CASE STUDY

Fairmont Chateau Whistler

FAIRMONT CHATEAU WHISTLER CLEANS UP AMENITY RECYCLING AND TURNS SOAP WASTE INTO SOMETHING GOOD WITH GREEN KEY GLOBAL “INFLUENCER” SUPPLIER, CLEAN THE WORLD
Built at the base of Blackcomb Mountain in the architectural style of earlier Canadian Chateaux, but with a modern twist, AccorHotel’s award-winning Fairmont Chateau Whistler has earned its reputation as Whistler, British Columbia’s landmark all season ski-in ski-out hotel. Within an hour and a half drive from Vancouver along the stunning Sea to Sky Highway, 528 well-appointed guest rooms are situated within steps of sensational skiing on over 200 ski runs accessed by 33 ski lifts on Blackcomb and Whistler Mountains, making for a busy winter season. But with a par 72, 18-hole Audubon-certified championship golf course offering breathtaking views and abundant opportunities for wildlife viewing and a full roster of other activities like guided excursions through old growth forests, kayaking, stand up paddle-boarding, cycling and hiking, summer occupancy is quickly starting to rival winter.
Robyn Gallagher may be Fairmont Chateau Whistler’s First Cook, but her dedication and motivation to help others go green has earned her the position of chairperson the hotel’s Planet 21 sustainability committee at the hotel. “Our backyard is mountains and we are uniquely close to absolutely gorgeous phenomenal nature” she said, pointing to the Fairmont Chateau Whistler’s number one sustainability challenge. “It’s super important to make sure we’re not looking just to next year, but several years ahead to do our best to make sure those mountains are still there.” The hotel, Gallagher said, needed strategies across the board to move forward and better measure sustainability goals.

As those mountains Gallagher mentioned are 133 kilometres away from Vancouver, it adds up to a lot of driving on the part of guests and suppliers to access the property. “For us, I know that just getting into Whistler from Vancouver or further away has a huge carbon footprint,” Gallagher said, “so we’re trying to take the initiative to get rid of large carbon footprint items for guests, like removing single-use plastic bottles from our rooms.”

Fairmont Chateau Whistler also began collecting leftover amenities from guest rooms, like shampoos, lotions and soaps. They donated them to local women’s shelters as one way to improve recycling while also making a positive impact in the community. Distribution of half-used soaps and shampoos, however, did little to build up and promote the self-worth of shelter residents doing their best to prepare to leave and join the workforce. But the alternative—to have staff empty and consolidate the contents of amenity bottles and clean them properly for recycling—was impractical, and the hotel did not have the staff to spare to do the job.
Gallagher said that Fairmont Chateau Whistler’s partnership with Green Key Global (GKG) “fell into their lap” as fellow Fairmont mountain resort, Lake Louise, strongly advocated for the program. “GKG gives you great feedback on where you need to change’, they said, ‘You guys should totally come and join us,’” Gallagher relayed. The Whistler location researched the program for themselves and found strong complementarity between GKG’s Eco-Rating and AccorHotel’s Planet 21 programs. “They are not just about green-washing,” Gallagher said, “Like Planet 21, GKG is about going in and changing people and things and systems—there’s depth to it.”

Gallagher had the cooperation of department heads to complete the GKG assessment over a period of a few months. “It was a partnership between everyone,” she said. She encouraged colleagues to make whatever changes were recommended in the questionnaire immediately—prior to completing the assessment—and went to bat with management to secure the capital needed to implement changes. “Being able to say we need it for environmental issues, the response was —Snap!—‘Yep, we’ll get it as soon as possible,’” she said, “The environmental timer is counting down on us and the company is saying, ‘Yes we need to change’. We need that thought process of what a green five-star hotel looks like.”

Fairmont Chateau Whistler received its first GKG rating of 4 Green Keys in 2017, and shortly afterwards, GKG’s programs became mandatory for all four Fairmont mountain resorts in Banff, Jasper, Lake Louise and Whistler. After another 4 Green Key rating the second time around for Whistler, “Our goal is to get 5 Keys,” Gallagher said.

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The Solution

It was a partnership between everyone

Robyn Gallagher
Chairperson, Fairmont Chateau Whistler Planet 21 Sustainability Committee
Tools to hold and propel past the eco-line

Gallagher said the hotel was pleased with their GKG assessment results, which reflected their efforts to operate at a high environmental standard and not fall into greenwashing. "GKG was there to say, 'here's what the eco-line is', and our score shows that we're not getting lost in all the green things that are good, but maybe not the best," she said. "We were already implementing a lot of this stuff, and our rating was a pat on the back to know we were going in the right direction."

Rather than resting on its laurels, however, Fairmont Chateau Whistler used the GKG assessment report to jump start their Planet 21 commitments. "I particularly liked the GKG tools to change things over and make improvements," Gallagher said, "They had new ideas and approaches to add to ours, and getting that report back was like, here we have some things to work on; what can we change that will be the most impactful?" Armed with this information, Gallagher said the hotel was able to push through and exceed AccorHotel’s eco-line. "We were able to check off a majority of Planet 21 initiatives right off the bat."

Cleaned up amenity recycling with green suppliers

To address their amenity recycling challenges, Fairmont Whistler teamed up in 2016 with Clean the World (CTW), an "Influencer" on GKG’s Green Supplier list of companies specializing in green products and services for the hospitality industry. "We specifically aim to offer an alternative to landfill waste for all the used bars of soap and bottled amenities that are thrown away each day," said CTW Canada Client Team Operations Manager, Maria Giuliani, "But we also focus on having a direct impact by helping those in need."

Instead of hotel staff taking on the labour-intensive process of emptying, cleaning and sorting thousands of amenity bottles, CTW streamlined the collection process for the Fairmont Chateau Whistler by providing them with a large cardboard box and allowing staff to toss all the products in the same container. CTW took on the messy task of sorting and cleaning the bottles with the help of volunteers. In addition, soap bars discarded by hotel guests are brought back to a CTW facility to be sanitized, grinded, and made into brand new bars. Recycled hygiene supplies were then repackaged and distributed nationally and internationally, to food banks and shelters, and in response to natural disasters like hurricanes and floods.
To date, Fairmont Chateau Whistler has collected over 13,000 pounds of soap waste, over 9,000 pounds of bottle waste, and 71,350 bars of soap have been distributed on their behalf to those in need. “They have diverted incredible amounts of waste through the diligence of their staff, specifically in housekeeping and operations, and as such have been able to help countless people,” said Giuliani, “They have been a wonderful partner to work with and I can tell that they are committed to their goals.”

**Recycling ripple chips away at carbon footprint**

Beyond amenity recycling, Fairmont Chateau Whistler continues to chip away at their carbon footprint and to influence staff, guests and the broader community to do the same. The hotel plans to get rid of all single-use plastic water bottles from restaurant and banquet facilities in addition to guest rooms, and to make sure that all to-go food containers are compostable. “Guests look for recycling, so we’re supercharged to have compostable coffee cups,” said Gallagher, “But staff are always trying to push the greener option; even trying to have guests have drinks ‘here’ instead of ‘to go’. I love that about our staff”.

Gallagher said she wanted to see the hotel’s recycling efforts reflected in the community by staff and local businesses. “If it can be recycled here, it can be done at home,” she said. “We want to be a shining beacon in the community; to say that—if as a global, luxury hospitality company, we’re killing it when it comes to sustainability—then why aren’t you guys being just as good as we are?” said Gallagher, “We want to be able to say that we changed everything we could possibly change for our best future. There is no excuse for anyone.”

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**The Results**

“We want to be able to say that we changed everything we could possibly change for our best future.”

Robyn Gallagher  
Chairperson, Fairmont Chateau Whistler Planet 21 Sustainability Committee