

# Hotel trends: When luxury becomes responsible



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*Six Senses Resort Con Dao, Vietnam*

**In a world where financial and environmental issues have become a realistic worry, overt luxury is not something to boast about anymore. The modern consumer is more responsible, critical and demanding. But for those not ready to let go of their high standards, there is now a way to stay chic and become responsible at the same time. The tourism industry saw the opportunity for a new trend: «eco-chic» hotels. But the concept was not that obvious in the first place. The idea of luxury often comes with the assumption that guests paying top dollar are entitled to expect more services and thus consume more than the average customer. And as for the green movement, it revolves mostly around the principle that energy and consumption should be reduced as much as possible. Their positions have then remained at opposite ends of the spectrum until the emergence of the «eco-chic» concept introduced the idea that luxury can become environmentally friendly. Integrity, as much as authenticity, are presented as the core values of luxury, with the ethics behind the concept and the products within it put forward.**

#### **A win-win formula**

The eco-chic hospitality business has its own Tables of the Law. It needs to be financially viable, provide financial benefits to the local community, respect and highlight the culture and

traditions of the area where it has established itself, minimize the negative environmental impacts while trying to contribute positively to the conservation of natural heritage.

Everybody benefits from this trend – the consumer, the environment, the local community, the investor and the hotelier. This winning scenario is set to grow exponentially over the next decade, especially in the tourism sector, which has considerable influence over the future sustainability and wellbeing of communities all over the world.

#### **A new clientele**

The baby boomer generation, which contributed to the development of branded hotels, represents today the main luxury travelers. But as they are getting older, younger individuals more conscious about sustainability and environment take over and drive changes in the industry.

#### **Recycling and saving energy are the new mantras**

For green hotel managers, the new hobby-horses are energy, waste and water-saving measures. Some resorts limit the use of water with low-flow showerheads and electricity thanks to solar panels and wind generators. Natural ventilation replaces air-conditioning and new systems of ionized water in swimming pools reduce the use of chemicals. Some resorts even installed recycling bins inside the rooms. Another initiative is carbon-

offsetting, since spending several hours on the plane is far from being green friendly. The new challenge for many professionals is now to become carbon neutral.

#### A global trend

From Kenya to Bangkok, uber-green hotels emerge every day. Europe insists on eco-friendly architecture and refurbishing such as Hi Hotel and Le Morgane in France. But they have a harder time with energy saving than tropical regions. Africa leads the way in eco-chic travel, becoming the epitome of barefoot luxury. Tour operator professionals sell it well claiming it is more about the luxury of the experience than the experience of the luxury. Asia is the most crowded region, with a large number of eco-chic resorts. The Maldives are the flagship destination, followed by Thailand and Cambodia. On the South American side, Mexico and Brazil lead the way. City hotels were the last to realize the importance of sustainability, with some of the luxury brands only joining the trend in recent months such as the New York Palace of the Dorchester Collection. Green resorts are being developed in the region, even if it still lags behind the rest of the world. The clientele is mostly composed of Westerners looking for an Arabian experience. The Six Senses Zigby Bay in Oman is a good example on how a luxurious hotel tries to blend in with its natural surroundings. Guests can take an Arabic culinary workshop, go fishing or paragliding. Another project Evason Ma'In Hot Springs, managed by Six Senses, was opened near Madaba in Jordan. Direct competition is Starwood's brand Element, which can be found in Oman and Abu Dhabi. Dubai has publicly spoken out

for the green trend. In 2008, it launched an eco initiative to encourage hotels to cut their CO2 emissions by 20% by the end of 2011. Outside the city center, Al Maha Desert Resort & Spa promotes traditional life in the desert. Its Bedouin tent settlement offers private suites furnished with regional artwork and antiques.

#### Egypt jumps on the bandwagon: the Green Star Hotel Label

The Adrère Amellal Desert Eco Lodge is also one of the eco-chic pioneers in Egypt. The lodges are made of local karshif (a mix of stone, salt water and clay), the furniture is carved from clay, the natural ventilation uses the winds and an underwater stream feeds the pool. And there is no electricity. The German group Iberotel is also trying to respect the green trend through its 14 branches all over the country. Novotel in Cairo follows the lead as well.

In Egypt, more and more professionals now understand the opportunity of the green trend, both for the environment and their business. In July, the Ministries of Tourism and Environment signed a cooperation protocol with CEDAR Tree Foundation for Eco Labels. And last February a project started in partnership with the «European Neighborhood Policy Initiative» that will help over the next two years 30 hotels in Alexandria and another 25 in Marsa Matrouh to become eligible to receive an eco-label from the European Union, an international set of environmental specifications. It will be overseen by the «Center for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe» in cooperation with the Environment Ministry, the Tourism Ministry and the governorates of Alexandria and Marsa Matrouh.

The project aims at implementing a rationing system for water consumption, while also introducing clean energy sources



Adrere Amellal, Siwa

such as solar and wind energy as well as the recycling of waste. Holding an eco-label will be a boost for these hotels and the touristic activity in the area more generally, attracting a new clientele and increasing their competitiveness.

But the most significant move is the Green Star Hotel label, which aims to stimulate the hotel industry towards environmentally sustainable development. The awards scheme is the first of its kind to be designed specifically for hotels in Egypt. A pilot destination was chosen in 2008 to test the concept. El Gouna, a resort located on the Red Sea, was selected for its traditional architecture and internal recycling and water treatment plants. Today more than 16 of the hotels are holding the Green Star Certification. And new resorts are now on the map, such as Taba, Makadi and Sharm al-Sheikh. The goal is to reduce their water, energy and chemical consumption up to 30%, use renewable energy up to 25%, assure proper waste handling and reduce the waste accumulation up to 20%. To receive the Green Star hotel certification, hotels need to fulfill 10 environmental mandatory key criteria. They can achieve three, four or five star ratings depending on the initiatives put in place. To help them, the Green Star Hotel Initiative provides a Practical Toolkit to support the hotels. It consists of a guidelines manual, graphic marketing and training tools.



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