

ECOTEL Version 2.0 - Reaching Out

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While the phraseology 'version 2.0' has become part of our vernacular, it is interesting to step back and reflect on what the revolutionary Web 2.0 was all about. This was different from Web 1.0 because it forsook the path of one-way communication and created a more open society of web users where dialogue and interaction became the new norm. People now communicate back to the web and freely express their views, likes and dislikes, pretty much changing the entire way we look at communication today.

ECOTEL – Version 2.0: ECOTEL began when environmentalism was not as much in vogue as it is today. We now live in a world where it has become fashionable to be green. While it is very commendable that this movement is so youthful and exciting, there remains a fear of it losing momentum before accomplishing its objectives.

The impetus, in our opinion, shall come by increasing the number of stakeholders; by making everyone a part of the solution. To do so, we have looked at all aspects of our certification and tried to work on ways and means to reach out to the employees, community and guests. We have worked on internal aspects (such as the rating and certification process and audit criteria) as well as external (setting up a reservation engine, creating a fresh website and introducing a construction globe).

The Audit Process: New ECOTELs shall be audited for their readiness status. We shall then prepare a customised blueprint for them to achieve the target standards and work with the hotel's management in achieving them. Hotels shall be rated on a graded system based on a Likert scale. Our audits shall now be annual, allowing enhanced interaction between the hotel's management and our teams.

Rating: We are reviewing and modifying the rating system wherein hotels would need to achieve a minimum score across all five 'globes' (ECOTEL's certification verticals). Hotels will be differentiated based on the level of environment friendliness and those exhibiting higher standards shall be accordingly recognised.

Audit checklists: We are updating our checklists to ensure that they are aligned with international best practices. The checklists shall be customised based on type of property, location, geography, climate, and other considerations.

Collaboration with leading agencies across the world: In our endeavour to deliver a world class product, we are getting our certification assessed by leading domestic and international entities. Our basic standards conform to the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria and we intend reviewing these continually.

Training process: The strength of the programme lies in its ability to have employees who believe in it. We intend concentrating on providing quality training modules for hotel employees and help in creating a more cohesive and responsive team.

Apart from this, ECOTEL is looking at introducing the following facets into the programme:

Reservation engine: All ECOTELs shall feature on the ECOTEL reservation engine, enabling end users to directly book rooms in the participating hotels through a common website.

Sustainable design and construction globe: Unlike other certifications like LEED, which concentrate primarily on the building structure, we focus on maximising efficiency and minimising waste generation by concentrating on improving the day-to-day operations of hotels. However, we have always



Summary

ECOTEL's metamorphoses into a more inclusive and interactive certification, involving owners, guests, employees and the community. We see the practicality of going green through a case study analyzing Rodas, an ECOTEL, located in Mumbai, INDIA.

1 Comments

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understood the importance of environmentally-friendly building design and construction and shall now be introducing this aspect as a separate globe or assessment criterion for all new build hotels, making ECOTEL the first certification of its kind to certify both construction and operations.

The core strength of the certification is in its staff training programmes and community outreach initiatives. While some of our existing hotels have very strong processes, we would be paying special attention to involving the entire value chain. We shall assist hotels in spreading the message of being earth friendly to others involved, such as our vendors and suppliers and further, to those such as the waste handlers. Our comprehensive approach aims to engage the community through programs that enable a great degree of interaction with local residents and businesses.

But the most important axis in this movement is the one controlled by the business decision-maker. It is very important for businesses to understand and believe that going green is not just responsible corporate behavior, but also a smart financial decision. The cost of constructing an earth-friendly hotel is marginally higher than that of a conventional structure, adding approximately two-to-three per cent more to the overall development cost. Incorporating green best practices help in retrieving these additional costs in a couple of years. Considering that most hotels tend to have a life span averaging 15-20 years, operationally sound green practices tend to offset all costs and become an additional source of revenue, apart from bringing in other tangible and intangible benefits.

To better understand these benefits, we analyse Rodas, an ECOTEL.



Rodas, Mumbai: A case study

Located in Powai, Mumbai, in the 3000-acre commercial-cum-residential complex known as Hiranandani Gardens, Rodas is a hotel committed to the environment. This 36-room upscale property opened its doors to business in May 2001.

Why did we choose the Rodas in Mumbai as the subject for our case study? One, because it is an excellent example of a sustainable business where energy-efficient design and construction is complemented by earth-friendly practices in every area of hotel operations. Two, because it demonstrates that imaginative thinking, and a conscious effort to follow through, can generate significant savings even with minimal monetary investment. Three, because both as a hotel and an earth-friendly operation, Rodas strives for continuous improvement.

Sensitivity to the environment is built into every aspect of this hotel, starting from the initial stages of design and construction. The hotel's neoclassical arched façade, while visually arresting, plays a role in reducing loss of energy from the sides of the building and thus maintaining lower temperatures within. The façade with its dual layers – external arches and columns and internal walls and glazed windows – increases the insulation for the building envelope, reducing energy losses. The building itself is positioned such that the centre-point of its parabolic shape faces the north-east, which reduces the effect of direct sunlight and thus helps the hotel save on the energy requirement for air-conditioning and lighting. The roof top is treated with three layers of coba (clay brick), so as to increase the insulation from the roof. Lastly, double-glazed windows in the guestrooms reduce the need for daylight lighting; at the same time, the glazing reduces the absorption of heat radiation from the sun while also cutting out noise pollution.

The cement used throughout the building is Portland Pozzalana (PPC), which uses 25% fly ash, a by-product of electric power generation. Fly ash itself is the non-combustible portion of coal that used to be released into the air through the smoke stack before the government enforced regulations on emissions into the atmosphere. Fly ash mixed with cement, thus while environmentally friendly, is also more durable than plain cement and the lifecycle of such concrete can be measured in hundreds of years instead of decades.

In the Rodas, all the wood used is either rubber wood (resulting from felled rubber trees) or medium density fibre (from the waste stalks of the cotton tree). While rubber wood is produced from trees that have had their sap extracted and are felled, the latter is produced from the 'waste' stalk of the cotton plant which, instead of being

discarded, is put through a manufacturing process that involves chipping, sieving, washing and cooking, and which results in a fibre with properties very similar to natural wood.

Like the building, the facilities infrastructure has been designed in a manner that it enables energy-efficient operations, and energy meters allow staff to monitor consumption within the individual departments. Grey-water recycling and the installation of water-efficient fixtures ensure the judicious use of water. These initial investments have been supported by a keen attention to staff practices: right from the time of its initial opening, the team at Rodas has worked hard to build a conscious culture of reducing, reusing and recycling. Practices such as switching off of lights and equipment when not in use, using the water from the Bain-Marie to wash kitchen floors, and keeping careful track of the solid waste generated within all departments/areas, have gone a long way in helping Rodas achieve its environmental objectives.

The hotel's practices and processes in the broad areas of waste, energy and water management are highlighted in the following section:

Waste Management:

- Emphasis on reducing waste at source: Guest laundry is lightly folded and delivered to the guests in jute baskets, and not in plastic or paper covers that must be thrown away. Suits are delivered to guests in muslin cloth covers. By smarter usage of paper and items such as stirrer sticks, the hotel saves approximately Rs1.9 lakh (US\$ 4,200) each year.
- Kitchen waste is systematically carefully segregated according to the four-bin system, and food waste is sent for composting. Guestrooms feature two bins – one for recyclables and another for non-recyclables.
- At present, 50-kilogrammes of wet garbage is deposited into six composting pits daily. The sale of vermicompost for use within and outside the Hiranandani complex generates an additional income.
- With the help of an in-house tailor, the housekeeping department ensures that all spare or leftover fabric or linen is recycled into something useful. Double bed sheets that are no longer usable in the guestrooms owing to a small spot or tear are converted into single sheets. Bed sheets are also converted into pillow covers, while tablecloths are converted into wiping cloths and tray mats. Dead stock upholstery is similarly recycled into curtains for the back of the house.
- Glass from broken tables is, to the extent possible, not thrown, but collected by kitchen staff to be cut, finished and polished to make serving platters in varied shapes. On an average, Rodas makes three-to-four new platters a year. Similarly, glass pieces and shreds resulting from broken glassware are not discarded; instead, staff collects these glass bits, which are sent to be processed into insulating material for the kitchen *tandoor*. When the *tandoor*'s clay pot is replaced every six months the insulating layer also needs to be changed and this is when the material comes in handy.

Energy Management:

- The hotel does not use boilers to heat water for the bathrooms and kitchen; instead, the excess heat generated by the air conditioners is reused to heat water up to 50°C, with the heat pumps acting as a back-up during the winter season, when higher water temperatures may be required. In 2009, the cost saving as a result of this system was equal to approximately 1.8% of Rodas's total electricity bill.
- Another by-product of the air conditioning system – chilled water at -7°C – is reused by being circulated through Rodas's central water purifying unit, in order to cool water that has been purified using ultra-violet rays and is otherwise fit for consumption. Using the water from air conditioners in the main water purifier and chiller saves this ECOTEL a considerable energy expense.
- The hotel maintains the Power Factor at 0.97 to 0.99, thereby earning a small discount from the local utility company, which encourages energy savings.

- Wherever possible and suitable, energy-efficient lights and signages are used. Guest participation is solicited through the 'Green Button' featuring on the control panel in the guestrooms. By pressing this button, the default in-room temperature is raised by 2°C.

Water Management:

- Rodas reduces the use of water through taps that are fitted with flow restrictors that operate on timers. Wash basins and toilets in public areas have sensors. The toilets in all guest bathrooms feature the Geberit concealed cistern, which uses only six litres of water per flush. While six-litre cisterns are a common feature in most new hotels in India, in 2001 when Rodas commenced operations, most hotels did not have water-saving devices as efficient as the Geberit.
- The hotel's entire wastewater is diverted to a huge sewage treatment plant located within the Hiranandani Gardens. Wastewater generated within all the developments in the Hiranandani complex is sent to this plant, where it is treated with the latest technology and used for air conditioning, gardening and for new construction within the Hiranandani complex. As much as 180,000 cubic metres of water passes through the treatment plant on a daily basis.
- The backwash water of the water filtration plant is collected back in the flush tank, which reduces overall consumption of water.
- Tent cards placed on the bed inform guests about the hotel's 'Save Our Planet' linen and towel reuse programme. Guest participation, at approximately 15% of total room nights annually, is largely influenced by the fact that Rodas draws 85% of its business from the business traveller, who has an average length of stay of two days.

A discussion on Rodas would be incomplete without a mention of the community-service actions that are a key component of the hotel's environmental initiatives. The hotel's Green Team meets regularly to review the progress achieved in meeting defined eco-targets, as well as plan out workshops and awareness-building initiatives that are implemented every year with great success.

Employee Education and Community Involvement:

- Each year prior to *Ganesh Chaturthi*, Rodas organises a workshop to teach school children to make Ganesh idols out of natural silt soil from Lake Powai and organic colours, with pistachio shells and pulses for decoration. The idea is to encourage children to make their own eco-friendly Ganeshas, rather than having to depend on the store-bought idols that are made using plaster-of-paris and commercial colours. In 2009, about 300-children from 18-schools (both regular schools and those for special needs) participated.
- Following the *Ganesh Visarjan* (immersion of the idols into the sea), which marks the culmination of the 10-day *Ganeshotsav* festival, the Green Team gets together on the Lake Powai promenade to clean up the area. The floral offerings made to Lord Ganesh as well as the waste lying about are collected, brought back to the hotel, sorted and segregated for recycling and composting. The floral offerings are composted in two pits set aside for this purpose.
- The hotel management frequently interacts with school children from around the locality and talks to them about the importance of being environmentally friendly, ending the sessions with some lovely goodies from the kitchen.

Rodas demonstrates its environment commitment through processes, practices and initiatives (some of which are highlighted) that assist the hotel in minimising its environmental impact while enhancing its positive impact on the local community. This ECOTEL globe captures the essence of the four globes just discussed, while embracing many other aspects; for example, the use of earth-friendly technology and recycled-material products.

Environment Commitment:

- All refrigeration units (including walk-in coolers and deep freezers), use the gases 134A and 404A, which have zero ozone depletion potential, and are the most environmentally-friendly gases for such equipments. All detergents used have a very low/neutral pH value. Pest controlling is done herbally.
- Disposable plastic/styrofoam products are prohibited in the kitchen.
- Pulses, rice and other essentials provided to the kitchen are delivered either in reusable cloth bags provided by the supplier, or in cloth bags stitched by Rodas's in-house tailor out of leftover fabric available with housekeeping.
- All hangers in the guestrooms' wardrobe areas are made out of sawdust. The hotel uses utility trays made out of sawdust, and the same applies to covers for sugar pots. Parabola, the 24-hour café, uses buffet props and breadstands made out of waste/discard rubberwood. Disposal bins as well as the pens and pencils placed in all guestrooms are made out of recycled material.
- All promotional materials are made out of 50-75% post consumer content paper.

As Rodas approaches its ninth anniversary, new initiatives are in place – to create a second herb garden, and to make space available to increase the number of composting pits. Certain to remain steadfast, however, is Rodas's commitment to embed a permanent sustainable development culture into day-to-day strategic decisions and behaviour. With a team that strives continuously to meet organizational objectives and exceed customer expectations, Rodas offers a rewarding experience to both its guests and its employees.

Rodas manages to save approximately Rs1 lakh (USD 2,200) per year per room by engaging in environmentally-friendly practices. The case for going green is not just philanthropic but extremely business friendly.

This aims to provide the most comprehensive guide to all India compensation trends in the hospitality industry. It has been created to provide various industry stakeholders with current information on compensation thus enabling them to benchmark their compensation practices against market values.

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