

Bottle or bar? A soapy case study

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Is the end in sight for dinky bottles of toiletries in hotel bathrooms? The European Union (EU) is considering banning miniature hotel toiletries and single-use food containers in a bid to reduce wasteful packaging, reported Euronews. The proposal is part of the European Green Deal, which aims to reach net zero by 2050, separate economic growth from resource use and promote a circular economy within the EU.

The UN Environment Programme states, “The plastic pollution crisis stems mainly from the fact that plastic is currently produced, used (often just once) and discarded. Tackling plastic pollution requires an approach that addresses all stages of plastic’s life-cycle, from production to consumption to waste management, reducing pollution and waste at each stage. A life-cycle approach also helps balance economic needs with concerns over the effects of plastic pollution.”

With World Environment Day on 5 June having just passed, City Lodge Hotels shares its ongoing efforts to reduce single-use plastic in guest bathrooms that tie in well with this year’s theme of #BeatPlasticPollution. The group made history when it totally overhauled its in-room amenities in July 2020 and introduced the Zero Hair and Body Bar. This was a South African hotel industry first and among the earliest adopters of a new approach to amenities and packaging technology worldwide. Amenities are among the items that every single guest interacts with, so the overall messaging and impact are significant.



The group’s aim was to strip guest bedrooms of single-use plastic, resulting in the now famous The Bespoke Amenities Company (TBAC SA) Zero Bar a standard feature in all its hotels – Courtyard Hotels, City Lodge Hotels, Town Lodges and Road Lodges – replacing the traditional mini plastic bottles of shampoo and body wash. This is what that looks like in numbers for the period 1 January 2022 to date, reflecting the collective impact of just this one change:

Bottle versus bar:

- 8 843 cases of shampoo bars delivered to City Lodge Hotels totalling 884,300 units
- 1 shampoo bar replaces 2 plastic bottles (shampoo bottle and body wash bottle)
- 1 shampoo bar weighs 26 grams to transport and shampoo and body wash combined weigh 74 grams
- 32ml liquid shampoo and body wash together total 64ml, which is 77.44% water

The impact:

- 1 768 600 plastic bottles removed from hotels
- 43 827.32 litres of water saved
- 42 446.40 kilograms reduction in weight transported

TBAC SA delivers to several City Lodge Hotels’ properties and collects empty boxes and product discarded by guests, achieving the ideal circular economy for the most effective consumption, recycling and waste disposal of packaging and plastic.



Circular economy

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation, a UK-based, international charity committed to creating a circular economy for plastic, states, "While improving recycling is crucial, we cannot recycle our way out of the plastic issues we currently face. Wherever relevant, reuse business models should be explored as a preferred solution (or 'inner loop' in circular economy terms), reducing the need for single-use plastic packaging."

The organisation's comprehensive website explains: "The circular economy considers every stage of a product's journey – before and after it reaches the customer. This approach is not only vital to stop plastic pollution, it also offers strong economic, social, and climate benefits. When applied correctly, the circular economy benefits society, the environment and the economy. This means all packaging should be designed to fit within a system, whether it is reused, recycled or composted."

As hotel groups locally and internationally catch-up to what City Lodge Hotels and TBAC SA have already achieved, Bruce Turner, managing director of TBAC SA, examines some of the options being proposed or adopted: "Many hotel groups are looking for a 'silver bullet' solution, but there are factors worth considering to ensure the outcome does what you want, i.e. less waste in the system. You need to design for recyclability – problems arise when you print on PET containers, for example, as it renders them non-recyclable, and coloured PET plastic is not recycled locally either. The use of plastic bottles – even in dispensers – still adds to the problem of waste, regardless of size.

"What City Lodge Hotels did was an authentic, genuine solution by changing the product altogether. Zero Bars are a pure cleansing bar, gentle yet effective on all hair types as well as the body. They contain the key elements of shampoo and body wash just minus the water. They lather up in a similar way to liquid products and require minimal packaging," Bruce adds. Another great benefit of the bar is guests can pop it in their hand luggage without worrying about declaring it at airports as is required with liquids when travelling internationally.

PLANET: ONE
WASTE: **ZERO**



HI, I'M A
BODY CREAM



WE'VE CUT THE NONSENSE

PLANET: ONE | WASTE: **ZERO**
Interested yet?

Bruce notes that some hotel groups prefer to keep the formula of bathroom amenities as is and purchase products from a supplier committed to sustainability. Discarded bottles need to be disposed of correctly, with the organisation setting up and maintaining a responsible recycling system usually involving reputable external waste collection and processing companies.

As hotels encourage guests to take their amenities home, recycling becomes the sole responsibility of the end-user. City Lodge Hotels and TBAC SA have gone so far as to use outer packaging that is recyclable cardboard that poses no threat to rivers, oceans and landfills if not recycled.

“A hotel group’s responsibility is to make sure what they have is recyclable, and then recycle it, and if they can replace risky material like plastic and there is benefit in doing that, then replace it,” says Bruce. “With City Lodge Hotels, we’ve eliminated all unnecessary plastic and where plastic is necessary, found alternative products. The Zero Bars offer a triple saving – no single-use plastic for starters, coupled with a lower carbon footprint as less water is required in making the product, and it has a lower shipping weight than its liquid alternatives. This is a significant development, leapfrogging over more cumbersome albeit well-meaning alternatives. Together we took a risk and chased innovation, and we continue to do

that.”

Sustainability journey

City Lodge Hotels is growing its investment in environmentally friendly operations, which currently includes:

- Solar systems added to a further 15 hotels in addition to the 25 hotels that have already installed solar panels, and increased focus on energy storage.
- Hydration stations at all the group’s hotels offer free, filtered, magnesium-enriched still and sparkling water for guests to help themselves to at any time, reducing the amount of bottled water purchased.
- Boreholes installed at properties where water is frequently disrupted.
- Commitment to only using eggs laid by cage-free hens from 2025.
- Switching to environmentally-friendly equipment when hotels refurbish, such as washing machines in laundry rooms.
- Online check-in and QR menus to reduce the use of paper.
- Procuring from local suppliers where possible to reduce the distance goods must travel while supporting small and medium businesses.

Lindiwe Sangweni-Siddo, chief operating officer at City Lodge Hotels, says, “We are committed to delivering on our sustainability goals, and replacing our bathroom amenities was a big step in the right direction. We know our guests appreciate being part of our journey to lighten our collective carbon footprint while still delivering tip-top, loving and clean hospitality. We make it easy for them to ‘go green!’”

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