Replacing single-use plastic bottles in Asia

Quick facts

- Type of procurement: reusable bottles and mobile water refill stations
- Year of inception: 2017
- Type of business: Travel organizer
- Organisation name: Buffalo Tours
- Number of staff: over 500 staff and thousands of local agents and operators
- Country/region: Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, Laos, China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Japan
- Procurement value: 250,000 USD (2017-2018)

Background information

During the International Year for Sustainable Tourism for Development in 2017, Buffalo Tours recognized that the tourism industry has a massive impact on the proliferation of plastic waste – in particular in Southeast Asia where recycling facilities and infrastructure are lacking.

The challenge

To ensure the well-being and comfort of guests, tour companies must supply travellers with safe, cool and convenient drinking water. However, providing every guest with several disposable water bottles on a daily basis quickly amounts to an ecological disaster. Buffalo Tours has therefore decided to offer guests the option of refilling reusable bottles from coolers instead, with the following objectives:

- Reduce the amount of plastic waste sent to landfill;
- Ensure that water bottles are made from safe materials, reducing the risk of harmful plastics or chemicals;
- Raise awareness of customers on environmental protection using a branded reusable water bottle.

The strategy

A refillable water bottle is offered at the start of the trip. Water to refill bottles is provided at hotel checkpoints for multiday tours. Bottles are labelled with the client’s name on it to help raise awareness, acceptance and individual responsibility, while also educating travellers about the environmental challenges caused by plastic waste. Any excess plastic that is still generated by guests is disposed through recycling centres.

To meet key concerns from agents and operators on providing safe, cool and convenient drinking water, Buffalo Tours has also developed a mobile water refill station. This station keeps the sealed water tank cool for up to 4 days.
Impacts

In 2017, over 200,000 disposable water bottles were eliminated. The production of these bottles is equivalent to the emission of 17,800 Kg of CO₂.

For 2018, a reduction of over 1,000,000 bottles is targeted.

Lessons learned

Most travellers will only use refillable water bottles if the dispensed water is perceived to be safe, cold, and convenient. It is therefore critical to alleviate travellers’ safety concerns. In addition, as most agents are not keen to support additional costs, it is recommended to provide such refillable water bottles free of charge.

Tender specifications

Each mobile water refill station set consists of:

- Stainless iron inner tube with capacity to hold a 25-litre sealed purified water container;
- Stainless steel lid with centred hole for a 25-litre sealed purified water container neck and pump;
- Foam outer insulation tube compressed up to 30 times, the same material surf boards are made of;
- Foam insulation lid with centred hole for neck and pump;
- Pull-over bag, which protects the foam and is easy to clean or replace, allowing them to be branded by Buffalo Tours or individual agents;
- A manual pump has been chosen to avoid recharging and battery waste.

“We have a duty to keep our guests hydrated and happy, but we also have a duty towards the environment. By offering travellers an alternative to single-use plastic bottles, even if we only save one bottle per person each day, it has a huge impact.”

– Peter Christiansen, Country Manager, Buffalo Tours Indonesia

1 Source: Kauertz et al. (ifeu GmbH) – PET Ökobilanz 2010.

For further information

https://www.buffalotours.com/responsible-travel-at-buffalo-tours/

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