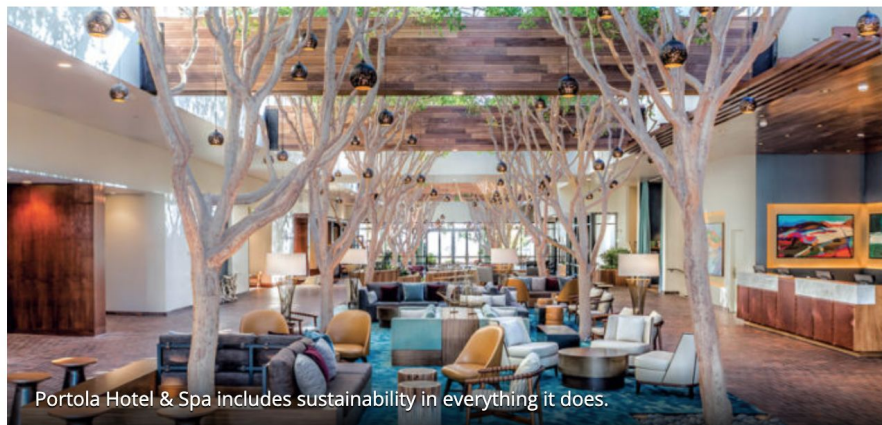


Hotel Business®



Portola Hotel & Spa includes sustainability in everything it does.

For Portola Hotel & Spa, green measures are part of its DNA

BY GREGG WALLIS ON MAY 15, 2020

SUSTAINABILITY: LEED-CERTIFIED HOTELS

MONTEREY, CA—Since 2010, when the Portola Hotel & Spa became one of the first U.S. Green Building Council LEED-certified hotels on California's Central Coast, sustainability has played a role in all of its initiatives.

When Janine Chicourrat, GM of the property, arrived in 2008, she started looking at all of the hotel's operations. For instance, the property had a cogeneration machine, which Chicourrat had previously not worked with before.

"I started thinking about all of the different sustainable practices that they had started informally at the hotel, and then I researched LEED certification," she said.

That research, sparked by the cogeneration machine, which generates electricity and useful heat at the same time, led Chicourrat to pitch the owners on achieving LEED certification.

"I estimated when I did my presentation that it was going to cost about \$30,000 to \$50,000, and it was upward of about \$400,000 when we finally got our LEED certification, with all of the different changes we made equipment-wise in the hotel," she said.

Despite the cost of the changes to become more sustainable, Chicourrat said it had a number of benefits. "Energy costs continue to rise. No matter what you do, it is a smart investment in terms of trying to reduce your overall energy costs or keep the increases at a lower rate than a hotel that doesn't go through something like that," she said. "You are saving money on energy. You are saving money on water. The Monterey Peninsula has a huge water issue and our cost of water is one of the highest in the country. Anything you can do to save water and reduce those expenses is a good thing. A lot of it has to do with the payback on energy and water; those are the two biggest contributors."

In addition to the energy and cost savings, the social aspect is important to Chicourrat. "There is a certain responsibility to try to help educate people, I believe, in terms of what it is to be sustainable," she said. "Hotels in general tend to be one of the biggest energy wasters in the world. Think about all of the lights that are turned on and left on. Some people leave their hotel rooms and leave their TV on. It just blows my mind."



Since achieving LEED certification, sustainability is a factor in all the hotel does. “Every time we do something in the hotel, we look for ways that we can make changes that respect the environment and help us with our initiatives,” she said. “We’ve gone the extra step to try to be as sustainable as possible.”

One initiative the property has undertaken is switching its plastic water bottles to aluminum. “We are working with the manufacturers to see if we can brand it to create a sustainability message for our destination,” she said. “We are also trying to get all of the hotels and restaurants using these aluminum bottles to help educate people on the importance of sustainability.”

There is a difference in the cost between aluminum and plastic, but Chicourrat is fine with that. “As I tried to convince one of our local hotel operators, who said he gives his water away, I told him that I put it in and charge,” she said. “I told him he could find something else to give away. I give away a cookie at check-in. You don’t necessarily have to give away your water. Charge for it and you are going to be fine.”

Last summer, the property launched a Reduce Waste conference program. The sales and catering teams deliver all sales kit information electronically or via eco-friendly flash drives and provide clients with a list of suggested environmentally friendly vendors, as well as biodegradable badges and other green-friendly conference services. “For groups of up to 900, we do composting,” she said. “We’ve got eco-friendly vendors that we work with and exhibit companies. We try to get people not to use paper plates and go back to china and replace disposable utensils.”

Including the composting from the conference program, the hotel is diverting about 75% of its waste. “We separate everything,” said Chicourrat. “In the kitchen, we have all of our food waste separated and we send it off to be composted.”

The Portola’s dining establishments also participate in the local Monterey Bay Aquarium’s Seafood Watch Program, which classifies seafood using a green, yellow and red system. Species classified green are the most sustainable. Yellow should be avoided, but can be used occasionally, while those classified red should be avoided at all costs because of environmental impact or endangered populations.

The property also offsets 100% of its carbon footprint by purchasing renewable energy credits. These energy credits also help support local schools by helping to fund solar projects. The hotel recently purchased green power to offset 100% of the building’s annual energy consumption over two years—equivalent to offsetting 3.9 million kilowatt hours of electricity and 2,035 metric tons of carbon dioxide.

The hotel has even found a way for the leftover mash from its brewpub to suit another purpose. “It is sent off for use as cow feed,” she said. “It was one of our brewers who came up with that.”

One of the best parts of the sustainability initiatives for her is the employee engagement. “They are the ones who come up with the ideas because they are doing the job,” she said. “It has been really cool to have the creativity come out in the people that you work with and have them throw out their ideas. I encourage everyone around me.”

The hotel includes info on its sustainability efforts on its website and in-room for guests to see. Chicourrat said she has even overheard a child talking to his parents about how the hotel had so many environmentally friendly things. HB