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Vishal Kamat writes about the various practices that Kamat Hotels follows to be one of the premier water positive brands in the Indian hospitality industry

There's a famous bollywood song which asks "Paani re Paani tera rang kaisa? Jisme mila do lage us jaisa." Unfortunately, the colour of water across the nation is turning brown. Either with sewer pollution or mud colour due to the sources drying up. At such a time when India is going either bone dry or drowning by its own hands of environmental damage and water mismanagement, it falls upon each one of us as business houses and citizens to conserve this precious resource.

The Kamats Group thru its flagship brand, The Orchid, has been at the forefront of sustainable hospitality and tourism and is Asia's pioneering environment-friendly hotel and resort chain. From 1997 it has been doing exceedingly well without compromising on its core ethos of 'Friendly-Eco Friendly', inculcating it in our team who we call Kamat Khandan Members and educating and inspiring our guests who further spread the message in their homes and workplace.

Water is a huge cost in the cities and a scarce resource in rural areas. So, we have tackled this issue on multiple levels without compromising on the guest experience. To start with, every hotel needs a Sewage Treatment Plant (STP). Almost all have it, but not many focus on ensuring that it functions with maximum efficiency. It is more of a compliance showpiece rather than a true commitment. In all our properties where we have STPs, we ensure they are running at optimum. The water from the STP has to be clean enough to be reused in cooling towers and even flush tank. The effects of the water used from our STP can be seen in Fort JadhavGadh - Pune. The treated water helps the plants grow even better along with organic manure creating an oasis in the middle of a fairly parched drought-prone area. This green zone over 25 acres has created a bird paradise with more than 40 species of birds coming regularly and many making it their permanent home.

While it is good to recycle, the key is to reduce at source, for which, we studied the water flow in our taps and other water consumption patterns which gave us the data to make certain changes. We changed the washers in the taps which cost approximately Rs 150 each and brought the flow rate of water down to six litres a minute, that too without reducing the pressure. It led to a huge saving as water waste was high for guests who leave the tap on while shaving or brushing teeth. We also used washers in the showers leading to benefit further. Also, with the help of professional agencies, we could study the flow and pressure in the main pipelines. By moderately reducing the pressure we ended up saving a lot of money in power and also in water consumption. In our Pune hotel, we started waterless urinals after doing a trial for 15 days. It was successful hence it was extended to the whole hotel. This included back of the house areas which consume the maximum water. We also practiced rainwater harvesting during the monsoon. Pure rainwater was channeled to the tank where it went thru sand filters as an additional back up and then to the water tanks leading to enormous quantities of water getting saved. We still follow rainwater harvesting to help the water table rise and mainly because it is part of our ethos.

The combination of various techniques mentioned helps us reduce consumption from 15 to 30 per cent and in one case 46 per cent. Hotels are like little towns living and breathing and just change in their patterns from season to season. In the same way, if you study the usage based on each season, you will get better and more practical solutions based on your property requirements.

Saving water cannot happen without greening our planet earth. We do a lot of plantation of trees in the areas where we work keeping a long term vision in mind. When cyclone Fani destroyed 50 lakh trees, we planted more than 10 lakh trees in Odisha with our 'seed ball' initiative which has motivated youth across the state to take this up as a major cause. With the approaching Ganesh Festival every year we distribute more than 8000 clay statues of Lord Ganesh which when watered, dissolve and a tree comes in its place, hence the name, 'GanpaTree - A Green Start to A Heavenly Earth'. Likewise, in each location, we take up various initiatives relevant to the local area including Turtle protection in Odisha and Konkan, etc. Now, many others are taking these sorts of initiatives forward and we feel ecstatic about it. When it comes to our environment, we would rather be a spark to light the many than be a candle to show the way to a few. Dr Vithal Kamat has inculcated this in us since our childhood and I'm proud to take forward the Kamat culture of hospitality with a cause.

(The author is CEO at Kamat Hotels)

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