

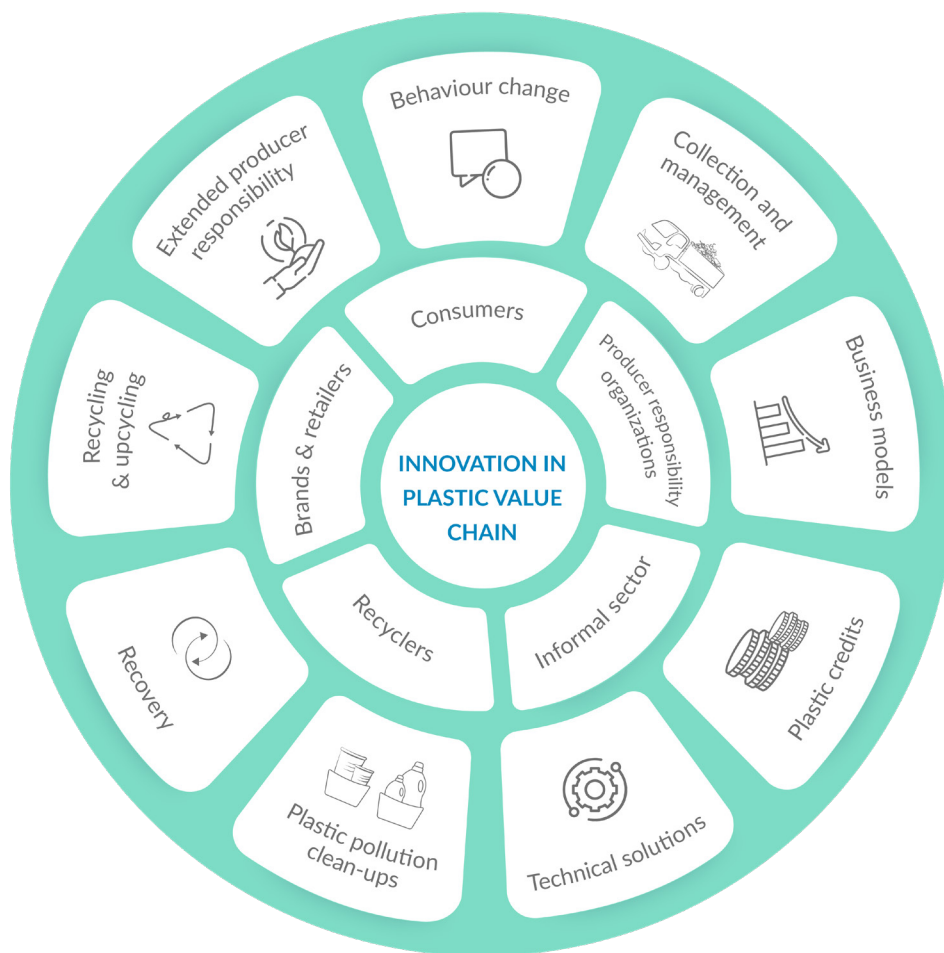
Circular solutions for plastic pollution

Enabling hotels to become more
sustainable through voluntary collective action

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



Tourism – and the related hospitality sector – is a major contributor to plastic waste in Thailand. According to the Tourism Intelligence Center of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, the country welcomed more than 39 million tourists in 2019, which impacted the environment and produced a colossal volume of waste. With a tourism industry worth upwards of USD62 billion and more than 10,000 hotels in the country, the sector is arguably one of the most damaging in terms of plastic waste generation in Thailand.

Plastics are widely used in hotels to support travellers' requirements for convenience and aesthetic appeal, as well as sanitary concerns. From the cups, straws, coffee lids, shampoo bottles, amenity kits, water bottles and room minibars, to hotel breakfast buffets, event spaces and back-of-house activities, plastics are ubiquitous in the industry, with single-use plastic one of the main sources accelerating the environment's rapid degradation.

Background: Phuket and Phuket Hotels Association

Phuket is one of Thailand's leading leisure destinations. Airport passenger arrivals in 2018 exceeded a record 9 million, who stayed in the city's 1,000 registered hotels and licensed establishments, and generated almost 950 tons of waste per day, according to local officials.¹

In Thailand, people living within 50 km from the coastline generate about 1.2 kg of waste per person per day, of which 12 per cent is plastic.² For coastal communities in places such as Phuket, improperly discarded plastic bags are a huge challenge. Aside from representing a missed opportunity to recover, reuse and recycle plastic, it also negatively impacts the communities' waste streams, contributing to various environmental nuisances.

Launched in 2017, the Phuket Hotels Association (PHA) was formed to raise the profile of Phuket and build a strong brand identity in international markets. In promoting the island, PHA assists and educates environmental best practices to reduce any harmful impact that tourism has on the island, while also helping to raise money to educate residents through the association's scholarship fund.

PHA also leads and supports its 74 members in addressing sustainability – both individually and collectively – so that their operations do not negatively impact the very resources on which the island depends for its wealth and economic development.

1. Pichayada Promchertchoo, "Phuket already bursting at the seams but more tourists on the way", Channel News Asia, 8 December 2019. Available at www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/phuket-resorts-beaches-tourism-growth-infrastructure-environment-12137920.

2. Steven Layne, "Phuket's plastic pollution problem", The Phuket News, 19 April 2015. Available at www.thephuketnews.com/phuket-plastic-pollution-problem-51839.php.



The strategy

How did PHA rally its members to commit to sustainability and visible efforts and results?

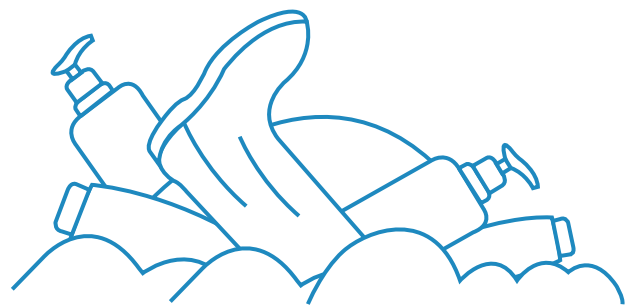
As a non-profit, non-commercial association, PHA relies on membership fees as their sole source of income. Member hotels pay between THB 15,000 and THB 49,000 per annum depending on the number of rooms sold.

Most of PHA's member hotels are international brands or hotel chains, with all the island's five-star and meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) hotels also members.

Given its limited resources, PHA needed to be systematic in its approach to determine programmes that would be most relevant for its members, taking into account their needs and capacity, as well as the aim to improve the management of used plastic. In 2018, PHA surveyed its members' plastic use, the results of which it then used to inform ways to shrink their plastic footprint.

Activities included:

- **Knowledge-sharing and education.** Continuous training and education and capacity-building were made available for its members' staff, especially on the environmental impacts of their specific roles in hotel operations.
- **Access to experts to build PHA members' knowledge and awareness.** In 2018, Dr. Marisa Jablonski, an expert on waste, was hired to help members determine the environmental footprint of their hotel operations (measure plastic use, food waste, etc.). The five-part programme helped 65 member hotels to reduce their use of plastic straws by 1.6 million units and their plastic water bottles by 4.4 million units.



- **Continued measurement and monitoring.** Partnerships with research organizations, such as the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), were established. In 2019, visiting students from RMIT supported hotels in monitoring the waste generated and evaluating measures in place. Findings indicated that the hotels had reduced their overall use of plastic items, rather than increasing their use of items with recycled content.
- **Sharing best practices.** PHA engaged its members to map out a list of their trusted suppliers that sell environmentally friendly products. The [Great Big Green Hotel Guide](#), an e-book on sustainability practices, was launched during the Phuket Hotels for Islands Sustaining Tourism (PHIST) event in September 2019. This provided an effective information-sharing platform on substitutes for plastic and processes, as well as potential cost savings.
- **Events.** PHA launched knowledge-sharing opportunities in 2018 with PHIST, showcasing sustainability products and services, and offering attendees a mix of expert panels and thematic discussions covering topics on destination development, ocean health and impacts, hotel sustainability governance, community tourism and global sustainability trends. A virtual PHIST event was held in September 2020.
- **Community training activities.** Campaigns such as PHIST's "People. Planet. Phuket" theme were launched to educate local communities and visitors about the importance of the 3R – reducing, reusing and recycling. Training materials, such as the film *A Plastic Ocean*, which had Thai subtitles, were used to effectively capture the audience's attention. PHA also collaborated with local academic institutions, such as the British International School, Phuket (BISP), to develop materials, including the Thai-language version of the licenced book, *A Happy Green World*. The [Happy Green World Foundation](#) develops environmental educational materials on waste, water and energy for children worldwide.

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The challenges

Confidentiality. One of the key results of the PHA survey developed for its members was the need for each hotel to conduct an operations review, which could lead to the establishment of a baseline for the amount of plastic being used and potentially wasted in the hotels. Due to the sensitivity of this information, PHA calmed its members' hesitation by signing confidentiality agreements, confirming non-disclosure so as not to expose its members. Using this approach, initial resistance was minimized, with members eventually deciding to participate.

Limited available alternatives for non-plastic or recycled materials. Many hotels have limited options for cost-efficient, sustainable alternatives for their plastic amenities. In addition, hotel brand standards can be a barrier to selecting replacements for current products used, thereby limiting the options that can be considered.

Management support. Buy-in and support from hotel owners and general managers is crucial in leading hotels towards sustainability. PHA enlisted hotel owners and general managers to commit to PHA's environmental goals for Phuket and to their own properties' objectives, recognizing that engaging top management would result in a better cascade of sustainability thinking within hotels.

Communications challenges and the competitive nature of the industry. PHA established real-time communication among its members through mobile applications such as LINE, to educate and improve their awareness on sustainability.



Impacts

- Hotels that switched from using plastic water bottles to glass bottles had cost savings. One particular hotel was able to stop the use of almost 660,000 single-use plastic water bottles, equivalent to THB 500,000 net savings annually. This positive experience provided the opportunity for other hotels to convince management to take similar action and support alternatives for plastic amenities.
- Pledges during PHIST 2018 resulted in a 51 per cent decrease of plastic bottles used, which was equivalent to 4.4 million plastic bottles in the first six months of 2019.
- Consumer satisfaction is highly visible through guests' comments on Tripadvisor, word of mouth and either verbal or written feedback to the respective hotels for taking eco-conscious efforts in their operations.
- A reduced amount of plastic waste from hotels is being sent to landfill thanks to PHA hotel members having reduced the volume and types of single-use plastics in use, along with the elimination of plastic water bottles in their guest rooms in 2019.
- Through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) programme, PHA supported the education of about 20,000 hotel employees, thereby increasing employment opportunities for these staff.
- PHA also provided access to over 100 suppliers for its members, which thanks to their environmental and sustainability products, provide multiple benefits to local communities in terms of health, gender equality and poverty reduction.



Lessons learned

As Thailand's first organized hotel association, PHA has played a pioneering role in implementing value and behaviour change guidance on the ground, and supporting the key lessons learned to encourage members to take collective action, which includes the following:

- Involving decision makers who are already convinced and are supportive of what PHA is doing for the environment.
- Clearly demonstrating cost savings and having the evidence of projected numbers/data to support claims. Hotels face challenges with their owners, especially in terms of getting them to agree to make sustainable changes. The availability of data provides a better opportunity to secure their approval and support.
- Working with the culture. Opportunities for communication, using both formal and informal channels, and in a pre-competitive, non-threatening environment, must be established among decision makers and key operations personnel, which can support scale-ups and a critical mass.
- Minimizing plastic through continuous improvement (an agenda being pushed by PHA), regularly setting new targets and encouraging members to comply.
- Providing members with access to best practices through experts and platforms, such as the PHIST and [SEA circular](#) round tables.
- Amplifying efforts towards plastic reduction through effective associations and partnerships; collective results become more empowering when more stakeholders address the issue.
- Ensuring a collective approach as a united force through commitments, such as an individual hotel signed pledge.
- Offering hotel members tools and support devices, and providing training and other learning opportunities to make the transition to more sustainable operations effective.



Moving forward

PHA will expand on Phuket's brand to include sustainability and improved plastic management, and to disseminate information on government schemes and bailout support. Together, these activities will not only provide a measurable environmental benefit, but will also increase resource and waste management, as well as enhance health and the general well-being of the industry, which is already experiencing the effects of plastic pollution.

With the ongoing recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, this collective approach has become even more crucial as it may provide the opportunity to boost sustainability efforts as hotels consider sustainability within the island's bounce-back strategy. Although it is still early on in the process towards sustainability, PHA is encouraging its member hotels to focus specifically on how they can contribute to the transition of a more sustainable economy post pandemic.

What did PHA and Phuket hotels do while waiting for the island to reopen to tourism?

Through PHA's collaboration with Hotel Resilient, a COVID-READY certification initiative was launched for PHA members in Phuket, demonstrating PHA's emphasis on promoting the hygiene, health and safety of hotel guests and staff in its efforts to prepare its members for the new normal.



MEMBERSHIP

Join Hotel Resilient and enjoy many benefits

Sign-up for free on Hotel Resilient and start using our free tools, including the COVID-READY Audit and e-Learning program

Join as a member, and enjoy many more benefits:

- ✓ Free COVID-READY e-Certification with membership
- ✓ Access to all COVID-19 Resources
- ✓ Full access to the multi-hazard Hotel Resilient Standards, Handbook and Audit
- ✓ Access to all our e-Learning Modules and online resources
- ✓ Access to Webinars and our Trainings

Beyond COVID, the Hotel Resilient Framework provides a path to disaster and climate resilience. Go beyond the COVID-READY Audit and use our comprehensive online solutions to analyze and manage your risks from multiple hazards, potential to soar

Your partner in resilience through COVID and beyond

NEWS

Phuket gets COVID-READY with Hotel Resilient

Phuket is reopening to tourists, hotels in Phuket are taking extra steps to improve the safety of guests during this dynamic pandemic situation. Hotel Resilient has been working with the Phuket Hotels Association to ensure a smooth implementation of the COVID-READY Standards in the Thailand context. As a result of this collaborative effort, the Phuket Hotels Association confirms commitment to endorse Hotel Resilient COVID-READY Certification to all of its 75 member hotels. Partnerships such as these are critical to destinations re-opening safer and sooner than later.

Hotel Resilient Webinar!

Join us Monday May 25th at 10am Central European Standard Time for a free webinar that will introduce you to the COVID-READY standards, software and training material. See details on our website.

Free membership offer for destination leaders!

Hotel Resilient is collaborating with hotel industry leaders in select destinations to improve the ability of hotels to meet the COVID-READY Standards. For collaborating partners, Hotel Resilient is offering free trial memberships for a limited time. See if you qualify for the program by emailing us at: info@hotelresilient.org



Nothing should go back to normal.

Normal wasn't working.

If we go back to the way things were, we would have lost the lesson.

May we rise up and do better.



We thank Phuket Hotels Association 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

