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Essay - Assignment 1

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Sustainable practices in the hospitality industry are becoming increasingly important as businesses acknowledge their environmental responsibilities. Green practices in hotels focus on reducing waste, conserving resources, and minimizing pollution, ensuring a balance between business growth and ecological sustainability (Jauhari, 2021). These practices not only benefit the environment but also contribute to cost savings, improved brand reputation, and should also, enhanced guest satisfaction (Costa & Costa, 2022).

The Swan Hotel, located in Wells, UK, is a reputable accommodation provider known for its commitment to quality service. So far, the hotel has adopted some sustainable practices, but there are gaps in its environmental strategy. This essay explores a key shortfall in its sustainability efforts and proposes a practical solution to enhance its environmental footprint.

Despite incorporating standard eco-friendly measures such as energy-efficient lighting and towel reuse programs, as most hotels, the Swan Hotel lacks a plastic reduction strategy as seen on their website photos (small plastic bottles for shampoo, conditioner, body wash, and lotion, plastic-wrapped items such as soap bars, shower caps, and dental kits, disposable plastic cups or plastic-wrapped glassware, etc.). It is known that the hospitality industry is a significant contributor to plastic pollution, with single-use plastics from toiletries, packaging, and food service being major culprits (Edgell, 2020). Addressing this gap can lead to improved sustainability outcomes for the hotel and the wider community. According to the World Trade Organization (WTO), the hospitality sector is responsible for a significant portion of global plastic waste, with single-use plastics accounting for up to 50% of the waste generated by hotels (WTO, n.d.). The Swan Hotel, despite its efforts in other areas of sustainability, continues to rely heavily on single-use plastics, particularly in its guest rooms, guest bathrooms and dining areas. This gap presents an opportunity for the hotel to reduce its environmental impact and align with global sustainability trends.

One of the most visible areas where hotels use plastic is in guest rooms, particularly through single-use toiletries and amenities. The Swan Hotel can take several steps to reduce plastic waste in this area. First, the hotel can replace small plastic bottles

of shampoo, conditioner, body wash, and lotion with refillable dispensers mounted in showers and near sinks. This not only eliminates the need for single-use plastic bottles but also reduces the frequency of restocking, saving time and resources. Many luxury hotels, such as those in the Marriott International chain, have already adopted this approach, reporting significant reductions in plastic waste and cost savings over time (Green Globe, n.d.). Additionally, the hotel can replace plastic-wrapped soap bars with naked soap or soap in biodegradable packaging. For other amenities like sewing kits, shower caps, and dental kits, the hotel can switch to paper or cardboard packaging or offer them only upon request to minimize waste.

Another significant source of plastic in guest rooms is single-use water bottles. The Swan Hotel can replace these with glass bottles or reusable bottles that guests can refill at water stations located throughout the property. For example, the Soneva Resorts chain has implemented a "no plastic bottles" policy, providing guests with reusable glass bottles and filtered water stations, resulting in a 90% reduction in plastic waste (UNWTO, n.d.). To encourage guest participation, the hotel can offer incentives, such as discounts or loyalty points, for guests who opt out of single-use plastics during their stay.

The food and beverage sector is another major contributor to plastic waste in hotels. The Swan Hotel can take several actions to reduce plastic usage in this area. First, the hotel can eliminate plastic straws and stirrers, replacing them with paper, bamboo, or metal alternatives. Many hotels, including Hilton and InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG), have already phased out plastic straws, preventing millions of plastic items from entering landfills annually (Sustainable Hospitality Alliance, n.d.). Similarly, the hotel can replace single-use plastic cutlery and takeaway containers with compostable or reusable alternatives. For example, the hotel can use wooden or bamboo cutlery and containers made from biodegradable materials like bagasse or cornstarch.

Another area for improvement is the packaging of food items. The hotel can work with suppliers to reduce plastic packaging for snacks, condiments, and other items. For instance, individually wrapped sugar packets can be replaced with bulk sugar dispensers, and plastic-wrapped butter and jam can be replaced with serving dishes or biodegradable packaging. Additionally, the hotel can implement a "zero-waste" dining policy,

encouraging guests to dine in rather than opting for takeaway meals that require plastic packaging. By educating guests about the environmental impact of single-use plastics and offering sustainable alternatives, the hotel can significantly reduce its plastic footprint.

Also, housekeeping and laundry operations often rely heavily on plastic, particularly for cleaning supplies and laundry bags. The Swan Hotel can address this by switching to bulk cleaning products stored in refillable containers rather than single-use plastic bottles. This not only reduces plastic waste but also lowers procurement costs. For example, the Hotel Brooklyn in Manchester reduced its plastic waste by 30% by switching to bulk cleaning supplies and refillable dispensers (Green Globe, n.d.). Additionally, the hotel can replace plastic laundry bags with reusable fabric bags or biodegradable alternatives.

Another opportunity lies in the packaging of linens and towels. Many hotels use plastic wraps to protect clean linens during storage and transportation. The Swan Hotel can eliminate this practice by using reusable linen bags or simply folding linens without plastic wraps. These changes may require adjustments to housekeeping protocols, but the long-term environmental and cost benefits make them worthwhile.

Events and conferences often generate significant plastic waste, particularly through single-use water bottles, plastic cutlery, and disposable decorations. The Swan Hotel can implement a plastic-free event policy, requiring clients to opt for sustainable alternatives. For example, the hotel can provide water stations with reusable glass or metal bottles instead of single-use plastic bottles. Similarly, the hotel can offer compostable or reusable cutlery, plates, and cups for catering services. For decorations, the hotel can encourage the use of natural materials like flowers, fabric, and paper instead of plastic banners and tablecloths.

To promote these initiatives, the hotel can create a sustainable event package that highlights the environmental benefits of reducing plastic waste. By positioning itself as a leader in sustainable event management, the Swan Hotel can attract eco-conscious clients and differentiate itself from competitors.

Back-of-house operations, such as food storage and staff amenities, often rely on plastic for convenience. The Swan Hotel can reduce plastic usage in these areas by switching to reusable containers for food storage instead of plastic cling film and zip-lock bags. For example, the hotel can invest in glass or stainless steel containers that can be washed and reused. Additionally, the hotel can replace single-use plastic utensils and cups in staff break rooms with reusable alternatives.

The hotel's gift shop and guest services can also contribute to plastic reduction efforts. The Swan Hotel can stock eco-friendly products in its gift shop, such as reusable water bottles, bamboo toothbrushes, and toiletries in biodegradable packaging. Additionally, the hotel can eliminate plastic key cards by switching to digital key systems or key cards made from recycled or biodegradable materials. For promotional materials like brochures and maps, the hotel can use recycled paper or digital alternatives, such as QR codes that guests can scan with their smartphones.

The proposed initiative involves implementing a comprehensive plastic reduction program that includes some simple steps that will have great impact such as: Replacing single-use plastic items, such as bottles, straws, and toiletry containers, with sustainable alternatives like glass, metal, or biodegradable materials. Also the hotel could install refillable dispensers for shampoo, conditioner, and soap in guest rooms to reduce the use of small plastic bottles and use eco-friendly packaging for food service and operational supplies, such as compostable or reusable containers.

For example, some hotels encourage guests to participate in the hotel's plastic reduction efforts by providing information and incentives, such as discounts for refusing single-use plastics. Most people comply for a good discount!

On the other hand, the benefits are major not only for the environment, but also for the operational efficiency of the hotel. Reducing plastic waste helps protect marine life, reduce landfill waste, and decrease the hotel's overall carbon footprint (Jauhari, 2021, p. 56), but also, switching to bulk amenities and sustainable packaging can lead to cost savings over time, as these alternatives are often more economical in the long run.

Nonetheless, demonstrating a commitment to plastic reduction will enhance the hotel's image, attracting eco-conscious travelers and improving guest satisfaction and prepares the hotel for future regulations and standards related to plastic use and waste management. (Edgell, 2020, p. 82). On a more negative side, transitioning to sustainable alternatives may require upfront investment. However, long-term savings from reduced procurement and waste disposal costs can offset these expenses (Batabyal, 2018, p. 158). The initiative is cost-effective in the long run, as savings from reduced procurement and waste disposal costs outweigh initial investments. It is also realistic, as sustainable alternatives to single-use plastics are increasingly available and affordable.

Also, some guests may always prefer single-use plastics due to convenience. To address this, the hotel can provide clear communication about the environmental benefits of the initiative and offer incentives for participation (Sustainable Tourism, 2019, p. 210).

Most importantly, several hotels have successfully implemented plastic reduction initiatives and they seem to work. As mentioned before, the Marriott International group eliminated single-use plastic straws and stirrers across its properties, preventing over 1 billion plastic items from entering landfills annually (Green Globe, n.d.). Similarly, the Soneva Resorts chain has implemented a comprehensive plastic-free policy, including the use of glass bottles and refillable amenities, resulting in a 90% reduction in plastic waste (UNWTO, n.d.). These examples demonstrate the feasibility and benefits of the proposed initiative.

In conclusion, the Swan Hotel has made commendable progress in adopting green practices but still faces a significant gap in plastic reduction. The proposed plastic reduction initiative, including the elimination of single-use plastics and the adoption of sustainable alternatives, addresses this gap and offers numerous environmental, operational, and reputational benefits. While challenges such as initial costs and guest resistance exist, they can be mitigated through strategic planning and stakeholder engagement. By implementing this initiative, the Swan Hotel can enhance its sustainability efforts, contribute to global environmental goals, and set an example for other hospitality providers.

Furthermore, addressing plastic waste aligns with broader global sustainability trends, regulatory requirements, and consumer expectations. Guests are increasingly conscious of environmental impacts and are more likely to support businesses that demonstrate eco-friendly commitments. By proactively adopting these practices, the Swan Hotel can strengthen its market positioning and remain competitive in an evolving industry landscape.

While some initiatives may require upfront investment and changes to operational protocols, the long-term benefits—such as cost savings, regulatory compliance, and increased guest satisfaction—make them worthwhile. Through a combination of staff training, guest education, and partnerships with sustainable suppliers, the hotel can achieve its plastic reduction goals and set an example for other hospitality providers. Additionally, reinforcing these efforts through marketing strategies and transparent sustainability reporting will enhance customer trust and loyalty, further solidifying the hotel's reputation as a leader in sustainable hospitality.

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