

HOTELS TAKE UP THE GREEN CRUSADE

MORE NEED TO BE DONE TO ARREST ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION.

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By ANGIE NG

THE voice from environmentalists to do more to arrest the environmental degradation happening around us is growing louder. It is easy to understand why this is so given the downward spiral in the state of the environment as seen in the bizarre climate changes, rising sea level and the many natural disasters occurring around the globe of late.



Global warming and extreme weather conditions are becoming more pronounced with each passing day, and before further damage sets in and things become irreversible, the green environment crusade to arrest the ongoing environmental degradation needs more concerted efforts from all quarters to ensure Mother Nature has a chance to heal herself.

Hoteliers in the country are taking up the green crusade to do their bit to reduce the big carbon footprint that has been emanated by the many hotels around the country.

According to Malaysia Green Building Confederation (MGBC) president Sarly Adre Sarkum, the adoption of the "green movement" by hotel operators is a significant step forward as it is a wellknown fact that hotels consume a huge amount of resources, especially electricity, water and food.

"There is an urgent and critical need to adopt sustainable measures for the hotel industry in Malaysia. Article rank 13 Dec 2015 StarProperty.my By ANGIE NG angie@ thestar.com.my Angie Ng is the content editor of StarProperty.my. Ideally these strategies should be measurable, and hence the Green Building Index (GBI) rating has been established for the purpose. Hotel operators must be conscious of their contribution into the equation of the environment.

"Being sustainable starts with realising what you are currently doing that is not environmentally friendly and taking action to improve the processes to ensure that you mitigate the impact. This can be in terms of energy, materials, food, waste management and other areas in relation to the hotel operations," Sarly explains.

MGBC believes that most hotel properties in the country can be turned into green hotels, especially in the areas of energy efficiency, water quality and conservation, air quality, waste management and by switching to using ecofriendly products.

"We are working with Malaysia Association of Hotels (MAH) to raise awareness among hotel owners and operators to procure GBI green certification for hotels and resorts," Sarly adds.

MAH president Cheah Swee Hee says for new properties, it is less challenging to incorporate green elements during the design and building stage, stressing that it will be advantageous for new industry players to look into this from the onset of their business planning.

Cheah admits that it is an uphill task for old and existing properties to implement green elements within their premises, as the capital outlay may be quite substantial.

"We are encouraging these properties to adopt one green initiative at a time and the response towards this has been very encouraging."

He says MAH is working with industry players in the Klang Valley to create awareness and educate them on the fact that greening the industry will bring longterm value to their business, while at the same time do their bit for the environment.

Having focusing its efforts to educate industry players within the Klang Valley on how greening the industry will bring longterm value to the business entity and the environment, Cheah says MAH is now reaching out to the East Malaysian hospitality operators on the opportunity to procure GBI green certification for hotels and resorts there.

Green Building Index Accreditation Panel (GBIAP) cochairman Chen Thiam Leong says once the awareness is achieved, the next step is to convince the hotel owners on the business returns and viability.

"We realised that this will take time, and as such, the adoption rate for hotels and resorts is currently fairly low. Wellinformed hotel owners will appreciate the energy and resource savings that come with the implementation of sustainable elements, besides an improved image of the hotel brand for its initiative to reduce carbon footprint," he notes.

100 green hotels by 2017

Sarly clarifies that the most apparent benefit in greening hotels would be in assessing the performance of various aspects of the operations. As an example, to save energy one must understand the baseline and performance of each component of the hotel organisation. Many hotels realise there are many inherent inefficiencies as they seldom monitor these performances. By utilising a rating tool, such as the GBI hotel tool, it means that industry players have to start looking at various aspects of performances of their building and organisation. Usually correcting these inherent inefficiencies alone can provide many financial and indirect benefits.

Chen says most progressive hotels or resorts are already practising some form of green practice without realising it. This include efficient energy control in terms of lighting, rainwater harvesting, waste recycling, extensive greenery and procurement of ecofriendly cleaning agents.

"To merely push the boundary slightly, these premises should aim to obtain green certification through a few additional green features.

"The implementation would generally be low in cost but with excellent return on investment," he says.

Chen observes that the bigger hotels in peninsular Malaysia have embarked on energy audits to practise energy efficiency processes and he hopes to see this practice being implemented in Sabah and Sarawak as well.

One of the more successful green hotel groups in the world is ITC Hotels of India that is ranked among the top 10 "Sustainable Value Creators" in the consumer goods segment globally by the Boston Consulting Group. It has hotels that strive to be super sustainable with some operating solely on renewable energy.

"They have superb solid waste disposal and recycling policies. It is the only company in the world to be carbon positive, water positive and solid waste recycling positive, with its businesses and value chains supporting around six million sustainable livelihoods," Sarly shares.

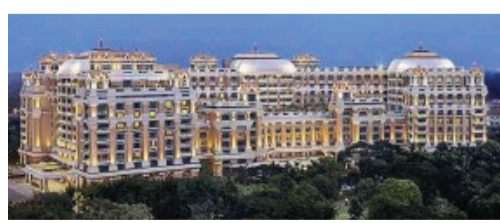
Within Malaysia, Hotel Penaga on Penang island is one of the many green hotels in the country which has managed to break the traditional notion that a heritage building is difficult to be green.

"The project that won the GBI gold award in 2013 shows that the building need not look in a certain way to be green, as even a heritage building can be built to be so," he remarks.

There are about 20 green hotels certified to date and MAH is looking to have at least 100 hotels certified over the next two years.

Nippon Paint Malaysia group general manager Gladys Goh says there are many ways to work towards being a green hotel and it is not just in having green structures or architecture.

She says it can be as simple as a green practice or process. There are various coatings that can reduce the indoor thermal level which then reduces the usage of airconditioning for a specific hotel or resort. By applying protective coating over floors or various surfaces, it can increase the lifespan of the surfaces while lowering maintenance resources in the longrun. "These are small steps that industry players can look into, aside from reviewing the entire green structure or operations.



"We hope to further educate hotel players on the various ways on how sustainability can be achieved. Most are unaware of the aesthetics and functional value of paint. Besides creating a certain ambience for hotels, paint also has functional elements such as the ability to absorb formaldehyde that helps to improve the indoor air quality that forms one of the elements in the GBI ratings," Goh explains.