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GOING GREEN

by KAMALA KIRK

Hosting eco-friendly events promotes sustainability and contributes to a healthier planet



Clockwise from above left: Mission Pacific Hotel in Oceanside focuses on water conservation during group events; Monterey Plaza Hotel & Spa is part of the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch program for sustainable seafood sourcing; The Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay, replaced traditional grass on-site with drought-tolerant alternatives; Pechanga Resort Casino in Temecula recycles fruit rinds.



PHOTOS (CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT): Mission Pacific Hotel; Monterey Plaza Hotel & Spa; The Ritz-Carlton Half Moon Bay; Pechanga Resort Casino

Sustainable meetings and events are becoming increasingly popular as more meeting planners and venues are aiming to reduce the negative impacts of events and gatherings on the environment. Many hotels and convention centers are partnering with sustainability programs and earning certifications that demonstrate their commitment to leaving a positive environmental impact on both their community and the planet.

Meeting planners are incorporating innovative strategies to minimize waste, maximize resources, and help attendees make eco-conscious decisions. By focusing on more sustainable events and practices, groups and organizations together can decrease their environmental footprint and transform the future of the industry.

SUSTAINABILITY ON THE SHORELINE

In the Bay Area, The Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay, has implemented several sustainable initiatives throughout its property. It replaced 4,800 square feet of traditional grass with drought-tolerant, low-maintenance alternatives. To minimize its water usage, the resort obtains its water from the Half Moon Bay Golf Links for irrigation purposes. And the culinary team implemented the Leanpath system, a food waste-prevention technology that enables hotel and commercial kitchens to operate more sustainably. "Meetings and events at The Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay, are designed to exceed our guests' expectations while still protecting our natural resources," says Clodagh Larkin, director of meetings and special events for the resort. "We have tools in place to empower our corporate guests to reduce the environmental impact with us through programs like our Ritz-Carlton Environmental Action Conservation Team and Impact experiences."

To support sustainable energy practices, Hyatt Regency San Francisco prioritizes green energy sources. Throughout the property are energy-efficient LED lights with motion sensors to optimize energy

usage, and appliances and office equipment are Energy Star-rated to ensure they meet strict energy-efficiency guidelines. Its climate control is managed by modular steam boilers with low-emission burners, providing effective temperature regulation while minimizing environmental impact. "Our sustainability programs are designed to make a meaningful impact," says Stuart Evans, director of sales and marketing for the hotel. "Through regular technology updates and efficient operational procedures, we strive for continuous reductions in energy and water consumption. We actively seek out opportunities to improve efficiency and aim for year-over-year progress."

To the south in Monterey, Monterey Plaza Hotel & Spa was named a Blue Zones Certified Property and offers paper guest room key cards instead of plastic, substitutes plastic straws with paper, and provides compostable to-go cups and utensils. The hotel is also part of the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch program for sustainable seafood sourcing, and 98% of ingredients it uses are grown within 100 miles. "For over 20 years, Blue Zones has been on the ground in hundreds of American cities co-creating and implementing evidence-informed Community

Well-Being programs to create sustainable, system-level solutions that improve population health and economic vitality," says Will Elkington, director of sales and marketing for the property. "They partner with public and private sector leaders to increase the well-being of cities leading to greater stability, improved health equity, and increased resilience."

Portola Hotel & Spa at Monterey Bay is experienced in executing conferences with reduced waste and meetings for groups up to 500 through a program offered by the property for planners to use eco-friendly meeting space and event amenities. The hotel produces hot water with cogeneration, which simultaneously generates electricity on-site, and installed energy-efficient lighting across the property through the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments' Energy Watch Program. The hotel also offers environmentally friendly vendor suggestions that include biodegradable badges shared with event hosts, as well as participates in the Monterey Regional Food Scrap/Composting Program to reduce local landfill waste. "We recently 'turned a room' for a large group proceeding from their plated breakfast and converting to general session," says Terri D'Ayon Joyce, director of sales and catering for Portola. "It was disheartening to see the amount of orange juice, breakfast meat, waffles, syrup, and eggs being disposed of in just one meal. Each of us walked away moved from that experience and knew we had to do more to reignite our Reduced Waste Conferences at Portola. ... Good intention is not enough when thinking how we can make a difference—taking action is something we are doing to make a difference."

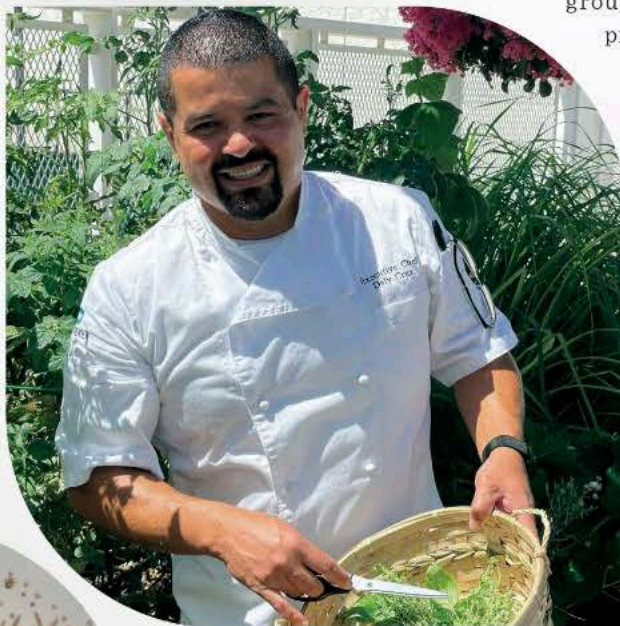
With a focus on water conservation and reduction of bottles, Oceanside's The Seabird Resort and Mission Pacific Hotel provide filtered alkaline stations on each guest room floor courtesy of its partnership with Urbn Water Co. "In Oceanside, our sustainability efforts are focused on



delivering authentic experiences for groups supporting our local businesses and backyard—the beach,” says Ben Fairchild, area director of sales and marketing for both properties. “Guests arriving at The Seabird Resort for the first time with their fellow attendees are greeted by 350 individually handcrafted ceramic corals, sponges, and anemones. The sculptural wall celebrates the immense biodiversity of coral reefs while raising the specter of climate change.”

And at the southern tail of the Golden State, San Diego Mission Bay Resort recently hosted an event with the primary goal of reducing conference-generated waste. The property supported the host group in implementing several practices by providing reusable utensils and lunch bags with meals assembled by guests, offering no individually wrapped items, and swapping plastic bottles for glass. The group worked with the city on compost and waste management, saving 3 tons of waste and repurposing cooking oil for fuel. Collectively, the group’s efforts doubled total recycling and halved trash pickup for the week and saved 3,070 plastic water bottles by using 81 water jugs. The group also donated leftover food from the event that was turned into more than 300 meals in Chefs to End Hunger food donations—a nonprofit organization based in Santa Fe Springs, California, that allows chefs to repackage and donate leftover food.

Through numerous sustainability efforts, Fairmont Grand Del Mar is driving changes toward positive hospitality. The irrigation system on the property’s golf course uses reclaimed water sent through a treatment process. Wireless sensors were installed at each hole of the course to measure moisture and



From above: Sheraton San Diego uses all-recycled meeting paper products; Chef Daly Cruz of Ontario Convention Center picks food grown in an on-site garden; The Seabird Resort’s coral sculpture hangs behind the reception desk in Oceanside.



“We want our guests to enjoy the resort ... for years to come—and to do so, we must be mindful in how we care for the property and its surroundings.”

—Brendan Carlin, general manager, Fairmont Grand Del Mar

*Temecula Creek Inn's
monarch butterfly habitat*



salinity levels to ensure watering only when needed. A bottle-crushing machine repurposes glass into ultrafine grains of sand to replace the sand in the bunkers of the golf course. The resort has also rescued more than 120,000 bees, which produce raw honey that is used in its restaurants. “We are proud as a resort to take a proactive approach to reducing waste and supporting conservation,” says General Manager Brendan Carlin. “We want our guests to enjoy the resort, situated on 400 acres of pristine coastal canyon and just minutes from the ocean, for years to come—and to do so, we must be mindful in how we care for the property and its surroundings.”

Sheraton San Diego Hotel & Marina’s Meet and Green initiative extends an environmental focus to meeting, event, and catering activities, and the hotel has received a Gold Level Environmental Standard for Lodging Properties from Green Seal. Kitchen food waste from preparing meals is dehydrated to less than 20% of its original weight, and the processed material is then composted. All meeting paper products are made of a minimum 30% postconsumer recycled content for attendees including paper handouts, printed signage, notepads, and paper napkins. “We are committed to finding innovative solutions to help minimize our environmental footprint,” says Sean Clancy, vice president and general manager. “Our Meet and Green events program helps guide our approach to meetings, events, and catering, allowing us to provide guests with the best experience possible while reducing waste and supporting conservation.”

INLAND ENVIRONMENTALISM

Alexis Green, director of event sales at Anaheim Hills Golf Course, says about 90% of the events she handles have some type of sustainability component, ranging from eco-friendly menus to digital

invitations. Event hosts frequently resell nonpersonalized used decor, such as table numbers and welcome signs, that can be reused by other groups. “I find that edible favors are a huge concept to incorporate into events because how many times do you leave the favor on the table or throw it out?” says Green. “This allows the guests to eat the item right then and there without waste.”

To the northeast, the Ontario Convention Center became the first U.S. professional hockey arena to make ice from recycled water and switch cooling towers over to recycled water—collectively saving about 5 million gallons of potable water every year. It installed more efficient tankless water heaters to reduce the amount of energy used to create hot water by 50% and participates in the City of Ontario composting program, which transforms organic waste into mulch. The convention center’s Executive Chef Daly Cruz is very active in its sustainability efforts. His chef jacket is made from recycled plastic and his on-site garden produces vegetables, fruits, and herbs that are used in preparing the fresh culinary menus, and unused food is donated to the Salvation Army.

South of Los Angeles, Temecula’s Pechanga Resort Casino partners with Terracycle to collect and recycle cigarette butts in disposal bins located around outdoor walkways, which are then recycled into plastic park benches, chairs, and other hard-molded plastic items. More than 100,000 gallons of water are collected annually from condensation created by internal turbines, and Pechanga’s golf course saves millions of gallons of rain and runoff water each year to irrigate the course instead of emptying into storm drains. The resort also collects food scraps such as rinds, peels, and shells and transports them to CR&R recycling facilities—a collection of waste and recycling companies servicing Southern California—to be turned into biofuels.

Temecula Creek Inn turned 8,000 square feet of land into natural habitat for monarch butterflies, which are on the red category of the endangered species list. The habitat includes local wildflowers and milkweed plants, which serve as the single food source for the insects before they enter metamorphosis. All guests receive two bottles of complimentary Path alkaline water, which can be refilled at stations throughout the property. The chefs at the property are master composters, taking food scraps from the restaurant, blending them, and then putting them back into the 4-acre Chef’s Garden—all while excess scraps are given to area pig farms. **m+e**

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