



# Getting with the programme

Hoteliers in Asia have traditionally looked upon corporate social responsibility as a form of philanthropy, and environmental issues weren't taken seriously. Thanks to public and governmental pressure, however, a growing number of hotel groups operating in the region are starting to adopt green friendly initiatives, reports *Michael Taylor*



The Dusit Thani Maldives was designed to minimise its environmental impact on the island

The lobby of Novotel Auckland Airport features a 10-metre living wall which helps to naturally regulate the lobby temperature and purify the air



The Upper House chef Gray Kunz – Swire Hotels sources as much local produce as possible to reduce the group's carbon footprint



Hansar Samui's organic garden

In Siem Reap, Cambodia, Sofitel Angkor Phokeethra has launched a number of interesting sustainability initiatives. “Organic waste is ‘methanised’ to produce gas used for cooking,” Lewis says. “The solution uses bacteria to decompose organic waste anaerobically, i.e. in an air-tight container, thereby producing methane, a bio-gas that is then used to prepare 700 meals a day for employees.”

Since 2004, the hotel has partnered with Agrisud International to support small producers located in the outskirts of the town of Siem Reap. “The NGO provides farmers with knowledge and best practice on producing vegetables sought by the hotel and established a calendar of culture to allocate production between farmers with the objective of providing an adequate supply at the hotel,” Lewis says.

“The project improves livelihoods for local farmers, who learn more efficient and sustainable farming practices and enables Sofitel Angkor Phokeethra to source more of its produce locally, rather than flying it in from Bangkok or further afield.”

In Bangkok, Novotel Bangkok on Siam Square has an initiative that helps the hotel reduce organic waste while decreasing its use of chemicals. “Waste fruit and vegetables are fermented into a vinegar using efficient microorganisms,” Lewis says. “The liquid is used to clean pipes and machinery and help its in-house wastewater treatment plan operate more efficiently. As a result of the programme, the hotel disposes of less food waste, saves money on cleaning agents and reduces the quantity of chemicals that are released to water.”

With a commitment to ending the sexual exploitation of children, more than 100,000 employees at Accor properties have been trained to recognise and prevent child sex tourism through the group's partnership with the NGO ECPAT International, a network of organisations and individuals working to end child prostitution and the trafficking of children.

But regional hotel groups are starting to tackle the issue, as well. Take Dusit Thani International, a Thai-based hotel group, for example. It has properties throughout Thailand as well as in Egypt, the Maldives, the Philippines and the United Arab Emirates. More are planned in China, India, and the United States.

### Minimising impact

Opened at the beginning of this year, the Dusit Thani Maldives is a case in point. Its

Accor Hotels, one of the world's largest hospitality groups, launched a new sustainable development programme called Planet 21 in April 2012. Implemented worldwide across all of its properties, which include Sofitel, Pullman and Mercure, among others, the initiative is aimed at encouraging employees, guests, owners, and suppliers to contribute to making the group's hotels more sustainable.

“While Planet 21 is a new programme, Accor's sustainability journey spans nearly two decades, with practical initiatives such as the creation of an environment department in 1994, of a hotel environment charter in 1998, and the adoption of many solutions aimed at contributing to the development of local communities, optimising water and energy consumption and reducing its hotels' environmental footprint,” says Evan Lewis, vice president communications, Accor Asia Pacific.

Over the last five years, the group has achieved several milestones. Water consumption has been reduced by 12%. Low consumption light bulbs have been installed in 82% of hotels. An environmental certification such as ISO 14001 or Earth

Check has been obtained by 590 properties.

With Planet 21, Accor is making 21 ambitious commitments, each with a measurable goal. By 2015, the group hopes to further reduce water consumption by 15%, energy use by 10% and greenhouse gas emissions by 10%. The ratio of hotels recycling and using eco-labeled cleaning products and eco-labeled bath amenities should reach 85%, and 40% of hotels should have achieved an Earth Check or ISO 14001 environmental management certification.

### Savings means reforestation

But benefits of the group's initiatives go beyond the properties themselves. If guests staying at Accor hotels reuse their towels, for example, half of the laundry costs saved go towards reforestation efforts. Around two million trees have been planted since the scheme was launched in 2008.

iPads allows a paperless arrival and departure experience at The Upper House



Aquaponic fish farm at Hansar Samui



infrastructure was designed to minimise its environmental impact on the island.

“Our resort has the distinction of being located in a world-renowned UNESCO biosphere reserve, where the rich tropical waters are filled with a diverse array of marine life, namely seasonal gatherings of the gentle giants: manta rays and whale sharks,” says Victoria Hilley, director of sales & marketing, the Dusit Thani Maldives. “The entire operation is geared towards achieving a carbon-neutral programme. We are one of the leaders in sustainable resort development in the Maldives.”

A clear road map has been established to promote sustainable tourism. Included are benchmarks for potential reduction in the areas of energy, carbon dioxide, water, and waste to landfill.

“Serving as a gatekeeper for the local biodiversity, we even hired a marine biologist to educate our guests on the beauty of the underwater world around our island as well as to lead programmes inviting guests to plant and regenerate coral and dives to identify sharks and manta rays,” Hilley says.

Hansar Hotels and Resorts is another Thai-based group. It has boutique properties in Bangkok and Koh Samui. As an example of its commitment to the environment, even its high-rise property in Bangkok has open air corridors to minimise the need for

air conditioning. And renewable resources, such as fast-growing bamboo, were used as much as possible in the design of its beachfront property in Koh Samui.

“Hansar always tries to be green and supportive both from a guest perspective, as well as for our staff and local community,” says Indra Budiman, general manager at the Hansar Samui. “We established this when we first formalised the company in 2009 as part of the company culture. We think it is important to adopt such a policy as we need to give something back to the community and the Earth. We hope by doing so we can be a good green entrepreneur.”

Initiatives include the use of non-plastic bottles for guest room toiletries, a 100% full waste water recycle system for re-use for its garden in Koh Samui and a 100% biodegradable green waste recycle system to make compost for use in the hotel garden.

Hong Kong-based Swire Hotels is a collection of three individual hotel brands – The House Collection, EAST, and Chapter Hotels. The group has maintained a sustainable policy since it was founded four years ago.

“Swire Hotels commits to develop sustainable and environmentally friendly hotels in an economically and socially responsible way,” says Clare Lavery, head of marketing, Swire Hotels. “Our policy

launched when we did in March 2008. We do it because, quite simply, it is the right thing to do.”

From check-in to check-out, Swire strives to create a paperless experience for guests. “We like to keep things as paper-free as possible – from a paperless arrival and departure experience with the use of iPad to your very own iPod Touch in-room loaded with information about the hotel and its surroundings,” Lavery says.

### Off the menu

Local, seasonal, and organic foods are sourced at local markets to reduce the group’s carbon footprint. “All the hotels support sustainable dining, which avoids endangered or at risk species such as blue fin tuna,” Lavery says. “We have never served shark fin and are delighted to see other groups following suit now also.”

Since June 1, 2011, Marco Polo Club members flying on a Cathay Pacific or Dragonair flight and staying at a Swire Hotels property have been able to offset the carbon emissions from their inbound journey to support the development of environmental projects in mainland China. The Upper House in Hong Kong and The Opposite House Beijing were the first two hotels to take part in the scheme.

“I think our guests appreciate our sensitivity to the concerns of the communities in which we operate, showing leadership when required and at all times respecting the environment which we share,” Lavery says. “Whether it has a direct impact on business is hard to say, but it is certainly an important part of our brand.”

One of the challenges facing the ecotourism movement in Asia has been a lack of awareness on sustainability issues across stakeholder groups. This runs from the public to governments to the operators of hotels.

“Until recently, corporate social responsibility in Asia was equated with philanthropy,” Lewis says. “We’re seeing a shift in this, however, with major regional exchanges, such as Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore introducing new sustainability reporting initiatives, and we are seeing a number of major Asian companies now reporting on their environmental and social performance.”

“In addition, the public and governments are expecting companies to be more sustainable and are increasingly holding them accountable.” **AHOT**