



CASE STUDY

Coast Hotels

GREEN KEY GLOBAL HELPS COAST HOTELS SET BRAND STANDARDS THAT PROVIDE SOLID FOOTING FOR DIVERSE PROPERTIES TO SUCCEED AT SUSTAINABILITY



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Background

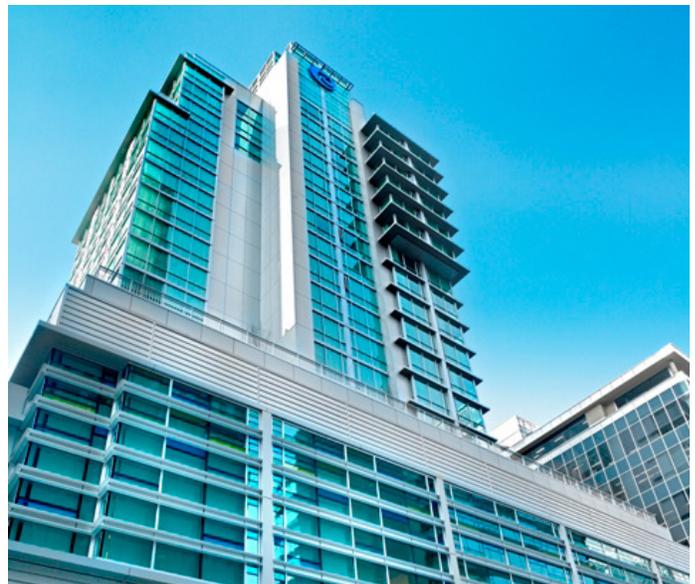
Coast Hotels

www.coasthotels.com

Vancouver Island-borne and Japanese-owned brand with a variety of managed, franchised and owned hotels on the Canadian and United States west coast, as unique as the friendly communities and beautiful locations where they are located.

Japanese-owned Coast Hotels is a regional west coast North American brand purchased in September 2016 by APA Hotel Group from former Japanese owners, Okabe Co. Founded about 45 years ago by local business owners on Vancouver Island, the chain includes a combination of owned, managed and franchised properties centred on core markets in Vancouver and Victoria, British Columbia (BC) in Canada, and Portland, Oregon and Burbank, California in the United States (US).

A growing brand with 25 Canadian and 12 American hotels, Coast Hotels' properties have been the hub of many small communities – particularly in BC – for decades. Throughout expansion, changes in brand ownership and the need to adapt to a continuously changing industry, Coast Hotels has kept its west coast feel and reputation for friendliness, at its heart.





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The Challenge

- **Setting brand-wide standards and benchmarks for diverse properties with different buildings, functions, systems and levels of experience with sustainability**
- **Motivating hotels to participate in sustainability assessments and equipping them to succeed**
- **Measuring progress across multiple individual properties and at the brand level**

With a range of ownership models and diverse hotels, Coast Hotels' main challenge was to develop a sustainability program that would be consistent across the brand and that all properties could participate in. "We don't have cookie-cutter hotels," said Executive Director of Marketing & Communications at Coast Hotels, Sarah Kirby Yung.

Emphasizing her point, she described properties as diverse as the modern Coast Coal Harbour Hotel by APA in downtown Vancouver with Japanese-style amenities; The Benson, an historic landmark hotel in Portland, Oregon; leisure properties in the Okanagan; and the Coast Kamloops Hotel with 30,000 feet of conference space. "The buildings, designs, ages and systems of our hotels are very different," said Kirby Yung, "How do you do sustainability with assets so diverse, without having to retrofit?"





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The Solution

“

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Sarah Kirby Yung
Executive Director
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Coast Hotels had been a long-time member of Green Key Global (GKG) but the recent GKG program refresh by the Hotel Association of Canada (HAC) was a factor in the chain’s decision to put a renewed focus on green hotel certification. Kirby Yung noted that with Version 3.0 of the GKG Eco-Rating Program released in 2016, “HAC made the program more intuitive. They introduced progressive ratings and made it more responsive to hotels. Working with them, we learned how the assessment process was evolving and how we could kick start it again at the brand level and with our hotels. It was a shared conversation.”

In the spring of 2017, Coast kicked off the assessment process by initiating a review and planning exercise across the brand. They established a target for all properties to complete GKG Eco-Rating assessments by October of that year, and every year after that. “The purpose is to establish a benchmark and to measure year-to-year improvements across the chain,” said Kirby Yung.

By the fall – about six months after initiating the process at the corporate level – properties provided verification of their completed individual assessments and a copy of their rating to head office, which allowed them to confirm that all hotels were up to standard. “Then we started celebrating,” said Kirby Yung. “We put the Green Key Global logo on emails and other promotional materials.”





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The Results

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Solid footing for all hotels - but with flexibility

With a wide range of hotels, including some with unique and/or aging infrastructure, some Coast Hotel members questioned whether and how they could qualify for a rating under the GKG Program. “We had hotels say they weren’t trained in sustainability, they were small, or they had no ability to retrofit an old building”, said Kirby Yung.

GKG helped Coast Hotels document a brand-wide environmental policy that was inclusive of, and applied to, all properties. “We gave our hotels core things to do as a brand,” said Kirby Yung. This included mandated use of the digital “PressReader” service to replace newspaper deliveries, and offering Coast Hotels’ optional housekeeping service where guests can choose not to have their room made up. “Optional housekeeping is good for the environment and good for business,” said Kirby Yung. “It means less laundry, detergent and energy use. It definitely has an impact.”

For hotels uncertain about their ability to deliver on sustainability, Kirby Yung said, “These brand standards were a way to say, “Here are things you’re already doing”. This enabled us to give all hotels solid footing to start on when doing their own assessments.”

At the same time, she said, “It was important to articulate goals for the brand that individual hotels can see themselves in.” Properties were encouraged to continue building on core activities with destination-specific sustainability projects that highlight their unique contributions to the brand’s overall goals.

The Coast Bastion in Nanaimo, for example, introduced 60,000 honey bees to their rooftop to support local pollination and honey production. Meanwhile, the Coast Coal Harbour Hotel’s Zero Waste management systems continue to keep 100% of the Vancouver property’s waste out of the landfill, and allow them claim the title of the chain’s only zero waste facility.

Effective onboarding through education

Kirby Yung noted that hotels needed a great deal of encouragement from head office to undertake their sustainability assessments. This was particularly the case at the beginning when properties were grappling with questions such as, “What does a rating mean when you have a certain number of keys?” or “What’s an average rating?”



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“It’s an evolution,” Kirby Yung said, “You’re really walking people through and identifying specific areas where they can improve – this is an important part of the process to getting people on board.”

Education and documentation early on were important for motivation and were big factors in successful implementation, she said. “We recognized that we needed to provide information to hotels in the easiest way possible for them to participate and keep it top of mind.”

Coast Hotels accomplished this by providing information on the company Intranet, and holding training sessions and webinars for member hotels. “A representative from Green Key Global also came to participate in sessions and that was helpful,” said Kirby Yung. While head office provided collateral and core tools, she noted, “what was effective was having a Green Key Global resource look at the all the materials and wrapping it all together in one program.”

Positive brand recognition – from without and within

Morin Kirby Yung thinks hotel brands increasingly need to demonstrate that they are actively pursuing sustainability in an authentic way. “Consumers notice if you’re not,” she said.

Guests making reservations with a Coast Hotel property will receive an email explaining the hotel’s sustainability initiatives – including brand standards – and the reasons why they are doing them. For example, visitors are informed that Coast Hotels provide large format amenities, shampoos and lotions because they use less packaging than individual sizes. “This creates a positive brand association,” said Kirby Yung.

Brand initiatives and local actions are backed up by each hotel’s GKG Eco-Rating, which resonates with guests and staff alike. “From a guest facing perspective,” said Kirby Yung, “Green Key Global has enabled Coast Hotels to communicate with confidence that we have green ethics as a brand.”

Internally, green certification generates a great deal of staff pride and it’s an important factor in attracting new talent, too. “We have millennial staff, so it’s important when recruiting,” said Kirby Yung, “Social consciousness is part of what people are looking for in work.”



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Promise of year-over-year progress

Having just established benchmarks through GKG assessments of all Coast Hotel properties, it's too early to report on progress. "I'd like to do an analysis after this year's rating, see our year-over-year progression and then consult with Green Key Global about what other strategies to undertake," said Kirby Yung.

Coast Hotels is committed to the certification process – and to making progress. "It will be important to show continual progression across the brand," said Kirby Yung. "And with Green Key Global to help with that review and to identify some strategies moving forward, it's what we hope for – and expect – as a partner."

