



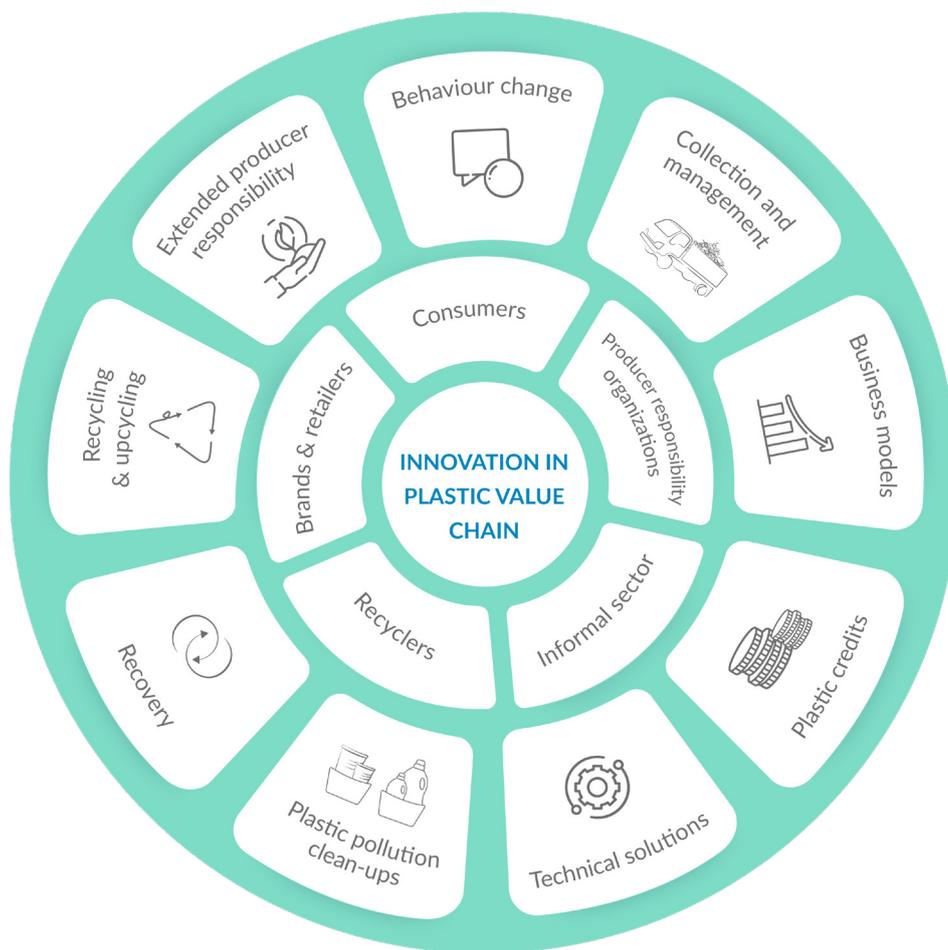
# Circular solutions for plastic pollution

Influencing value  
chains to reduce plastic use

# About the case study

This good practice case study is part of a series of knowledge products developed by the SEA circular project to showcase exemplary market-based solutions that bring about transformational changes in the way plastic is managed in the value chain. This series captures circular economy approaches, ranging from innovative business models to behaviour change initiatives, to address plastic pollution. These approaches form part of the SEA circular project's "circularity framework for the plastic value chain".

## Circularity framework – plastic value chain



# Background

Six Senses was founded in 1995, with the vision of shaking up the luxury resort experience. Pioneering barefoot luxury, Six Senses works at both the global and local levels, engaging people, cultures and ecosystems in their locations to provide quality remote island experiences.

From growing its own organic produce to learning how to close the loop on waste and launching coral restoration and reforestation projects, the company has been a leader in sustainability. The business case for Six Senses' work on plastic begins with its positioning as a brand and its commitment to its guests and communities. With this, Six Senses decided not to have single-use plastic bottles in its rooms from the outset, continuously challenging itself on why plastic products should be used at all. In 2004, all Six Senses hotels were equipped with water bottling systems to avoid the use of plastic water bottles, with the company eliminating the use of plastic straws from all of its resorts in 2016.



# The strategy

**Defined baseline and metrics.** To ensure sustainability, Six Senses started out by defining the plastic challenge for its resorts, identifying questions to be resolved as well as opportunities. Inventories are created for all plastic items, which have been used over the years to inform efforts to avoid or eliminate such items. The company is keen to implement plastic-reduction programmes in its resorts (such as the installation of water bottling systems, the elimination of plastic straws and the minimized usage of plastic wrap by timing arrivals of food quantities), which it first trials in a few resorts. Such pilots are followed by clear assessments against baseline figures, evaluations and reports highlighting lessons learned, which are then shared. The pilots help define plastic types, set priorities and methodologies, and establish the metrics and criteria for success (e.g. compostable items). If successful, the pilots are rolled out to all the company's resorts.

In 2018, an inventory was completed of all plastic items existing in every Six Senses hotel, resort, spa and corporate office – from plastic wrap in kitchens to air-conditioning units in guest rooms. These items are categorized as single-use, multiple-use and long-term. This inventory continues to inform Six Senses' implementation strategy to be completely plastic-free by 2022.

The strategy (Plastic Free 2022) does not focus on the weight or volume of the plastic waste, although these are tracked for all types of waste as part of the company's larger sustainability management programme. Rather, the key metric for Plastic Free 2022 is the number of plastic items eliminated or avoided per year. By conducting an annual evaluation, this metric is naturally skewed towards single-use plastics. Eliminating or avoiding single-use plastics altogether reduces the negative impacts associated with the entire plastic product life cycle, and not just with waste disposal.

## Eliminating or avoiding

single-use plastics altogether

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As Six Senses' strategy continues to unfold, metrics on the avoidance and elimination of plastic items are revisited, with every win along the way celebrated within the company.

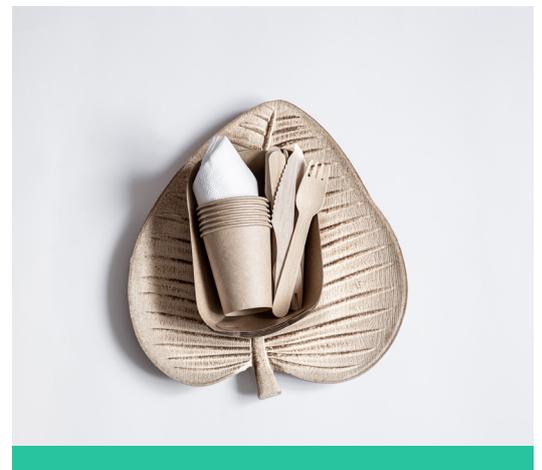
**Training.** Sustainability leadership workshops and training series take place regularly, and are designed to engage corporate team leaders, senior management, unit heads and hosts around the issues of plastic, how it relates to the company and how it relates to families and individuals. Training managers and sustainability managers at all hotels deliver the training, which has covered topics such as "What is plastic?" and "Microplastics, wildlife, human health and solutions". The goal is to achieve 100 per cent participation.

**Work with the community.** Many hotels have aligned with local community organizations to raise awareness of and empower people to adopt plastic-free lifestyles. Each property has an Earth Lab, where guests who are interested in plastic-free lifestyles can learn about this through activities such as making beeswax wraps, which can be used to replace plastic wraps.

**Focus on supplier engagement.** Six Senses focuses on waste avoidance rather than waste disposal, which is implemented with careful purchasing strategies and product selection. Packaging forms the bulk of the hotels' plastic waste and thus defines the critical role of suppliers, with which Six Senses continuously works to address this. In 2019, the purchasing teams of all Six Senses hotels sent written notification to their suppliers, informing them of the organization's goal to be plastic free. The letter solicited ideas and alternative products along with a pledge that suppliers were encouraged to sign. Overall, there was great support from many stakeholders in Six Senses' supply chains, and alternative suppliers were sought to replace those that refused to participate.

Six Senses values its supplier relationships and continues to seek innovative new products and suppliers that align with their plastic goals. The company continues to build in this area, sourcing plastic alternatives and planning additional training for its suppliers and purchasing teams.

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# Challenges

**Lack of plastic alternatives.** Some items, such as plastic-free air conditioners or plastic wrap, simply do not exist yet. While the company understands this, it has nevertheless set its vision on the innovations and developments happening in its chains, and the demand driven by its guests, the public and local governments worldwide.

**Too much packaging is the norm.** Packaging is a huge hurdle representing a colossal and mostly unseen burden of single-use plastic waste. Kitchen health and safety standards may need to adapt to allow a return to a world without single-use plastic. Plastic has become so ubiquitous to everyday life that often it is not even noticed.

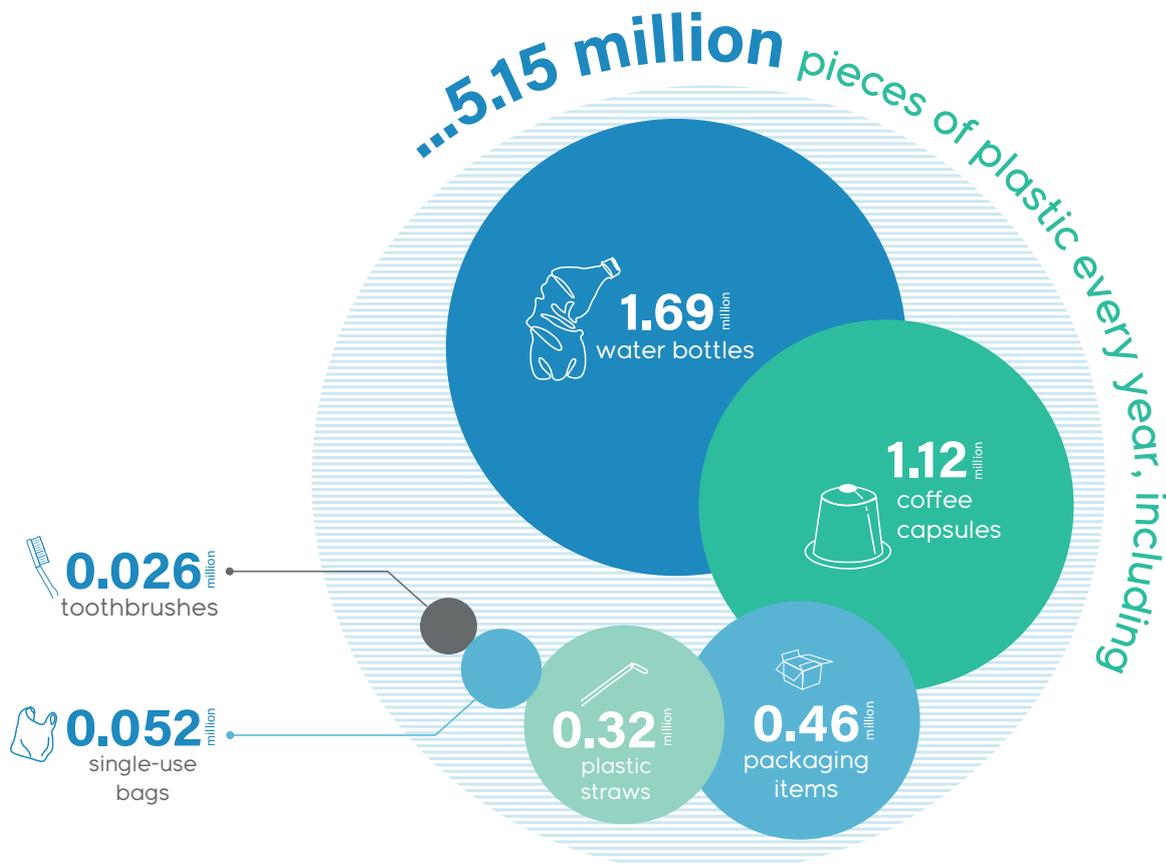
**COVID-19.** The current situation, in which big companies are seizing the opportunity to lobby for repeals of government bans on single-use plastics, is a big setback. Concern about whether the use of plastic gloves and coveralls reduces the risk of infection, or whether natural fabrics pose less risk of spreading the virus than plastics, should also be addressed through reliable information from authorized health organizations to assuage fears.



# Impacts

- Based on the latest recount in July 2019, Six Senses' 18 hotels successfully eliminated or avoided 5.15 million pieces of plastic per year. This figure includes more than 1.69 million water bottles, 1.12 million coffee capsules, 26,000 toothbrushes, 460,000 packaging items, 52,000 single-use bags and more than 320,000 plastic straws.
- The hotels' water bottling systems can expect a two-year payback period in locations with non-potable tap water, achieved through the cost savings made from not purchasing plastic bottled water.

Based on the latest recount in July 2019, Six Senses' 18 hotels successfully eliminated or avoided...



- Financial benefits for the hotels also stem from reduced waste handling and disposal costs (5.15 million plastic waste items less per year). The hotels also have strengthened relationships with their suppliers.
- Six Senses Laamu in the Maldives for example, is working with Air Seafood to avoid using 8,500 Styrofoam boxes per year by shipping food in Biobiene wood fibre containers (FSC-certified). In addition to saving on the cost of waste, the hotel now has an excellent source of carbon to create healthy compost, thereby eliminating the need to purchase chemical fertilizers, while also supporting vegetable production from the hotel's gardens.
- In many cases, Six Senses' hotels found that local suppliers appreciated the reduced operating cost to their business from reduced packaging, and that initial resistance towards change quickly shifted to adoption, for example, of container take-back programmes. One food supplier in Ninh Van Bay in Viet Nam, now no longer uses around 20,000 delivery bags per year following a switch to paper and reusable baskets.

## Six Senses' hotels

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# Lessons learned

- For any hotel unsure of where to start their journey to eliminate plastics, water filtration is an excellent option. Not only does it save operating costs and eliminate plastic bottles, but it also cuts carbon emissions associated with transporting water across distances.
- Packaging represents an immense volume of single-use plastics and is difficult to tackle directly. Six Senses did not fully anticipate the complexity of working with multiple businesses within and throughout its supply chains, which are required to effect changes in packaging. Shorter, local supply chains are less complex and have other benefits for local economies. Longer, global supply chains may require industry-level engagement or government regulations to solve.
- An unexpected lesson learned relates to the metrics that Six Senses uses. The plan was originally for an inventory of all plastic items used across the hotel group to form a baseline, which could then be periodically revised. The number of items eliminated or avoided would then be calculated against that baseline. However, the company found that the inventory of plastic items kept growing, rather than shrinking, despite the acknowledged significant reductions of certain items. This was due to the teams' improved ability to identify and report plastic items. As a result of such engagement efforts, Six Senses hosts have gained a greater awareness of plastics in use. The metrics used now simply track the number of items eliminated and avoided, and use the inventory data to inform strategy.



# Moving forward

Six Senses made an in-depth analysis of the latest science to form their Plastic Free 2022 strategy. The company set the extremely ambitious goal of not only eliminating single-use plastics, but all plastics involved in its operations. Starting with single-use and disposable plastics as the top priority, the aim is to carefully reduce the exposure of this petrochemical material to guests and communities, while being mindful of its harmful impacts to well-being and wildlife. This means transitioning to natural compostable materials in some cases, and to high-quality reusable materials in others.

Management recognizes that becoming plastic free is difficult if not impossible to achieve, but nevertheless views it as an important goal and a vision that not only supports and sustains the environments where the hotels are based, along with the livelihoods that depend on it, but one that also enhances the experience of guests and visitors staying in a Six Senses resort.



We thank Six Senses for sharing details of their exemplary innovations in the SEA circular project's series on the plastic value chain.



The SEA circular project Reducing marine litter by addressing the management of the plastic value chain in Southeast Asia is implemented by the UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA), with funding support from the Government of Sweden. SEA circular aims to reduce and prevent plastic pollution and its impact by working with governments, businesses, civil society, academia and international partners. The initiative promotes market-based solutions and enabling policies to transform plastic value-chain management, strengthens the science base for informed decision making, creates outreach and raises awareness. The project leverages COBSEA's regional mechanism to tackle the transboundary challenge of marine litter in a harmonized manner.

 [www.sea-circular.org](http://www.sea-circular.org)

