



Pan Pacific Hotels Group has rebranded the former Marina Mandarin as the Parkroyal Collection Marina Bay, which will have features that allow for more automation – such as more wood floors instead of carpets, allowing industrial robots to clean the area – and reduce its need for air-conditioning. PHOTO: PAN PACIFIC HOTELS GROUP

Hotels must go green so guests won't see red: Boss

Sustainability emphasised in \$45m revamp of former Marina Mandarin

Sue-Ann Tan

Sustainability has long been a sticky topic for the hospitality industry – think of all those plastic water bottles – but Pan Pacific Hotels Group believes there is more room at the inn for an eco-friendly approach.

The company, which is the hotel subsidiary of the UOL Group, started a new brand on Tuesday that will have more than a tinge of green about it.

One part of the initiative involves spending \$45 million to renovate the former Marina Mandarin hotel, with at least half of the outlay going towards making the hotel more sustainable.

The rejuvenated hotel near Marina Bay will form part of the new Parkroyal Collection Hotels and Resorts brand, which includes the Parkroyal Collection Pickering near Chinatown.

Pan Pacific Hotels Group chief executive Choe Peng Sum told The Straits Times: "Sustainability is costly, but we have to think long term. People in Europe and America, for instance, are more in tune with saving the environment, but Asia is also coming up now. People will soon demand it from us."

The old Marina Mandarin – now called the Parkroyal Collection Marina Bay – has already unveiled a 13m-tall green landscaped wall. Trees will also grow from the lobby to the upper floors. Carpeted floors will be replaced with wood, and the reception space will have moss on the floor.

The plants will help to cool the



Pan Pacific Hotels Group chief executive Choe Peng Sum believes that in the long run, there will be more demand for sustainable hotels, and guests may even walk away from establishments that are not in tune with saving the environment. ST PHOTO: GIN TAY

space and so reduce the need for air-conditioning, which is a big contributor to energy use here.

Mr Choe acknowledged that the hospitality industry is not generally sustainable, with plastic water bottles and small plastic containers for amenities like soap being replaced on a daily basis.

"We are now putting money into things like offering filtered water to reduce the number of plastic bottles used. Hotels also have cards that people can use to indicate that they would like to re-use their amenities. We are also moving towards pump cartridges for things like shampoo," he said.

Rather than complain, guests are grateful because they recognise the hotel is being sustainable, he added.

"In the long run, there will be even more demand for sustainable hotels, and guests will insist on it. If not, they might even walk away. We want to be prepared for that."

The hotel is part of nearly 15 new establishments under various Pan Pacific Hotels Group brands set to

MORE ECO-FRIENDLY

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MR CHOE PENG SUM, Pan Pacific Hotels Group chief executive, on how the group is making its hotels more sustainable.

open by the end of next year in places such as Singapore, Jakarta and London, as the group rides on the hospitality industry boom.

Mr Choe said: "The industry is growing especially fast in this region. In Singapore, our hotel occupancy rates are up to 80 or even 90 per cent."

He added that despite its small size, Singapore's hospitality industry continues to grow with an increased supply of visitors, thanks to the country being a hub for corporate guests.

But Mr Choe acknowledged that there is also a manpower crunch that intensifies with measures like the tightening of the foreign workforce quota for the service sector.

He said: "It is not easy. We cannot totally replace manpower with machines, and we will always face a crunch on staff. But people can be trained to take on multiple roles and multitask, such as the concierge, doorman and security being grouped together as service staff (rather than being seen as doing separate jobs)."

He added that machines like robots cannot simply be gimmicks, but have to help the staff.

For instance, hotels like the Parkroyal Collection Marina Bay will have more wood floors, which industrial robots can clean, instead of carpet.

The group's hotels are also getting into technology such as radio frequency identification systems that can help to sort dirty linen.

They might soon also use digital check-ins on customers' phones rather than at a desk, and automated trolleys to help housekeeping staff.

Mr Choe said that besides the use of new technology, hotels of the future will become lifestyle spaces for socialising and community-building, as room sizes shrink but communal areas expand.

"Countries are facing yield compression, which means it is tougher to invest, and land is expensive, so room sizes can get smaller," he noted.

"But there is also the rise of millennials who don't need to spend the whole day in their room. Instead, there is the rebirth of the lobby as a living space that is vibrant."

"In the future, the check-in counter can be a bar where people meet friends and socialise, and become members that build a community even when they go to different hotels."

Hotels might even have bartenders instead of receptionists, with lobbies that have not just furniture, but music and coffee.

These are just some of the rapid changes that Mr Choe envisages in the years to come, but he also remains cautiously hopeful that the steady growth will continue despite economic uncertainty.

He said: "The world is pretty rough now, but there is still a sense of optimism. South-east Asia is still growing and people are travelling. "Even... London, with the uncertainty of Brexit... continues to see international travellers due to the moderating pound."

When it comes to the group's expansion, Mr Choe said: "We want to grow even more in strategic locations, especially business districts of cities."

"We already have nine hotels in Singapore but will also continue to put more investment here, as the brand recognition is strong and it is a stable environment."

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