

Reduce carbon footprint with ecotels

And the Award Goes to,” became a huge gaffe while announcing the best picture award at this year’s Oscars; but there was no mistake when the India Tourism Development Corporation’s (ITDC) flagship property, The Ashok (New Delhi) won the LEED Gold certificate! Awarded for building operations and maintenance, this achievement heralds a huge change for tourism in the country. The recognition brings in focus the need for hotels to look minutely at their eco-footprint and be sensitive about sustainability in today’s day and age. Breaking several ‘firsts’ by winning gold, The Ashok now ranks as the oldest hotel in Asia to earn any level of LEED certification!

So, what exactly is a green hotel or ‘ecotel’ and on what parameters are they judged? An eco-hotel is one that has made important physical improvements to its building and initiated measures in maintenance and daily operations that minimize environmental impact. All the building upgrades to The Ashok and its facilities helped achieve LEED gold rating. For any property to be comprehensively and



A hotel using on-site composting machinery to turn organic waste into manure

environmentally responsible, other practices of green standards must also be incorporated. Rigorous checks of design calculations and operating manuals by independent third parties precede the certification of holistic practices at any of the premises. These ‘eco-labels’ vary across the world and the most common ones

include Greenglobe, EU Ecolabel, Ecosello and Green Hotel. In most cases, green hotels follow strict green guidelines. These guidelines range from best practices, guest participation and staff training that are implemented by each to ensure overall residents’ safety and non-toxic and energy-efficient accommodation. A

green hotel is designed to be so from the start, and as a first step new properties are built from sustainable resources such as locally available wood, stone and earth. The basic design principle is to blend in with the environment rather than oppose. Additionally, they should run on eco-friendly principles,

such as eco-friendly laundry and housekeeping, tight management of towels and sheets and stringent recycling of all resources like newspapers and water! Of late, many properties focus on using fresh air exchange systems to minimise air conditioning and save energy costs. Many lobbies and reception areas especially in resorts are large and airy with just natural ventilation. Adding a renewable energy component is always a great way to reduce grid energy use and many hotels have invested in green power — whether it is on-site solar or off-site wind farms. F&B departments of many ecotels choose to serve food that is organic and locally grown.

In all of these measures, a large component of the ecological footprint of any hotel is of the end user YOU! A survey of 1.2 lakh hotel customers reported that guests are generally willing to participate in sustainability programmes; but are unlikely to select a hotel for its greenness if they do not meet price considerations or skimp on convenience. Yet, hotels like The Ashok are smart to adopt sustainability as a regular feature of their business, because it makes business sense to do so!



PAVITRA SRIPRAKASH

@pavisriprakash

The writer is an architect, urban designer, dancer and chief designer at Shilpa Architects