

Single-use plastics

This factsheet explores the issues of single-use plastics and provides recommendations on how to reduce their use.

What is the issue?

The increased use of single-use plastic items has become a global sustainability issue, greatly contributing to pollution and negatively impacting wildlife as well as increasing global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Single-use plastics in hospitality

Hotels commonly use single-use plastic items within their operations. Here are just a few examples to highlight the extent of their use within hotels.

Hotel room

- Water bottles
- Coffee cups
- Toiletry bottles
- Stirrers
- Earbuds
- Turndown gifts
- Packaged tea/coffee
- Laundry bags
- Slipper wraps

Public spaces

- Water bottles
- Cups
- Straws
- Stirrers

Back of house

- Packaging
- Cling film
- Water bottles
- Plastic cups
- Single-use wipes
- Plastic gloves
- Masks



Roughly
1/2

annual plastic production is destined for a single-use product¹



32%

of all plastic packaging ends up in our oceans each year²



Estimated
4 trillion

plastic bags used each year worldwide³



Half a million

straws used each day globally⁴



500 billion

disposable cups consumed each year⁵

Why should hotels address this issue?

Hotels should do everything they can to reduce their use of single-use plastic items as it demonstrates a commitment to reducing their environmental footprint. Aside from the impact plastic can have on the natural world around us, there are some additional benefits to taking action:

- **Reputation**

There are increased [public media campaigns](#) around the issue of ocean plastic pollution and the damage single-use plastics can have on marine wildlife.

- **Regulation**

Globally, a trend to increase regulation around this issue is emerging in many geographies. For example:

- [EU single-use plastic ban](#)
- [California single-use plastic ban](#)
- [China single-use plastic ban](#)
- [India ban on plastic bags](#)

- **Guest choices**

The public is more aware of this issue and guests now expect to see that hotels are taking action. Evidence of addressing sustainability issues within hotel operations increasingly influences the decision-making process.

Case studies

ITC Hotels

ITC Hotels have mitigated usage of single use plastics (SUPs) from its operations. They built a cross functional taskforce to carry out a detailed assessment of where single-use plastic was being used and potential options for eliminating it or substituting them with alternatives. They have educated and worked with suppliers to look for alternatives to SUPs and created a plastic free roadmap for the coming years.

Items which have been replaced include water bottles, straws, stirrers, toothbrushes, shoe shiners, razors, combs, sewing kits, garbage bags and plastic packaging materials.

As part of this, ITC Hotels have installed an in-house water filtration and bottling plant to provide quality drinking water for its restaurants, meeting rooms, guestrooms and banquets thereby reducing the need for plastic water bottles.

Araiya

At Araiya, sustainability has always been a critical driver of strategy. When conceptualising their brand, they decided to eliminate as many single-use items as possible:

- Every Araiya hotel has its own reverse osmosis (RO) water plant and in-house bottling facility which reduces their carbon footprint and eliminated the need for 80,000 plastic bottles each year.
- Their vegan, sulphate-free and paraben-free body wash and shampoo are packaged in wall-mounted refillable dispensers, removing the need for about 35,000 single use bottles annually.
- Handwash dispensers are provided on all vanity counters to reduce the use of single-use soap cakes and cut down on waste packaging.

Throughout their hotels they also use items such as recyclable paper for wrapping bathroom amenities, reusable bathroom cups, reusable fabrics laundry bags, paper straws, wooden stirrers and paper containers for takeaways.



How to get started

Addressing this issue, will require joined-up thinking from all hotel departments.

- **Create a working group:** Consider which departments use single-use plastics and include them in your workgroup. It is important to have at least one member from Housekeeping and the Food and Beverage/Culinary team included in your group as these areas will be impacted the most.
- **Review each area of your operations:** Check for single-use plastic items in your operations and consider how you could remove or replace them.
- **Work with your suppliers:** They may be able to help you eliminate/reduce the amount of plastic packaging and provide multi-use items or products made of alternative responsible materials. Removing unnecessary plastic packaging from products doesn't just have a positive impact on the environment, it can also significantly reduce costs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a recent increase in single-use-plastics, due to the perception that they are required. However, it is still possible to reduce their use while ensuring that health and hygiene remain a top priority. The Global Tourism Plastics Initiative has created some [guidance](#) on how to continue such efforts during COVID-19 recovery.

Here are some examples of how you might be able to reduce plastics in your operations:

Guest rooms

- Review the packaging on every guestroom amenity and explore options to reduce plastic.
- Review plastic water bottles in rooms and switch to refillable options where possible.
- Consider the use of bulk bathroom amenity dispensers.
- Review all disposable items such as cups, wipes and bottles.
- Review use of plastic in tea bags.

Food and beverage/Hotel operations

- Eliminate the use of plastic straws/stirrers and only have a suitable alternative/limited amount available for customers upon request.
- Switch from single-use plastic water bottles to refillable glass bottles and/or water fountains for meeting rooms where possible.
- For local deliveries, check with your suppliers if plastic packaging can be removed/reduced or switched to multi-use containers such as re-usable crates which still ensure food delivered has the expected shelf life.
- Check with your waste management company on how plastic and other recyclables are processed after they have been picked up.
- Ask suppliers to commit to reduce plastic in deliveries (e.g. change mushroom boxes, banana wrapping, fruit punnets to recycled materials).
- Change takeaway cutlery to wood (FSC certified or equivalent) and remove all plastic cutlery items.
- Provide reusable drink cannisters for all employees back of house to remove the need for plastic cups.

Don't shift issues by changing packaging

If changing the packaging results in shorter shelf-life for food, we create more food waste which is an equally serious issue.

Replacing plastic bottles/containers with single-use metal or glass alternatives results in less plastic but shifts the problem onto metal/glass recycling. To support a holistic approach to sustainable hotel operations, you should ensure that all alternative materials used instead of plastic are reusable or are correctly recycled.

Communications

Letting your customers know what you are doing to address the issue of single-use plastics is almost as important as taking action.

Your communications should include what you are doing, what your achievements have been and how you are addressing some of the bigger, longer-term issues. A good start is to map your efforts against the relevant [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#). There may not always be a specific goal for the exact issue you are addressing but the goals most related to plastics reduction efforts are SDGs 12, 13 and 14.

[Tips to avoid greenwashing](#).



Tools and resources

- [Greener Guest](#) offer free online training to help balance plastic reduction with health and safety concerns and can signpost businesses towards more sustainable product choices.
- The UNWTO [Global Tourism Plastics Initiative](#) provide a framework for addressing plastic pollution in the travel and tourism industry.

Switching to bulk bathroom amenities

Several of the largest hotel chains have made commitments to phasing out miniature bathroom amenities and replace them with bulk bathroom amenities, removing a large amount of single-use plastic from hotels around the world.



1. Plastic Oceans, available from: www.plasticoceans.org
2. Earth Day Network (2018), *Plastic Pollution Primer and Action Toolkit*, available from: [Earth Day Network](http://EarthDayNetwork.org)
3. WM, *Bags by the Numbers*, available from: www.wmnorthwest.com
4. LA Times (2018), available from: www.latimes.com
5. Earth Day (2018), *Factsheet: Single Use Plastics*, available from: www.earthday.org
6. World Economic Forum (2016), available from: www.weforum.org

About Sustainable Hospitality Alliance

Sustainable Hospitality Alliance brings together engaged hospitality companies and uses the collective power of the industry to address key challenges affecting our planet and its people.

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