

## **Holistic Hotel And Resort Design - A New Paradigm In International Tourism - By Angela Clarke**

A new paradigm in international tourism has been established through the growing trend of holistic hotel and resort design, according to leading industry architects, interior designers, and sustainable tourism consultants.

This view promotes a holistic development system integrating body, mind and spirit to create balanced, self-renewing and sustainable tourism developments.

'International tourism can make significant positive changes to the world, particularly in the third world, where many countries are turning to tourism to build economic growth,' says Robert Zimmer, founder of leading international architectural and design firm, Zimmer Associates International (ZAI).

'By taking a leadership role in holistic sustainable development, we are helping protect the world's delicate ecology, as well as the interests of all stakeholders including indigenous people and local communities,' he continues.

In the past, sustainable tourism practice has been less prevalent, resulting in overdevelopment, which can lead to water, air and noise pollution, traffic congestion, and exploitation of resources. The environment has been destroyed through the degradation of landscapes, the destruction of local flora and fauna, and damage to marine life through increased sewage outfall.

The significant growth in golf courses, which consume large amounts of water and result in deforestation, can lead to soil erosion and flooding, as well as loss of agricultural societies, villages and traditional lifestyles.

One of the first monitoring systems to be established which looked at the environment was EMS (Environmental Management Systems). EMS is used to set targets and monitor progress on environmental impacts, water and energy conservation and community impacts through planning, training monitoring and corrective action. Most major hotel chains including Hilton, Accor and Shangri-la use an EMS system. Today, hotels are focusing on social elements as well and realise that their consumers have growing expectations.

'There has been an evolution from environmental to social awareness and sustainability. Today, hotels must take into consideration more than just the environment and look at a more holistic approach -social, environmental, community and financial elements. These include the design, siting and construction of a hotel, ethical and sustainable procurement procedures and effects and benefits to the community.' says Rachel Dodds, sustainable tourism consultant.

To achieve this holistic approach, Robert Zimmer recommends the following key design principles:

- **Overall Sustainability.** Ensuring the strategic long-term thinking and planning of tourism projects, so that they protect the environment as well as local cultures and communities. Benefits of this process include cost-savings through reduced energy costs, higher property values, greater worker productivity, and easier access to permits and funds from government organisations or the EU.
- **Regenerative Design System.** A design system that allows tourism projects to become part of their natural and cultural environments, by using local resources, and creating systems that continue to evolve and self-replicate. The relationship between man, building and the environment, combined with the natural cycles of the area, is key, along with the historic and cultural preservation of the site. Water is recognized as the most precious resource, and ways are developed to ensure that it retains its purity and integrity over the long-term. Non-toxic building materials are used, where possible sourced locally, as well as high thermal mass flooring with radiant heat and cooling. Recently, the International Tourism Partnership launched new guidelines for Siting, Design and Construction which hopes to facilitate the future development of more sustainable and environmentally sensitive hotels.

- **Service Philosophy.** Service delivery in the hotel industry can often be the key driver of a hotel's success, and is usually underpinned by contented staff. A holistic philosophy respects the individual customs and traditions of its staff, and incorporates their needs within the hotel's overall management ethos. In addition it seeks to incorporate locals in the management structure to teach the community how to create its own projects, and run them in the future.
- **Sanctuary Spas.** The creation of magnificent spa sanctuaries, located in peaceful and restorative environments. Based on the principle of sacred healing of mind, body and spirit, the spa services often incorporate massage, yoga, and meditation, as well as a wide range of detoxifying facial treatments, nutritious vegetable masks, thalassotherapy, reflexology and Reiki. Holistic cuisine. As a fundamental principle, the sourcing of indigenous foods, as well as organic vegetables and free-range game and fish to provide healthy, holistic and delicious local fare. Ideally, herbs and vegetables will be grown within the hotel's own organic vegetable gardens, tended by locals.
- **Sensitive Interior Design.** Interior designs reflect the natural beauty of the surroundings using exquisite materials such as raw silks, natural linens and wool, and through colour, texture and sensitive lighting. Holistic designers creatively blend colour, harmony, balance, proportion and style, resulting in a unique environment with a great sense of 'place'. Lighting is designed to reduce energy consumption, by maximising natural light and using low-energy lamps.
- **Native Landscaping.** Particular care is taken to ensure that native landscaping is preserved, and that planting is harmonious and regenerating, respecting the natural principles of permaculture. Natural ventilation is used where possible, along with water-efficient appliances, and recycling of inorganic materials, as well as composting of organic materials, are an integral part of the regeneration process.

'Fundamental holistic design combines the mind's knowledge and intellect, with the spirit's vision and inspiration, and the body's natural resources and money. The resulting design is underpinned by environmental ethics and harmony, sound construction and technology, as well as inspired design, with every element in place to ensure a balanced, self-renewing and sustainable project,' says Robert Zimmer.

This new trend in hotel and resort design is reflected by the growing number of awards in the industry, guidelines and best practices which continuously test the notion of a holistic, integrated approach. In the medium to long-term, the industry should see a transformation of its business practice and contribute to the creation of enduring, sustainable platforms that will underpin the industry for many generations to come.

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