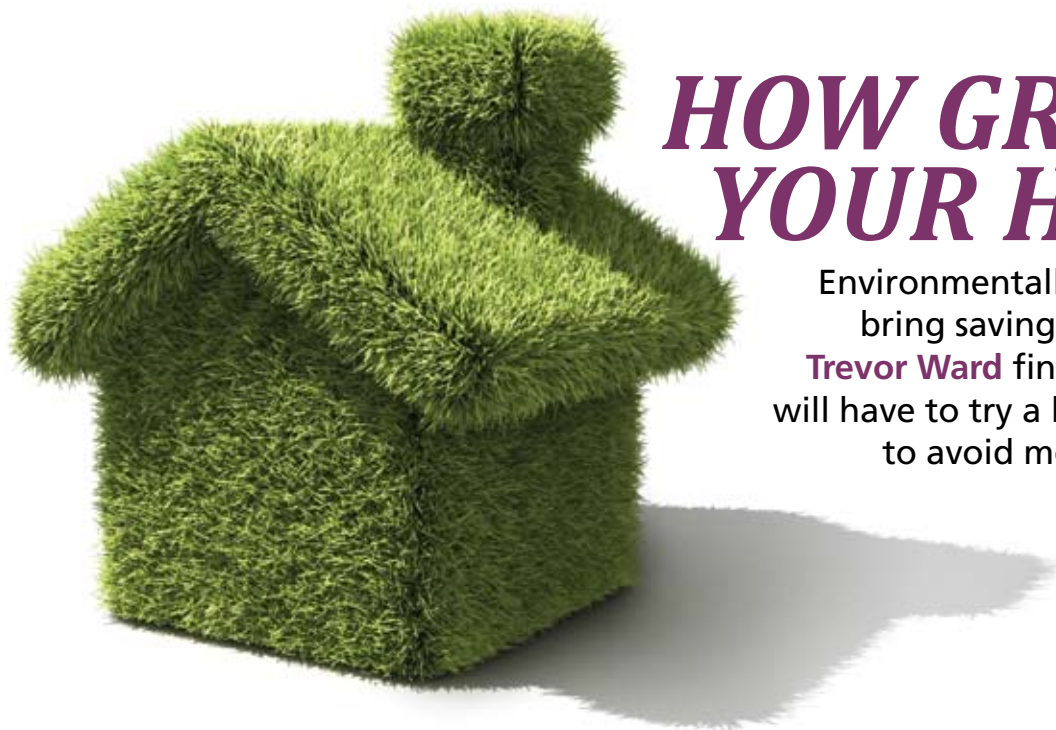


HOW GREEN IS YOUR HOTEL?

Environmentally friendly hotels can bring savings and customers. But **Trevor Ward** finds ecotourism claims will have to try a lot harder if they are to avoid merely sounding good



Few hotels that claim to be green go much beyond a plaintive request to consider the environment and reuse your towels, which are then replaced by the room attendant each day anyway. Paying attention to the environment can end up being little more than what critics label “green wash” – all talk and little action.

They’re missing a trick. The experience of hotel developers in the USA shows that the payback on the additional cost of building a sustainable hotel is measured in months, not years.

In Africa the case is even more salient. The availability of potable water in Africa is a huge issue, which is only going to get worse. An estimated 300 million Africans have no access to adequate water and sanitation facilities.

Fairmont Hotels reckon that the average water consumption of an occupied hotel room is 825 litres – and according to Infochangeindia.com, the average daily water consumption of a luxury hotel room in Delhi is a staggering 1,600 litres, ten times that of the average city resident.

At the Fairmont Hotel in Toronto, under the City of Toronto’s ICI Water Saver Program, businesses are rewarded for demonstrated water savings. In 2005, the hotel installed a commercial water softener that reduced water use in the laundry to one wash and one rinse per cycle, saving 476,000 litres of water per day – enough water to supply 500 homes.

Voting with their beds

It isn’t only about operational cost savings – it’s important for attracting custom. Ten years ago, guests didn’t much care about whether a hotel offered internet services. Today, a hotel that doesn’t have high-speed, wireless broadband is at a distinct competitive disadvantage. I can see the day in the near future when a hotel that doesn’t have green credentials will also suffer,

because the customer has a choice.


Several hotel chains that operate in Africa are promoting green operational practices. Rezidor, one of the fastest growing chains in Africa, produces an annual Sustainability Report, which in 2008 reported that energy consumption decreased 6% in their Radisson Blu properties and 14% in Park Inn; that water consumed per guest night was down 3% and 7% respectively, and that waste per guest night was down 2% for Radisson Blu and 22% for Park Inn.

“We are living in a world which increasingly views green

I can see the day when a hotel that doesn’t have green credentials will suffer

initiatives as a crucial foundation for business,” says Kurt Ritter, CEO of Rezidor

InterContinental’s new online Green Engage system envisages energy savings of up to 25%. Marriott has developed a five-point strategy in collaboration with Conservation International, which includes reducing fuel and water consumption by 25% per available room over the next ten years, installing solar power at up to 40 hotels by 2017, and expanding existing “reduce, reuse, recycle” programmes.

Given the phenomenal activity in the African hospitality business today, as evidenced by the unprecedented number of internationally-branded hotels under construction or in advanced stages of planning, Africa should be in the forefront. The triple benefits – cost savings from operations, consumer acceptability, and “doing the right thing” in a continent which still retains much of its natural environment – far outweigh any additional investment required. 

25% : drop by which Marriott promises to reduce fuel and water consumed per room by 2019