

Case Study: Six Senses

INFLUENCING THE VALUE CHAINS TO REDUCE PLASTIC USE

This case study demonstrates market-based solutions towards “less plastic wasted” highlighting transformational changes in the way plastic is managed in the value chain. Applying circular economy approaches, including business incentives for plastic reduction and recycling has led to an increase in plastic re-use and recycling rate and reduction in single use plastic packaging.

A. Background

Six Senses Resorts was founded in 1995, with the vision of shaking up the luxury resort experience. Pioneering barefoot luxury, Six Senses works with both global and local sensitivities by 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 to coral restoration and reforestation projects, the organization 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 hotels decided at the onset not to have single-use plastic shampoo and amenity bottles in their rooms since Day 1. ‘Why have plastic at all?’ has been a question it continuously challenges itself. In 2004, all Six Senses hotels were equipped with water bottling systems to avoid using plastic water bottles, and in 2016 the organization achieved plastic straw elimination in all of its resorts.

B. The Strategy

Defined baseline and metrics. Six Senses started by defining the plastic challenge for its resorts and identify questions and opportunities. Inventories are created for all plastic items, and over the years, efforts made to avoid or eliminate these inventoried plastic items. From the installation of water bottling systems, the elimination of straws, or minimizing the use of cling wrap by timing arrivals of food production quantities, such programs are usually piloted and tested in a few resorts first. This is followed by clear assessments vs the baseline, evaluations, including reports highlighting lessons learned are generated and shared. The pilots help define “plastic”, set priorities and methodologies, and establish the metrics and criteria for success (i.e., for “compostable”). These are then rolled out groupwide.

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

The strategy does not focus on the weight or volume of the plastic waste, although such are already tracked for all types of waste as part of the Resort's larger sustainability management program. 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. By eliminating or avoiding the plastic items altogether, negative impacts associated with the entire plastic product lifecycle are reduced, and not only with waste disposal.

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

Training the Organization: Sustainability leadership workshops and training series take place regularly, designed to engage corporate team leaders, senior management, unit heads and hosts around the issues of plastic, how this relates to the organization and how it relates to families and

individuals. Training Managers and Sustainability Managers at all Hotels have been delivering training covering topics as, 'What is Plastic?', 'Microplastics, Wildlife, Human Health, and Solutions', with the goal of 100% participation.

Work with the Community: Many hotel units have aligned with local community organizations to raise awareness and empowerment toward plastic free lifestyles. Each property has an Earth Lab, where guests interested in plastic-free lifestyles can learn through activities such as making beeswax wraps which can be used to replace cling films.

Focus on Supplier engagement: Six Senses focuses on waste avoidance rather than waste disposal, and this is executed with careful purchasing strategies and product selection. Packaging forms the bulk of plastic waste and thus defines the critical role of suppliers. Six Senses continuously works with them to address this. In 2019, the Purchasing Teams of all Six Senses hotel sent written notification to their suppliers, informing them of the organization's goal to be plastic free. This letter solicited ideas and alternative products along with a pledge that suppliers were encouraged to sign to. There was great support received from some unexpected stakeholders in Six Senses' supply chains, and alternative suppliers were sought to replace organizations that refused to participate.

Six Senses values its supply chain relationships and continues to seek innovative new products and suppliers aligned with their plastic goals. The organization continues to build in this area, seeking alternatives to plastic and planning additional training for its suppliers and Purchasing teams.

C. Challenges

Lack of alternatives to plastic. Some items like plastic-free air conditioners or cling film simply do not exist yet. This is not lost on the organization even as it nevertheless sets its vision on the innovations and developments happening in its chains, and the demand driven by Six Senses' guests, the public, and local governments around the world.

Too much packaging is the default. 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 we tend to not even notice it.

COVID-19: The current situation where big plastic companies are seizing the opportunity to lobby for a repeal of government bans on single use plastic, is a big setback. Concern about whether the use of plastic gloves and wrappers reduces the risk of infection, or if natural fabrics pose less risk vs. plastic surfaces at spreading the virus, should also be addressed through reliable information from authorized health organizations to assuage fears.

D. Impacts

- Based on the latest recount as of July 2019, Six Senses' 18 hotels successfully eliminated or avoided *5.15 million pieces of plastic per year*. Those figures include over 1.69 million water bottles, 1.12 million coffee capsules, 26,000 toothbrushes, 460,000 packaging items, 52,000 single-use bags, and over 320,000 plastic straws.
- The hotels' water bottling installations can expect a two-year payback period in locations with non-potable tap water, realized by the cost savings from not purchasing plastic bottled water.
- Six Senses hotels benefit financially by not paying for handling and disposal of 5.15 million waste items per year, plus by strengthened relationships with suppliers.

- Six Senses Laamu in Maldives for example is working with [Air Seafood](#) to avoid 8,500 Styrofoam boxes per year by shipping food in [Biobiene](#) wood fiber containers (FSC certified). In addition to saving on cost of waste, the hotel now has an excellent source of carbon to create healthy compost which eliminates the need to purchase chemical fertilizers, while supporting vegetable production from the hotel gardens.
- In many cases, the hotels found that local suppliers appreciated the reduced operating cost to their business by reduced packaging, and that what was initially resistance to change quickly pivoted to wholehearted adoption, as with container take-back programs. One food supplier, Ninh Van Bay in Vietnam, is now avoiding 20,000 delivery bags per year by using paper with reusable baskets.

E. Lessons Learned

- For any hotel unsure of where to start on their journey to eliminate plastics, water filtration is an excellent place to start. It saves operating cost, eliminates plastic bottles, while cutting down carbon emissions associated with transporting water across distances.
- Packaging represents an immense volume of single use plastic 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 is 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 regulation to solve.
- An unexpected lesson learned is related to the metrics used by Six Senses. The plan was originally for an inventory of all plastic items used across the group to form a baseline, which then be periodically revised. The number of items eliminated or avoided is then calculated against that baseline. What they found though, was the inventory of plastic items kept growing, not shrinking, despite the acknowledged significant reductions of certain items. The reason? The teams got better at seeing and reporting plastic items. As a result of such engagement efforts, Six Senses Hosts have gained greater awareness of the plastic around us. To date, the metrics used now simply track the number of items eliminated and avoided and use the inventory data to inform strategy.

F. Moving Forward

Six Senses took a deep dive into the latest science to form their revised strategy on plastic: Plastic Free 2022. The organization set the extremely ambitious goal of eliminating not only single use plastic, but all plastic involved in its operations. Starting with single-use and disposable plastic as top priority, the aim is to carefully reduce exposure to this petrochemical material for guests and communities, being mindful of its harmful impacts to wellness and wildlife. This means transitioning to natural compostable materials in some cases, and to high quality reusable materials in other cases.

Management knows this is difficult, if not impossible to achieve. It nevertheless sees the goal as something to strive for, as a vision that not only supports and sustains the environment where the hotels are situated and the livelihoods that depend on it, but enhance the experience for guests and visitors of staying in a Six Senses Resort.

Quotes:

We're taking a "Leap of faith" with the goal, and we're going to push it as far as we can. It is an unorthodox position, and we don't really know yet how we're going to get there, but we will.

It's important to note that world did exist prior to the 1940s and hotels and most commercial kitchens can operate safely without plastic.