



ITC-Welcomgroup hotels

A green model for eco-tourism

The Welcomgroup Bay Island (WGBI) hotel, owned and operated by ITC-Welcomgroup, is located in Port Blair, the capital city of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, an archipelago in the Bay of Bengal.

Being a prisoner of its geography, the Andaman & Nicobar Islands rely almost completely on the Indian mainland for all food supplies, medicines and items of daily use.

The WGBI hotel has created a new “green model” to operate in an eco-responsible manner and to create an eco-tourism model for the island. This model can eventually be replicated, with regional nuances, by the Welcomgroup chain and the entire industry.

In order to do this, Welcomgroup Bay Island (WGBI) first modified its hotel objective to state the following:

“We are in the business of providing room, food, beverage and eco-knowledge to our hotel guests and everybody in the Islands.”

The WGBI’s model concentrates on its four-R’s strategy: **Reduce**, **Reuse**, **Recycle** and **Rethink** systems, procedures and policies for the hotel. The hotel addresses the issues by adopting internal and external strategies.

Internal strategy

The internal green strategy was initiated because hotel employees believed that it must practice what it preached and ran from the end of 1988 until April 1992. During this time, the hotel addressed issues ranging from water, soil, waste, paper, etc. in a creative manner as they came along.

Water management

Port Blair had a major water crisis in 1991 when its filtered water supplies were cut down from 8 kilolitres to 2 kilolitres per day. In order to run its business the hotel:

- Replaced all interior piping with plastic pipes (to avoid corrosion) so that the clean salt water from the sea could be used for flushing toilets, thereby reducing the demand on filtered water supplied by the municipality.
- Dug a well in order to harvest rainwater for gardening during the summer season. In doing so, the company realized that water saved is also energy saved.

Soil management

Soil erosion is a frequent problem as the hotel is located on the slope of a hill. In order to combat this problem cost effectively, the hotel uses the outer husk of the coconut, or coconut coir, which was lying on the island as garbage, in those areas where the problem of erosion existed. This has two advantages. Coir is biodegradable and therefore environmentally friendly. It is also finance friendly, as it no longer needs to be landfilled.

Waste management

In terms of waste management, the hotel’s objective was to look at reducing waste in inputs and outputs.



- Initially, tourists went for sightseeing trips to the other islands in Port Blair with lunches packed in cardboard boxes. These boxes were invariably left behind on the islands thereby creating a garbage problem – a veritable visual assault. The hotel replaced cardboard boxes with steel lunch boxes. Users must return the boxes or pay a fine. This system has eliminated the recurring cost of buying cardboard boxes and the reduced the garbage levels on the other islands.
- Instead of disposing of used cooking oil in the drain, the hotel converts this cooking oil into soap, which is used for washing utensils. This reduces effluent levels in the water and saves the hotel from having to purchase washing powder.

Paper conservation

- All old documents of the accounts department were segregated into benign and confidential lots. The confidential lot was shredded, mixed with wet garbage and converted into fertilizer for use in the hotel garden. The other documents were converted into scratch paper for internal use.
- The paper caps used by chefs were replaced with cloth caps.
- The brown paper used as a lining in the drawers of writing desks in every room was replaced with velvet.

By taking these actions, the hotel aimed to reduce the usage of paper pulp in order to lessen deforestation rates. Today the world has only 8% forest cover and current estimates indicate that 496 million hectares of denuded land needs to be afforested worldwide¹. In order to build awareness around this subject, the hotel started an afforestation program in Port Blair by planting 1,500 saplings in the airport complex.

Telecommunications

Due to a lack of telecommunications infrastructure, the hotel has gone through crises periods ranging from an inability to order taxis for guests to allowing guests to use communications facilities. In order to palliate this problem, the hotel put forth a plan whereby 10 or 15 telephone lines with 50-60 extensions could be given on a priority basis to unemployed youth or ex-servicemen to start mini “retail telephone services” throughout the country. The mechanism would be very similar to an EPABX system in an office which has 10 main lines but numerous extensions at various desks, with the only limitation being that of wiring up houses within technically and economically acceptable distances from the mother unit.

Population & poverty

Growing populations and poverty are the biggest polluters. The WGBI created transferable models in these two areas.

Population: The hotel offers cash incentives to all employees who get married but postpone starting a family for two years. The concept of “One Family One Child” was also adequately rewarded.

Poverty: The WGBI adopted one of the poorest orphanages on the islands and provides them with educational materials as well as the services of the hotel carpenters, plumbers and electricians. Children aged 14 to 16 are given vocational training in the hotel for ten hours a week during four months to provide them with marketable skills when they leave the orphanage.

External strategy

The external strategy was spearheaded by the Andaman & Nicobar Tourism Guild (ANTG) to address the problems facing the hotel and tourism industry. Problems included:

- Foreigners could not stay in the island for more than 5 days and could not visit all the islands;

¹ C.S. Silver, One Earth One Future



- Alcoholic beverages could not be served in the bar. Hotels were not permitted to sell foreign liquor;
- Charter flights were not allowed to come to the islands;
- Cooking gas was not available to the hotels for commercial use;
- Subsidies due to the hotels were not paid for years;
- Until 1995 there was a chronic shortage of telephone lines; this was resolved by interactions between the hotel and different arms of the local government to get policies changed.

The objectives of the Guild were as follows:

- To accept responsibility for a larger canvas by identifying the issues which were hampering tourism in the islands and taking it up with the local government through a common platform;
- To create a sustainable eco-tourism model which would be acceptable to all arms of the tourism trade – hotels, travel agencies and boat operators;
- To advise the government on infrastructure problems through a feasible economic solution steeped in the microenvironment of the hotel.

Formed in 1990, the Guild has effectively used a poster campaign to incite eco-tourism. The campaign informs tourists and locals of the importance of tropical forests, the value of a tree, why they should not litter the islands, and the importance of coral in the primary food chain, among other topics. Most importantly, the guild convinced the local government to position the island for high-end tourism in order to seed the local economy and reduce the pressure on the already scarce resources by restricting the number of tourist through cost measures.

Results

Through its efforts, the hotel has gained cost, image and operational advantages within the chain and on the island. The Welcomgroup chain has since become the first eco-responsible chain in India. The initial costs of the hotel's activities were shared with its competitors, the local administration, and hotel guests. This has led to a cascading effect in terms of echoing eco-tourism practices.

The local administration has accepted the concept of eco-tourism as conceptualized by The Andaman & Nicobar Tourism Guild (ANTG) and WGBI received The British Airways Tourism Award for Environment.

Additionally, the hotel has created a small eco-tourism museum on its grounds in order to educate people about environmental degradation. The museum also hopes to learn from people of other walks of life on how to improve it. The Navy has created another museum in Port Blair, and the Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) has decided to create a large-scale environment museum in Ghaziabad.

Lessons learned

- The hotel has discovered that every problem opens up a new window of opportunity.
- Actions must be translated without compromising on quality and with the direct intention of influencing guest behavior by sharing the problem and solutions in all communications in the hotel and in the islands through creative poster campaigns.
- Because the smallest hotel in the chain created this eco-model (bottom to top approach) it has had a harder time reaching out to other members of the chain.



**Welcomgroup Bay Island - Port Blair
Problem-Solution Matrix**

| Problem | Solutions |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Paper use -- deforestation | Replace paper chef's hats with cloth; replace brown paper lining in drawers with velvet; recycle paper; use steel boxes for picnic lunches for tourists instead of cardboard boxes |
| Water use/waste | Fill septic tanks with seawater for flushing; harvest rain water during the summer season for gardening; explain unintentional wastage through a poster |
| CFC | Use of sea breeze and Agarbatti (incense sticks) to ward off mosquitoes and other insects rather than sprays using CFCs |
| Soil Erosion | Place coconut husks on the ground to fight erosion |
| Power Conservation | Stickers as reminder to turn off power |
| Chlorine | Ban use |
| Lack of skilled staff | Provide English classes |
| Environment awareness | Provide eco-training classes |
| Poverty | Sponsor an orphanage and train the orphans to give them marketable skills for when they leave the orphanage |
| Population | Carrot/stick personnel policy giving incentives to families that only have one child and to those that put off having children for two years |
| Telecommunications | CCTV concept |
| Oil Spill | Equipment to combat oil spills |
| Energy Shortage | Look into/invest in renewable energy solutions |
| Eco-design savings rs. 450,000 per year (US\$ 10,300) | |

The future

While a lot has been done, there is a need for further follow up action. Barriers to continuing and scaling up include:

- Lack of understanding of the environment issue because of scarcity of models to emulate. It is a pioneering arena.
- Organizational pressures on the bottom line and short-term measures get more focus.
- Lack of policies on fiscal incentives / disincentives by GOI (Government of India) to accelerate eco-ethics in business.
- Lack of example setting by the western countries in reducing their consumption style and simultaneously introducing these very strategies without modification in third world countries. Example: clean technologies are still not being passed on to third world countries. On the contrary, such countries are being used as a dumping ground for obsolete technology and waste.

Organizations need to institute a separate environment cell in every organization which will network with all departments by taking a look at their existing systems, procedures and policies to see how it can be re-engineered through the eco-philosophy of the 4 R's : Reduce, Reuse, Recycle & Rethink, spread over a specific time frame in concurrence with all concerned. Change is hard work and change can take place through collective vision. Collective vision will only emerge after discussion, training & policy changes.



Greening of the Supply Chain (GSC)

BASIC STANDARDS





Is water conservation being practised?
Is water being recycled?
Are there water meters?
Has water harvesting been implemented?
Is drip irrigation being used?

Water

Does the organisation use CNG vehicles for transporting goods?
Is there ample ventilation in the workplace?
Are the vehicles in good condition/tuned at periodic intervals?


Air






Are noise level norms being followed?
Are there noise mufflers on the DG set?

Noise



Greening of the Supply Chain (GSC)

BASIC STANDARDS




Are right-sized motors installed?
Do the exhaust fans have regulators to control speed depending on outside ambient temp?

Energy


Wrap a blanket around a burning person to extinguish the fire.
Keep extinguishers for multiple type of fires.
Do not use water to fight electrical fire.

Fire




Switch off machines during repairs to avoid accident.
Install safety guard on moving parts of a machine.

Mechanical




Use helmet, goggles, gloves.
Use safety harness while working at heights.


Civil



Avoid joints in a wire.
Do not use multi-point external plugs, this may result in fire.
Live electrical wires should not touch water.
Hang wires above ground level.

Electrical





Greening of the Supply Chain (GSC)

BASIC STANDARDS



Is the workplace clean?
Are there dustbins?
Are food related items like kitchen cloth clean?

Hygiene

Is waste being segregated?
Is it being reduced at source?
Is there an opportunity for recycling internally/externally?

Waste





Is the lighting adequate?
Is day lighting being used where available?
Has the wall been whitewashed to increase light reflection?
Are the tubelights free of dust?
Is the top of the fan free of dust?

Lighting





Welcomenviron's energy and water game

Most people are not aware that only 1% of fresh water is available for human use and is disproportionately distributed worldwide. India's water table has gone down from a depth of 30 feet to 350 feet on average since 1950. This leads to increased energy use for daily needs, a situation which is not sustainable.

Welcomenviron is the ITC-Welcomgroup Hotels' vision for a green world: a multifaceted program devised to practice the principles of conservation in order to create a safe, harmonious and ecologically balanced environment for its guests and employees.

In line with its philosophy, Welcomenviron has developed a stimulating energy & water game. Energy and water are contentious issues that everyone's participation in order to optimize their use. This game aims to internalize some simple ways to conserve water and energy. All you need are a dice and one colored coin for each player, and the game board below.

How Green are you?

There are a number of seemingly trivial choices we all make every day. Choices that are ecologically significant.

Play the game but remember -

Reality no longer offers a choice.



This case study was produced in cooperation with Niranjan Khatri, General Manager, Welcomenviron Initiatives; e-mail: niranjan.khatri@welcomgroup.com; tel.: 091 11 2685 0242 ext 4048.

About the WBCSD

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) is a coalition of international companies united by a shared commitment to sustainable development via the three pillars of economic growth, ecological balance and social progress. Our members are drawn from more than 35 countries and 20 major industrial sectors. We also benefit from a Global Network of 40 national and regional business councils and partner organizations involving more than 1,000 business leaders globally.

4, chemin de Conches
CH – 1231 Conches-Geneva
Switzerland

Tel: +41 (22) 839 31 00
Fax: +41 (22) 839 31 31

E-mail: carpenter@wbcsd.org
Web: www.wbcsd.org