

Waste Management in Dubai Sustainable Tourism (DST)

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As global warming and climate change remain key challenges that the world urgently needs to find solutions for, there is an urgent call-to-action for each nation to collectively alter current paths to reduce their catastrophic impact on the environment and increase the likelihood of sustaining natural resources for generations to come. Dubai has answered that call and is embracing a sustainability model to cater to the need for a greener, more environment-friendly future.

Dubai, is a city that is growing at an exponential rate, with each industry's contribution inter-twining to result in nationwide development and economic growth. The Emirate is also recognised world-over for being one of the leading tourism destinations. With 14.9 million visitors in 2016, and by setting ambitious targets of welcoming 20 million visitors in 2020, tourism has undoubtedly become one of the key pillars driving Dubai's economy. Much like the city, Dubai's hospitality industry is experiencing steady progress, and the growing influence of the city's tourism and leisure sectors are major contributors to the industry's evolution and success.

Consequently, it is no surprise that both tourism and hospitality play critical roles in achieving our sustainability goals. The growth of these sectors, translates into a crucial responsibility that each of its stakeholders have - to ensure we create a more sustainable environment for residents and visitors alike. Furthermore, as travellers and residents alike become more conscious about the environment and are steering towards brands that are meeting their 'green' expectations, hospitality establishments are now having to cater to this environmentally-aware segment of visitors.

Globally, environment waste numbers are increasing each year. This speaks volumes about the immense pressure that natural resources and the environment are under. One of the '2017 Sustainable Development Goals' stipulated as part of the United Nation's '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' is ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns. According to United Nations, an estimated one third of all food produced – equivalent to 1.3 billion tonnes worth around US\$1 trillion – is wasted each year.

Historically, hospitality players have been blamed for being contributors to environmental waste – power, water, and mainly food wastage. Keeping this in mind, Dubai is moving to tackle the issue of food waste with the launch of the UAE Food Bank. The initiative, spearheaded by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, was announced in January and aims to combat the AED 3.5 billion worth of food discarded in the city every year by either distributing to the needy or recycling in an environmentally friendly manner.

Carbon emissions and food wastage remain some of the biggest barriers to managing sustainable tourism. This is why Dubai Tourism has developed a long-term 'Dubai Sustainable Tourism' strategy which acts as a roadmap to ensure that the city continuously remains at the forefront in terms of sustainable tourism. The mandate is to enhance the sustainability of the tourism sector, therefore positively impacting interconnected industries within the city, and contributing towards achieving overall sustainable development targets by the year 2021.

Ultimately, part of the responsibility also lies with tourism boards and governing authorities to create the right framework to ensure that steps are taken to substantially reduce wastage, therefore lowering the overall negative impact a city or country has on the environment and its natural resources. DST works with a broad range of hospitality partners, government bodies, non-profit organisations and environmental groups to successfully implement relevant programmes, while collaborating to achieve a common goal of making Dubai one of the world's leading sustainable tourism destinations.

DST's strategy includes the development and roll-out of tools that tourism and hospitality stakeholders can use to measure the impact and effectiveness of sustainable tourism initiatives. These include four inter-linked pillars around Awareness & Education; Performance Measurement; Industry Awards and Industry Standards.

Each of the four pillars have a focus on waste management at their core. For example, in 2017 DST issued the '12 Steps Towards Sustainability Guideline' to hotels across Dubai. This practical guide consists of 12 simple steps that any hotel in Dubai can adopt to improve their sustainability levels and enhance their green credentials. The aim of the guideline is to advise hospitality professionals on the best practices for hotels, regardless of size and operational structure, on a number of topics including waste management.

This year DST also implemented The Carbon Calculator, an automated tool that measures the carbon footprint arising due to operations in Dubai's hotel industry. It forms part of the Tourism Dirham (TD) industry platform; all Dubai hotels have access to it and it is mandatory for each property to submit activity and data on their emissions on a monthly basis, including details on the amount of waste sent to landfill sites without recycling. Once the information has been inputted, the calculator analyses the results, estimating the carbon footprint of hotels. This will allow DST to develop strategies for the hotel sector such as increasing the efficiency of managing resources and ultimately mitigating climate change.

In addition, 2017 saw the inauguration of the Dubai Sustainable Tourism Awards. These recognised the

hotels and people that are driving environmental awareness and are adopting tangible measures to ensure enhanced sustainability within the tourism sector. The awards featured 20 different categories; 13 main awards targeted towards hospitality establishments, and seven special awards that recognise the efforts of the leaders and individuals who truly embody the sustainability principles of DST in the market place. All award submissions were required to demonstrate a sustainable and progressive approach towards waste management within their establishment.

While DST continues to lay the groundwork to create a sustainable future, it is equally imperative for stakeholders to keep the conversation alive and continue to educate the public about the importance of every little contribution, which collectively goes a long way. Therefore, an important aspect of ensuring that the sustainable tourism strategy works is public-private partnerships. It's important for the industry to work together to identify action plans to achieve sustainable tourism goals.

Through the strategies and tools described above, DST is harnessing its stakeholder relationships and educating the industry on sustainability issues. By issuing city-wide guidelines and training tools, DST can recommend strategies and procedures that can be implemented by hotels thereby mobilise change to be implemented across the industry.

To sum up, as the travel and tourism sector continues to be a key pillar of economic growth in the UAE, it is imperative for the industry to come together to identify common challenges and roll out initiatives that can effectively resolve any issues. Dubai will undeniably play an instrumental role in shaping the way forward for sustainable tourism, and if history is any indication, the city will work tirelessly to achieve the targets set, ensuring a cleaner, greener tomorrow is right around the corner.