people the film was going to be shown. So as the sun went down, the people emerged. At least 600 people turned out on the first night. And just as many came on the second, when the film was shown in a school playground.

First we showed "Voices from Popenguine" – a short film in four parts in which all of those who gave me their voices made their opinions known about their VILLAGE, about TOURISM, the HOTEL and the FUTURE. Most of these people are not in the actual film "Hotel of Dreams", because it to an ever-increasing extent became a portrait of a Senegalese, JEANNOT, who return home with a DREAM: of building a hotel at the heart of their little fishing village.

Everyone was laughing when they saw themselves on the screen, – deeply moved by how beautiful their village was and went silent when elderly folk who had since passed away spoke. And when we later showed "Hotel of Dreams", everyone was very attentive. In the course of 59 minutes, the returning foreigner – at a single blow – came right up close to them, and he himself saw more clearly the village he has chosen to become a part of. It was an incredibly important gesture to give the film back to the people who it is about. The films now exist in several copies in the village. "Hotel of Dreams" was actually made for my neighbour. It is a European audience I wanted to address, which is why it was co-produced with the Franco-German TV station ARTE and already sold to TV stations in Denmark, Finland, Belgium, Switzerland and Estonia. Anyhow, it was wonderful to experience how, at a single blow, we speeded up communication in the village: A major, important "dialogue" about the arrival of tourism in their village gathered momentum. A dialogue that is decisive as to whether they become overrun by global tourism and wiped off the map as a fine community, or, take their time to discuss the issue, and secure the necessary influence in the development of their village.

