

From Food Waste to Furniture: Sustainability Practices at Swire Group Hotels



Source: Unsplash (2023)

Background

Sustainability has become a major topic for hotels nowadays as travelers become increasingly environmentally conscious. With the goal of creating a greener future, the Swire group has rolled out a range of eco-friendly initiatives at its two hotels in Hong Kong (Swire Properties, n.d.).

The Food Waste Recycling Machine, 'ORCA'

Located on the 1/F of EAST Hong Kong in Quarry Bay, the bustling restaurant FEAST (Food by EAST) is certified under the Swire Properties Green Kitchen Initiative (Swire Hotels, 2022). Among the many eco-friendly practices adopted by the restaurant, the most noteworthy is the food waste recycling machine, 'ORCA' (Swire Hotels, 2022). The ORCA is a Canadian-designed technology that can decompose up to 45 kg of solid food waste per hour into liquid form, which can be safely discharged into the drainage system through a grease interceptor. The process also produces effluent that can later be captured to generate renewable energy at sewage treatment plants (HKTDC, 2020). Over the course of 2023, the two ORCAs installed at EAST Hong Kong disposed of a total of 11,915 kg of food waste—the equivalent of two elephants (Swire Hotels, 2023). The implementation of ORCA not only reduces waste going to landfill but also supports sustainable energy generation.

The Zero-waste Christmas Tree

On the other hand, The Upper House in Admiralty emphasizes limiting the use of natural resources, with its building engineering team taking pride in improving the building's energy efficiency and water consumption (The Upper House, n.d.). As part of their past projects, the hotel created a 3.6-metre-tall upcycled Christmas tree made from 38,600 discarded plastic bottles and upcycled glass, which were shredded and melted into sparkling orbs resembling glittering Christmas ornaments (Swire Hotels, 2022). Designed with the concept of "The Tree That Lives On," the 100% upcycled Christmas tree was later reconfigured into five sets of

furniture after being displayed over the holiday season. The furniture sets were then auctioned to raise a total of HK\$170,000 for charities supporting underprivileged families in Hong Kong (Swire Hotels, 2022).

Challenges

Although these initiatives and technologies can effectively reduce the hotels' carbon footprint, their effectiveness greatly depends on staff knowledge and environmental awareness. Moreover, despite such meaningful and innovative approaches to sustainability, there is a lack of promotion to inform the public about the group's sustainable measures. The group should consider putting up information boards around the hotel or working with local news media to promote and educate the public about the hotel's sustainable designs, such as the zero-waste Christmas tree.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the potential benefits and challenges of using technology like ORCA in reducing food waste in the hospitality industry?
2. In what ways can the zero-waste Christmas tree project at The Upper House serve as a model for other hotels looking to implement sustainable practices?
3. How can hotels effectively promote their sustainability initiatives to increase public awareness and engagement?
4. How important is it for hotels to collaborate with local media to promote their green initiatives?
5. What role does staff knowledge and engagement play in the success of sustainability initiatives?

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Keywords

- Sustainability
- Hotel
- Food waste recycling
- Environmental Awareness
- Zero-waste
- Carbon footprint

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