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Luxury, Sustainability Can Co-Exist In Hotels

Paris fair showcases green products, luxury hotel practices.

By Alicia Sheber, contributor -- Hotels, 7/1/2009

Paris—While financial and natural resources are becoming increasingly scarce, pioneers in hospitality are realizing that renewed abundance might just be found by marrying two concepts formerly considered incompatible—luxury travel and ecological responsibility.

The idea that luxury can be profitable yet not wasteful was the theme in May at the world's first Sustainable Luxury Fair in Paris entitled 1.618. The exposition's name is the numerical expression of Phi, the Golden Ratio dating back to ancient Greek civilization as the most aesthetically balanced proportion in nature and mathematics. Adopting this philosophy, the event's aim was to showcase products that are of the highest quality without depleting the ecosystem's balance.

Eco-tourism exhibitors presented the ways hotels are integrating sustainable practices into their operations and implementing strategies to lower its environmental impact without reducing revenues or luxury.

Exposition co-sponsor **Hôtel Fouquet's Barrière Paris** has adopted the slogan "Dignified Luxury" for its responsible tourism efforts. As described by International Sales Manager Ute Benedikt, the hotel offers guests choices that maintain quintessential Parisian sophistication while introducing the idea that ecologically sound alternatives exist. Much of this is being achieved through cross-promotions: Pop Earth, Maison Pommeroy's bio-dynamic Champagne, is available exclusively in Fouquet's Barrière, while an E-Solex battery-powered scooter can travel 40 km/charge for jaunts to the café.

From an operations perspective, the Paris hotel respects ISO 14001 norms for reducing unnecessary consumption. Actions toward this include recycling, installation of low-flow faucets and LED lighting, and partnering with ecologically minded providers such as a laundry service which recycles sanitized water.

For the independent hotel **Princesse Bora Lodge**, Sainte Marie Island, Madagascar, being ecologically minded is a necessity due to its remote location. Using only the resources needed is a matter of practicality, explains General Manager Laurent Buri; if a restaurant guest orders a fish, the kitchen simply goes out and catches it. Locals are involved in every aspect of creating self-sustainability; the majority of staff live in neighboring villages, and all supplies are sourced from local businesses. Where the hotel really shines is with its dedication to whale conservation. By hosting scientific seminars, the preservation of the species is promoted while an unparalleled luxury experience is provided.

With more than 80 members worldwide, hotel consortium **Eco Luxury**, Rome, has developed a model that takes a comprehensive approach to combining sustainable luxury with responsible tourism. To join the collective, hotels must prequalify with strict quality, financial and environmental standards, while thereafter adhering to Eco Luxury's sustainable principles. Thus, the brand's name becomes a certification that the practices espoused by the hotel are not superficial.

Caroline Palazzo of Eco Luxury says the philosophy begins with an acceptance that investment by foreign and indigenous high-worth individuals through carefully regulated eco-tourism is not just profitable but crucial for ecological and community preservation. For example, the first automobiles could only be purchased by the affluent and, therefore, their capital funded the invention of affordable motors.

This concept has evolved into what is called the "African Model." A resort in Botswana is happy to share with guests a small portion of its country's "best of the best" since the financial influx, when responsibly reinvested, supports micro-businesses, the protection of endangered species and renewable energy initiatives. Within this partnership, members share their sustainable development knowledge: an African resort that has learned how to be 100% solar powered can teach this to a property in China. Each hotel offers its guests the best its region has to offer without changing its community's identity—welcoming differences but not compromising the level of luxury.

For regions with limited resources, ingenious methods of self-preservation are a result of necessity. But their practices can be adapted to make an existing urban hotel eco-compatible while providing for tourism's long-term growth. By taking a fresh look at the symbiotic relationship between luxury hotels and sustainable development, eco-investors are realizing that responsible tourism sustains not only the environment, but also their bottom lines.

Contributed by Alicia Sheber

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