



Demonstrating the impacts/benefits of sustainable tourism certification: The case of Seychelles Sustainable Tourism Label (SSTL)

About the SSTL

The Seychelles Sustainable Tourism Label (SSTL) is a voluntary, user-friendly, sustainable tourism management and certification program designed specifically for use in Seychelles. The label encourages hotels in Seychelles to mainstream sustainability practices into their operations with the aim of safeguarding the biodiversity and culture of the country. The SSTL seeks to encourage and guide improvements in sustainability outcomes as such the project is much an educational process as an examination process.

The certification process involves the following five steps: **Communication**, which involves communicating the label message and the benefits of the certification process to accommodation managers and owners to enlist their participation in the program, **Application** which involves hotels doing an internal assessment and then applying for the SSTL, **Assessment** which involves review of the application and statement of compliance from the hotel and a third party audit, **Verification** in which assessment forms are verified for completeness and scoring of each section is reviewed and **Award** which involves a panel for endorsement of the award recommendations.

The assessment criteria for the SSTL balances environmental, social and economic priorities and are grouped under eight themes, namely; the Management's commitment to sustainable policies, energy conservation, water conservation, waste management, community involvement, staff welfare, guest satisfaction and engagement in conservation practices. In order for a hotel to qualify for certification it is necessary that they earn a minimum number of points under each of these themes.

Aim and context of the case study

The SSTL is still in its early days. So far five hotels have been certified of which three have completed the first term of certification. These are the Berjaya Beau Vallon Beach Resort & Casino, Constance Ephelia Resort and Hanneman Holiday Residence. It is the opportune time as these hotels go through the process of re-certification to do a short case study and see what the certification and its process has meant for them.



These three case studies seek to demonstrate the positive impact and value derived from responsible tourism within the Seychelles context.

THE BERJAYA BEAU VALLON BEACH RESORT & CASINO



Business and Awards Overview

The Berjaya Beau Vallon Bay Resort and Casino is located on the North Coast of Mahe Island, on the popular Beau Vallon Beach. It is one of the oldest hotels on Mahe dating back to 1972. The hotel has seen management changes over the years moving from being a state owned hotel to form part of the Berjaya chain hotels. The hotels boasts 232 rooms and is recognised for its very active involvement in its community and in the Seychelles at large.

In September 2012, the hotel was amongst the first to become an SSTL certified hotel after making special efforts to mainstream sustainability practices into its business operations. This certification for the hotel means more commitment towards creating awareness about sustainable practices amongst the hotel's guest, staff and the local community in general.

Berjaya's Initial Situation – Prior to SSTL Certification

The hotel's journey towards sustainability began way before the launching of the SSTL. It was among the hotels that voluntarily participated in the SSTL pilot assessments. These assessments highlighted some good sustainable practices already in place and also identified a number of weaknesses. It was through this exercise that the hotel became interested in the label and it showed its commitment by seeking the necessary technical expertise to assist it in addressing its weaknesses and prepare for certification. This included looking at ways to improve waste, water and energy management as well as drafting of the necessary policy documents that would guide the hotel in the best steps to take towards sustainability.



Impacts

Seychelles suffers from periods of drought every year and it is a difficult time for everyone as water restrictions are applied across the country. The Berjaya Beau Vallon is spread over a large property and maintaining the grounds and landscaping efforts during this period is a challenge. Through the certification, the SSTL label has encouraged the hotel to look at rain water harvesting. Through the provision of tanks and collection of rain water the hotel has managed to better maintain its grounds and keep its landscaping to a desirable standard.

As part of the SSTL requirements the hotel has also set up its own composting for green waste and this further goes towards the maintenance of the grounds and has greatly reduced the cost of buying compost for the hotel.

Additionally, the SSTL certification has benefited the hotel by increasing staff awareness on sustainable practices, and the importance of reducing wastage.

The SSTL has also encouraged the Berjaya Beau Vallon Bay to become more actively involved in its local community through a number of donations and activities. The hotel has a well- established partnership with the Beau Vallon Primary School, where the hotel has funded the creation of a spice garden, which is grown by the students and the produce sold back to the hotel. Berjaya Beau Vallon Bay also supports the Old People's Home of the Beau Vallon District.

Efforts to better manage energy and water consumption is in place through the provision of low flow devices at the guest toilets, Guest information on importance of water and need to change linen less often. 100% LED lights throughout the public areas, cooling systems for the guest rooms are set on a minimum of 23 degrees and key cards assist in switching off lighting in the rooms when guests are out.

Despite these numerous efforts the hotel notes that the energy and water consumption figures for the past two years do not reflect desired reductions in consumption. The hotel will be concentrating on improving these results during this new certification period by conducting energy and water audits and applying proper energy and water monitoring methods to identify areas of weakness and wastage and implementing appropriate control measures.

With the challenges currently being faced by the Berjaya Beau Vallon Bay Hotel, especially with the decrease in the direct flights from the Seychelles' main markets and opening of new resorts as well as smaller establishments in the vicinity, the hotel is undergoing major refurbishment and maintenance, this added with the SSTL certification will surely help the hotel to stand out from its competitors, providing an added advantage and appeal to the increasingly environmentally conscious visitor.



HANNEMAN HOLIDAY RESIDENCE



Business and Awards Overview

The Hanneman Holiday Residence which opened on the 17th December 2009 is located in Beau Vallon and is only a few minutes' walk to Mahe's most popular beach. It is a small tourism business comprising of seven self-catering apartments; four duplex apartments of two bedrooms, one penthouse apartment with two bedrooms, one penthouse of one bedroom and one terrace studio.

The Hanneman Holiday Residence which has a reputation of being an eco-friendly accommodation was certified by the SSTL in 2012. For the Management of the hotel, being certified by the SSTL signifies their commitment to sustainable tourism practices.

Hanneman's Initial Situation – Prior to SSTL Certification

The Hanneman Holiday Residence, owned by a naturalised German national, known to be environmentally conscious, had taken into account sustainable practices at its conception stage, mainly geared towards water and energy conservation. Water saving methods such as taps providing aerated water and low flow devices in toilets have been installed. A large underground reservoir assists during drought periods.

LED lights and energy saving equipment are in use and, in spite of the availability of air conditioning units in all guestrooms, fans are also provided as an alternative cooling option which uses less energy. Double glazed doors and windows to aid conservation by retaining cool air have been integrated into the hotel design.



Hanneman Holiday Residence underwent an intensive audit process to achieve certification in 2012, making it the only small hotel to be certified so far. Whilst the hotel has achieved the majority of the criteria requirements, areas which would require additional emphasis were participation in local campaigns, installation of solar panels and staff training.

Impacts

Adopting sustainability practices ensures that service delivered is excellent, thus helping the Hanneman Holiday Residence to differentiate and compete against existing and newly opened hotels in its vicinity. Since 2010 the hotel has enjoyed a yearly occupancy of 81 -83%, which is steadily on the rise.

The establishment has also been awarded, four times in a row, with certificates of excellence on the largest travel website Trip Advisor. The hotel uses its SSTL Certification to promote its establishment as one which is eco-friendly. This has contributed to the Hanneman Holiday Residence gaining an increase in the number of visitors, especially from Germany who appreciate the hotel's policy and choose the small establishment for their stay. The hotel is listed as a number one hotel with a recommendation of 100% on the German travel website Holiday Check.

The establishment has managed over the last two years to meet the SSTL objective of conserving energy by reducing electricity costs. Whilst the occupancy of the hotel rose from 81% to 83% from 2012 to 2013, the establishment saw a decrease in its total yearly electricity consumption from 67084 in 2012 to 66926 units in 2013.

In its efforts to continuously improve on its sustainable practices, the Hanneman Holiday is endeavouring to install solar powered LED lighting system on its compound.

CONSTANCE EPHELIA RESORT & SPA



Business and Awards Overview

Located on the West Coast of the main island of Mahe and overlooking the Marine National Park of Port Launay, the Constance Ephelia Resort is set on 120 acres of land and on one of the most pristine beaches on the island. The hotel is presently the largest on the island offering a total of 309 rooms to its clientele through a wide range of exclusive accommodation, comprising of junior and senior super deluxe suites, spa villas and luxurious hillside villas. The resort consists of five restaurants and bars, each with its own individual concept, design and décor. The Spa de Constance offers to the guests the pleasures of beauty and wellness.

The hotel's commitment to excellence has over the years resulted in a number of accolades, such as the TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence in 2012 & 2013, the TUI Holly Award 2013 and the worldwide ReviewPro's Awards for 2014. It is amongst the first hotels to be HACCP certified in Seychelles. In September 2012, the Constance Ephelia Resort was awarded the SSTL Label.

Constance Ephelia's Initial Situation – prior to SSTL certification

Being a newly-opened hotel, at its inception stage, most of the groundwork that would qualify the hotel to be certified for the SSTL Label had already been done as part of the hotel's group corporate policy. Following their application for the label in August 2012, the hotel was certified in the space of one month as most of the necessary pre-requisites to obtain the label were already in place.

Impacts

Since its opening in 2010, the Constance Ephelia Resort has been self-sufficient in the production and consumption of potable water through the operation of its own desalination plant. Over the years, their many proactive water conservation efforts has also resulted in a considerable reduction in monthly water consumption. When comparing the figures from January to July 2014 to that of the same period of the previous year, an average reduction of 3781m³ has been observed per month.

During the course of this year, an internal bottling system has been set up to reduce the amount of PET bottles used by the hotel. It is estimated that this will see a reduction of 200,000 PET bottles purchased per year.

Other water conserving initiatives has included the installation of an OTS system which tracks and reports on any leakages at the resort and also records follow up actions taken. Low flow devices have also been installed at water points at staff facilities to reduce the general water pressure and thus reduce on water consumption.



One of the objectives of the SSTL is to ensure that the establishment puts in place strategies to conserve energy. It is to be noted that in this respect, the Constance Ephelia Resort has made remarkable achievements. Whilst the SSTL requires that at least 50% of lightings in rooms or at two areas of the resort are energy efficient, the resort has installed 100% energy efficient lighting on its premises and furthermore, all of the appliances in the kitchen and offices are energy efficient. The air conditioning system of the resort is centralized, to maintain a minimum temperature of 23 degrees. Additionally, an automatic sensor system has been installed in every guestrooms to switch off lights and increase air condition temperature to 27 degrees when the rooms are empty.

The hotel has also been very successful in putting in place an effective waste management system, whereby all waste are fully separated. Oil and grease waste are treated and then exported for recycling purposes, garden waste is composted and kitchen waste is delivered to a local pig farm. Other initiatives to reduce waste includes the repatriation of disposable club car batteries and the purchase of re-usable egg crates from suppliers. Other plans to improve on its waste management system include the provision of recycling bins in all of its guestrooms by the end of the year.

In relation to community involvement, the Constance Ephelia Resort has contributed immensely to the Port Glaud community through various donations and sponsorship of social, cultural and environmental activities organised in the district. To highlight the activities, the hotel commemorated the International Heritage Day through sponsorship of snacks for members volunteering in the general cleaning of the Parish church. This activity also saw the participation of the hotel staff. The Constance Ephelia Resort has also been instrumental in the publication of a heritage brochure identifying the sites of interest in the Port Glaud district, which will greatly benefit school children and heritage enthusiasts. Other events which have been celebrated has included World Wetland Day, World Environment Day and Beach Clean-up Activity.

The resort is very involved in environmental protection and conservation initiatives. On a regular basis, the hotel organises environmental activities where guests, staff and the local community participate eagerly, such as the Green Day, a monthly event organised by the resort where the mangroves habitat on which the Constance Ephelia Resort is partly located, is cleaned, restored and new seedlings are planted. In 2012, the resort in partnership with the Department of Environment and the Port Glaud community embarked on a management plan of three years to better manage and preserve this wetland area. The hotel has also initiated a coastal management programme to protect the coastline and prevent erosion by planting trees and bushes on a regular basis.



On the social front, the hotel has sponsored and hosted the Christmas party for the 250 children of the President's Village Orphanage, as well as contributed gifts to children's party organised by the District Administration. Donations of household items to the community through the office of the District Administration has also been part of the hotel's corporate responsibility.

Conclusion

From the case studies presented, it is apparent that all three hotels are making great efforts in ensuring that sustainability practices are mainstreamed into their business operations and that impacts to their surrounding environment is limited and gradually lessened with the aim of safeguarding the natural resources that are the basis of our tourism industry.

In better managing their consumption of water and electricity they are helping in cutting not only their operational costs but are also lessening the burden placed on the country to provide these very costly resources.

They continue to have a positive impact on their local community, through the provision of decent jobs and by favouring local producers and produce thus taking the tourism benefit down the value chain

All of this contributes towards the tourism industry's growing sustainability.

Acknowledgements

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