

An Importance-Performance Analysis Of International Visitors To Penang, Malaysia

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As one of the leading tourism destinations in Malaysia particularly after Kuala Lumpur and Pahang, Penang faces competition with its neighbouring competitors. To remain competitive, Penang needs to identify its strengths and weaknesses and consequently develop its future marketing strategies to secure high tourists' satisfaction. Indeed, tourist satisfaction needs to be measured and monitored. In light of this consideration, it is believed that the importance-performance analysis (IPA) was found to be a practical and useful technique for evaluating attributes that satisfy tourist and at the same time measure the importance of the same attributes to the tourists. This paper presents an application of the IPA technique to a sample of 372 international visitors who visiting Penang Island between September to October 2012. The data, analyzed quantitatively using matrices, showed the mean score of importance, which were plotted against performance onto two-dimensional axis. Results show that Penang performs well in five items namely (1) safety and security; (2) image of destination; (3) variety of attractions; (4) value for money; and (5) accessibility to the destination. On the other hands, findings show that there is room for improvement for accommodation services, and other areas like friendliness of the people and cultural/historical uniqueness appear to get too much attention. Moreover, this study is significant in identifying the prime market segments and evaluating the products and services provided. As a result, it provides an insight for tourism stakeholder such as hotels operators, public transport operators, food operators, policy makers and others towards enhancing future development of tourism in Penang.

Key words: importance-performance analysis, international visitors, tourist profiles, Penang

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Towards Sustainable Tourism: Synergizing Environmental And Social Practices In The Hospitality Context

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Sustainable business practices have gained prominence especially in the hospitality sector. Besides being environmental friendly, there is also a need to ensure that the businesses in the hospitality sector contribute to the local community. In this paper, the environmental and social community practices of an international resort in Phuket, Thailand are explained. A case study approach is used in this research, in which semi-structured interviews were conducted with the management and employees that are directly involved with the resort's sustainable practices. In addition, the resort's internal documents were also reviewed. The resort practices were benchmarked against other hotels' best practices to identify the performance gaps. The major key issues faced by the resort included lack of environmental awareness among its employees, the red-tape in releasing fund pertaining to investment on environmental practices, uncooperative customers, and local municipal's poor waste management policy. Three main areas that required focus and improvement are energy and water conservation and the channels of communication. Besides, the resort can further expand on its current linkages between its environmental and local community practices to ensure a wider outreach of local community in receiving benefits.

Key words: sustainable business, environmental management practices, social practices, linkages

Introduction

The hospitality business is one sector of the tourism industry that consumes high amount of water and energy and generates substantial waste. Hence, ensuring sustainable business practices is indeed essential in the hospitality sector so as to ensure the sustainability of the industry. The unsustainable tourism activities will then lead to lower tourists' attraction. Similarly, a destination may lose its appeal if there are social problems like commercialisation of culture and immigration of local people whose lives were affected by the tourism activities. Hence, there is a need for the business in the hospitality sector to participate in environmentally-friendly activities to ensure that all processes, products, and activities adequately address current environmental concerns and including the welfare of local community.

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Moreover, being green can be used as a competitive advantage given that there is trend of environmentally-minded consumers who choose hotels that demonstrated concern for the environment (Chan & Ho, 2006). Besides being environmental friendly, there is also a need to ensure that the businesses in the hospitality sector would contribute to the local community where they operate. However, studies have showed that an estimation of two-third earning from the tourism sector is repatriated out of developing countries rather than circulating within the countries to help the local development (Faulk, 2000). Besides that, there is also leakage of tourism revenues which occurred through holiday packages offered by tour companies as the revenue stayed in enclave and foreign ownerships and does not provide benefits to the local community. However, the social and community engagement practices usually involve provision of funds or ad-hoc financial assistance to the community. Thus, the businesses seldom strategized on social contribution and or in linking the environmental practices together with contributing to local community as their sustainable business practices. However, limited study has undertaken on social responsibility of the businesses within the tourism (Ragodoo, 2010).

Hence, this paper discusses the environmental management practices of Minerva Resort, a franchise managed by one of the world largest chain hotels group that is located Phuket, one of the world most popular tourism destination. This paper examines the environmental and social practices of the hotel, the current linkages done and the benefits received from the linkages. The hotel environmental and social practices are also benchmarks against industry best practices and practice of other hotels in the area.

Objectives

The objectives of the case study in relation to the synergizing the social and environmental practices of the resort can be formulated as under:

- Identification of the environmental and social community practices of the hotel
- Discovering the challenges faced in doing the environmental and social and community programs.
- Identifying the gaps in environmental performance and the social community programs

The paper ends with discussion and recommendations on ways to expand the current linkages to ensure the sustainability of the business.

Literature Review

Business sustainability is defined as “making sure business lasts long term while contributing toward economic and social development, a healthy environment and a stable society” (Mekong Private Development Facility, 2004). Hence, the term business sustainability commonly evolved around three principles: economic, environment and social which then similar to Triple Bottom Line where the balance is seek out between the three principles over the timeline.

There are main three key areas needed to be addressed by hoteliers and also all other related parties involve in tourism industry which are the economic development, environmental practices and societal equity. These can also be seen as the goals for accomplishing sustainable tourism.

Environmental Practices

According to Mensah (2006), there are main three areas which are hotels main concern as environment management practices, namely, energy savings, water conservation, recycling of waste and waste management. Evidently, based on a survey carried out by American Hotel and Motel Association (AH&MA) disclosed that hotel managers have rated their most concerning areas in both energy consumption and also waste management whereby recycling is the most commonly used method (Mensah, 2006). However, Zhao and Merna (1992, as cited in Mensah 2006) said that reducing wastage of water and improving water quality are also main concern as hotel industry is one of the highest industries in consuming clean water and often faced with costly water bill.

Community practices

Hotels should ensure that their operation benefits the local community as they indirectly played a significant role in ensuring the sustainability of the tourist destination (Goodwin, 2004). The protection of the local community is important since in most cases, the benefits of tourism often bypass the local community and most of the activities related to tourism contribute significantly to the degradation of the surrounding environment (Faulk, 2000). Thus, it is crucial for tourism businesses such as hotelier and tour operators to involve the local community so that the community gained benefits from tourism activities.

In 2008, The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) set a set of standard which comprises 37 voluntary standards for tourism sustainability that encompass four pillars: effective sustainable management, maximise social and economic benefits to the local community and minimise negative impacts, maximise benefits to the environment and minimise negative impacts and maximise benefits to cultural heritage and minimise negative impacts (GSTC, 2009).

Background of the Organization Under Study

Minerva Resort Phuket is managed by a General Manager who is appointed by the parent company. The management style of franchised by managed hotel is that all management activities are to be followed with the given guidelines by the head quarter but any decision making in regards of monetary aspect will then need approval from the owners before proceeding. The resort has six main departments with each managing their own subunits. These departments are Rooms, Food and Beverage, Engineer, People Development and Quality, Finance and Business Support, and Sales and Marketing. The hotel has around 500 employees with only 2 foreign employees; the General Manager and the Food and Beverage Manager.

In December, 2004 a 9-Richter scale Tsunami hit the island of Phuket. The tsunami had a major on the tourism sector as almost 400 hotels, restaurant and souvenir shops were closed resulted in 5,000 people being unemployed (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2005). The Tsunami tragedy was the turning point for Minerva Resort. The disaster has made the General Manager realised the need of providing helping hand to the local community rather than just the occasionally charity activities which have been carried out previously under the Corporate Responsibility programme.

The Study Methodology

This study was conducted using the following methods:

- Semi-structured interviews of employees at Minerva Resort
- Collection and analysis of data, information from secondary resources
- Comparative analysis with best practices

Semi-structured interviews

A total of five face-to-face interviews were conducted within the resort premises. Different key personnel were interviewed to have a better understanding of the case issues. The interviewees' responsibilities varied from top management to first-line employee within the resort. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Data collection from secondary sources

Both internal and external secondary information were collected from company's websites, company's Corporate Social Responsibility report and government reports.

Comparative analysis

In evaluating the performance of Minerva Resort's environmental practices, the industry best practices and common indicators by Earth Check were used. EarthCheck which is associated with Green Globe was developed with the joint cooperation between the Australian Government funded Sustainability Tourism Cooperative Research Centre (STCRC) and Brisbane-based company, EC3 Global. EarthCheck focus is key environment issues such as climate change, waste reduction and non-renewable resource management (EarthCheck, 2010).

The EarthCheck Programme has been awarded with international standard of compliances, namely, the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) Guidelines for National Greenhouse Gas Inventories, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) Greenhouse Gas Protocol, and the International Organisation for Standardization (ISO) 14064 range of standards for greenhouse gas accounting.

The Findings

The findings are divided into four main parts (i) the environmental practices (ii) the social community practices (iii) the link between environmental and community practices (iv) the barriers from achieving good social and environmental practices

Environmental Practices

Minerva Resort has been engaging in environmental protection through various practices since 2001. However the initial practices was more towards cost saving with the encouragement by the parent company when it established an internal intranet a tool that can monitor and measure hotels' performances in several areas such as energy efficiency, water consumption and also waste produced. With the adoption of the online system by Minerva Resort, the monitoring and measuring work has been carried out by the energy committee members on monthly basis. The data from the

system were feedback to the parent company. The system will then generate benchmark report on utility and waste usage of Minerva Resort against hotels within the chain.

Thus, this internal system acts as the stepping stone, encouraging Minerva Resort in implementing measures to reduce their energy, water consumption and waste by showing the possibilities in reducing operating cost by cutting down energy and water consumption and reduce wastage. Subsequently, Minerva Resort uses a new online sustainability management system called Environment Engage, which is a more comprehensive tool system it provides ways for hotels in becoming “green” through conservation of energy, water and waste consumption and it also gives advices on every aspect of the hotel lifecycle.

In addition, Minerva Resort set a new target to achieve energy saving of 6 to 10 per cent over three years (2010 – 2012) on per available room night basis. Through utilising the tool, the Resort has managed to reduce consumption and have quite a significant amount of saving through energy conservation, water saving and waste management.

Social -Community Practices

Initially, there are not many social-community practices carried out by Minerva Resort. The early social practices can be considered as minor activities including giveaway of old and broken electronic goods to college; old bed linens and towels to dog shelter, dry waste of recyclable items to private garbage collector and also wet waste of leftover food to both dog shelter and pig farmers is also a form of contribution to the local community. However, after the Tsunami tragedy, two up-to-date most successful social practices were carried out, namely, the Happy Homes project and also the two local schools adoption.

The initial work of House of Children started out in 2005. House of Children is basically a shelter home for streets children of Patong. These children are mostly orphanage that either were misplaced or were having drug issues after the Tsunami disaster. Funds were raised both external and internally by Minerva Resort to kick start the project. After a collection of seven million baths, a building was purchased with the capacity to accommodate up to 50 children. Although Minerva Resort is the initiator for House of Children, but it does not managed it.

Besides the additional funding from Minerva Resort, there have also been the involvements of Minerva Resort’s guests. Pamphlets and envelopes are prepared at the Customer Service counter in the lobby for guests who like to make contributions to House of Children. In addition, all employees are encouraged to contribute on voluntarily basis toward House of Children. They donate in terms of time and effort in helping around the House of Children during weekends. For examples, engineers usually volunteer for all the maintenance and repair work.

Aside from aiding the House of Children, there are two local schools located at Phang Nga bay that were adopted by Minerva Resort when the idea was first bought up by the restaurant staff. These two schools have been identified by the team as poor and needed some financial aid from outsiders in order to sustain as the budget received from the provincial government were insufficient.

Each of these schools signed a year contract with Minerva Resort whereby throughout the entire year, support in form of financial aid will be given. At the end of the year, reviews will be made by the visiting team in determining whether the support is still needed as each new school term begins.

The community practices by Minerva Resort focuses on two main areas which are donations and continuous financial funding. However, these types of community practices by Minerva Resort pose two questionable issues: how widespread does the benefit expand and the issue of dependency. Based on the types existing community practices, the benefits only reached certain level of community.

Current Linkage of Practices

Previously, Minerva has not linked its environmental practices with the social and community programs that it has undertaken. The Tsunami changes the direction of the resort. Thus Minerva Resort started to contribute back to the local community by doing charitable work combined with recycling programme such as selling recyclable items to private garbage collectors for a minimal sum, donating old and broken electronic goods to Phuket Technical College and giving out old bed linens and towels to local dog shelter. This method allows Minerva Resort to minimise amount of wastage sent to landfill while at the same time helping specific local people.

In addition, Minerva Resort has also policy of sourcing from the local supplier. Besides seafood source from local suppliers within Phuket, vegetables served in Minerva Resort are obtained from Chiangmai's hill tribes' people in the support of helping to increase their income under Royal King's Sufficient Economy project. The same goes for bathroom amenities which are locally produced products.

Apart from that, the consent were given by the General Manager to two local Thais in operating their store on the sidewalk of the resort does not only provide them with income and guarantee of low leasing rate but also at the same time helping to promote local arts and handicrafts to its foreign guests. This aspect is important as more modern shopping complexes built with stores selling foreign brand goods while the traditional products are slowly diminishing.

However, there are sustainability dilemma on sourcing vegetables from Northern Thailand, as long distance trucking is required for such delivery; Chiang, north of Thailand to Phuket, located in southern part of Thailand. The concern is on the emission of more carbon dioxide into the air through trucking although supporting local supplier is also part of sustainable practices.

The benefit of synergy practices is that Minerva Resort is able to reduce its wastage and the private garbage collectors have a job and income. Additionally, Minerva Resort commitment in practicing recycling despite the absent of government recycling initiative in Phuket can act as a role model to other hotels and resorts to undertake recycling programme. Besides that, it also serves as awareness to all Minerva Resort employees on the importance of recycling.

The local sourcing does not only helps in creating jobs for local people but it also allow the money to be circulating within the context of local economy which then can help to prosper the economy development. In addition, by creating job opportunities also translates lower unemployment rate and reduce of poverty which leads to lower crime activities and allowing local people to have better living standard. The act of supporting the local craftsmen by Minerva Resort showed their commitment in preserving local cultures and crafts. Hence with the current linkages, a bigger contribution can be made towards local community by helping them generating income through the tourism activities.

The Barriers to Good Social and Environmental Practices

Costly Investment

Some practices related in energy saving or using of rain water, for example, require costly investment to initial. Although it will yield return in investment, but often takes a long period of time. Hence, dealing with the effort for implementation of energy saving practices, the General Manager faces with limitation as the fact that decision-making authority that involved capital investment lies on the hand of both owners.

Lack of Enforcement

In the aspect of waste management too, Minerva Resort faced with challenges. One of the main reasons why outside contractor is hired and allowance of private rubbish collectors in coming to collect the rubbish is the lack of garbage policy in place and worst of all, there is no governmentally driven recycling scheme. There are no rules in placed that all garbage must be recycled. In fact, the main problem faced by the landfill operator is that 60 per cent of the garbage collected around Phuket and into the incinerator could not be burned properly because it is too wet. This is due to the fact that the municipal that collected the Phuket’s garbage will have it all dumping into the landfill.

The other issue is that the garbage fee collected by the municipal is not based on the amount of garbage produced by the hotel. Instead the garbage fee is charge accordingly to the type of hotel. Higher star-rating hotels are being charged more while motels and guesthouses are charged at a cheaper rate.

Lack of Communicating Initiatives

One of the criteria in succeeding the implementation of sustainable environmental practices requires in communicating environmental policies toward employees and staff. However, in Minerva Resort, the awareness of employees toward environmental issues remained low despite many practices have been implemented in daily operations. Table 1 below shows the checklist of administration and communication toward employees on environmental policies.

Table 1: Administration and Communication on Environmental Policies

Administration and Communication			
Check List		Yes	No
Communication and policies initiatives	Have environmental policy in place	/	
	Communicate environmental policies to employees		/
	Trained staff to be eco-friendly		/
	In-house environmental management training programme for employees		/
	Send employees for environmental management training programme		/
	Instruct employees on green practices	/	

The lack of communication and policies initiatives in various environmental practices showed the reason why employees in Minerva Resort have low level of awareness and self-conscious toward environmental issues. This reveal that all

practices that currently in place are being interpreted by employees as instructions to be obeyed given by the management rather than being truly understood the reasons of why these practices are important.

Therefore, without any communication on the available environmental policy, Minerva Resort's employees were not aware of the importance of environmental protection. Hence, the current practices to the eyes of employees were part of their job requirements, no more than an instruction to be obeyed.

Uncooperative Guests

Alike energy saving, Minerva Resort too faces some problem in its practices of water conservation. For example, the pilot test run in installing of low-flow shower heads have received much complaints from the guests questioning on the reason of low water pressure. As a four-star resort, the guests are expecting certain standard of services being provided by the resort and high water pressure for shower head is one of it.

As for the bed linens and towels, Minerva Resort faces many unresponsive guests. Initially, a reminder card is placed in every room to inform and ask for guests' participation in conserving water. But only three per cent of the guests responded to such act. Thus, Minerva Resort changed its method in dealing on this issue whereby all guests are being informed that bed linens and towels will only be changed on the second day. However, the right as guest in asking for fresh bed linens and towels on daily basis is undeniable. Hence, Minerva Resort felt that there is a need to create awareness among its guests in ways they can conserve water as part of the environmental practices.

Benchmarking Analysis

Minerva Resort environmental performance is benchmarked against industry best practices. In addition, Minerva Resort practices are also compared against other resorts' best practices in order to identify the performance gaps.

Evaluation of Environmental Practices

Minerva Resort has shown signs of improvement over the years with reduction in energy and water from year 2007 to 2009 shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Comparison between actual figures, baseline and best practices

Items		Years		
		2007	2008	2009
Energy (MJ/guest night)	Actual	335	153.5	158
	Baseline	480	480	480
	Best Practices	336	336	336
Total CO ₂ -e (kg CO ₂ /guest night)	Actual	87	38.7	35.6
	Baseline	80	80	80
Water Consumed (L/guest night)	Actual	1,387	548.8	580.5
	Baseline	900	900	900
	Best Practices	630	630	630

Waste to Landfill (L/guest night)	Actual	6	2.4	1.1
	Baseline	13	13	13
	Best Practices	9.1	9.1	9.1
Recycled /Composted Waste (%)	Actual	60	20	20
Cleaning Products (Points)	Actual	100	100	100
	Baseline	50	50	50
	Best Practices	80	80	80
Pesticide Products (Points)	Actual	100	100	100
	Baseline	50	50	50
	Best Practices	80	80	80

However, Minerva Resort showed a high consumption of water in 2007 exceeding both the baseline and best practices score. The resort then installed dual flush toilets which lead to better water conservation in 2008

Waste is measured accordingly to the amount sent to landfill and also the amount being recycled or composted. Both of the waste has exceeded the scores of baseline and best practices. The reduced amount of waste sent to landfill and the amount of waste recycled showed that lesser resources are being consumed hence lesser waste are produced. Lastly, as for use of both cleaning and pesticide products, Minerva Resort earned a full rating which is 100 points, indicating it is better than both Baseline and Best Practices level for the consecutive of three years.

Comparison against Other Hotels' Best Practices

Table 3: Comparison between the Other Hotels' Best Practices against Practices of Minerva Resort in Connection of Environmental Practices with Local Community Programmes

Minerva Resort Phuket	Banyan Tree Phuket	Evason Phuket
<p><i>Recycling Programme</i> Sell dry waste for a minimum sum to private garbage collector and giving out leftover food to pig farmers and owner of dog shelter. As for old and broken electronic goods are donated to Technical College while old bed linens and towels given to dog shelter.</p>	<p><i>Recycling Programme</i> Provide recycle materials which collected not only from hotel premises but also from employees' houses whom have signed up for contribution at a minimum sum to a local village entrepreneur who then sell it to recycling centre and earn some money which use for various health care, education and capacity building effort purposes.</p>	<p><i>Recycling Programme</i> Leftover food is sent to pig farmers.</p>
<p><i>Local Arts and Crafts</i> Two local artists charge with minimum rent on</p>	<p><i>Local Arts and Crafts</i> Opened Banyan Tree Gallery selling local</p>	<p><i>Local Arts and Crafts</i> Traditional Thai ceremonies are arranged at</p>

<p>available space in the sideway selling local crafts and arts (biodegradable products and products made of local materials) to the hotel guests.</p>	<p>handicrafts and eco-friendly products made by local women artisans and the proceedings are channelled back to support them with balance used up to open Santhitham Vidhayakhom school. The gallery acts as intermediary to promote local handicrafts on worldwide scale to ensure preservation of unique culture and skills. Besides that, provide training workshop for villagers in Narathiwat province to expand their range of basketry products.</p>	<p>appropriate date where guests learn about Thai traditions and customs. Thai cooking classes and batik painting classes are conducted on regular basis with the fees channelled back to local community.</p>
<p>Local Sourcing Seafood supply come entirely within Phuket while vegetables are source from northern Thailand, Chiangmai in support of local tribes' people. Resort other necessities are also locally produced products including of hiring local interior designers and contractors.</p>	<p>Local Sourcing Ensuring local suppliers used for resort daily needs.</p>	<p>Local Sourcing Preferences given to local suppliers and locally source products</p>
<p>Greening Communities Give a helping hand to local beach operators in cleaning up the beach.</p>	<p>Greening Communities Organised various beach cleaning up activities to ensure the lives of local people are not impacted by the tourism activities and for sustainability of the destination. Planting more than 8,000 trees over the period of three years to help rebuild natural coastal defence system that if ruin will affect the lifestyle of nearby villagers.</p>	<p>Greening Communities Beach cleaning activities on regular basis to ensure the cleanliness. Cooperating with local authorities for mangrove planting project.</p>

Source: Banyan Tree (2009) and Evason Phuket (2008)

Although contributions have been to the local community yet the benefits are limited to only certain individuals rather than the entire community as a whole. Here,

only one private garbage collector benefits from the sale of recyclable items to the recycling centre. As for the wet waste, the same situation applies as only one pig farmer and the owner from dog shelter benefits from the leftover food giving out for free by Minerva Resort. The fact that Minerva Resort has been renting its space to two local tenants at lower price compared to the market prices indeed help not only the survival of these two local store owners but also opening market access for local arts and crafts within Minerva Resort.

Recommendations

To reduce the energy consumption, Minerva Resort can adjust and set the air-conditioners in the guests' rooms and office to 25°C and above. This is due to the fact that for every 1°C decrease in air-conditioners' temperature is equivalent to an increase of 10 per cent in energy used (NSW Business Chamber, 2009). As for water conservation, instead of completely dismissed the installation of water restrictor devices due to guests complained on low water pressure, instead aerators can be replaced as it functions by using the airflow force to create greater pressure while reduce water consumption. Besides that, Phuket as a tropical island received up to 315 millimetres of rainfall during the wet season making installation of rain water harvester an ideal way of water conservation.

There are many ways Minerva Resort can adopt in enhancing the communication on environmental policies towards its employees. For example, newsletter can serve as a good source of publishing latest information on environmental practices. Additionally, examples of practices from other hotels under corporate umbrella brand can be included as case examples to employees in enhancing their knowledge allowing employees to be exposed to the latest techniques and methods deployed by hotels from worldwide.

Additionally, the education programme on awareness towards environmental practices can be extended to include the younger generation. Activities containing educational elements related to environmental can be organized by Minerva Resort in local school to create awareness and spreading knowledge of know-how to this younger generation. Minerva Resort could organise a recycling programme for the school children, encouraging them to reduce waste and recycle as part of their daily life. Environment related teaching materials such as videos, posters and illustrative books can be provided to schools for school children to adhere good practices.

Furthermore, Minerva Resort could have their guests participate in their community programmes. Continuous projects like having the orphanage to list down their desire Christmas present, hang those wishes on the Christmas trees, and displayed it in the Minerva Resort's lobby. Guests can then choose among the wishes listed and sponsor these presents to the orphanage children. Besides that, ornaments like Christmas trees and cards made by the less-fortune or orphanage children, Minerva Resort can help to promote it among its' guests, urging for some charitable works done while raising some funds.

Conclusion

This study examines on the current environmental practices and also the community programmes implemented by a resort in Phuket. It also examines the current linkages between these two aspects by benchmarking against other hotels' best practices to provide recommendations in the effort of further expanding the current linkages.

Overall, the resort does have a strong sense of commitment towards local community welfare and also support to the local suppliers. This resulted not only on lower cost from local procurement but also helping in contributing to the local economy. However, there are several improvements that can be made to the environmental and community practices of the hotel.

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