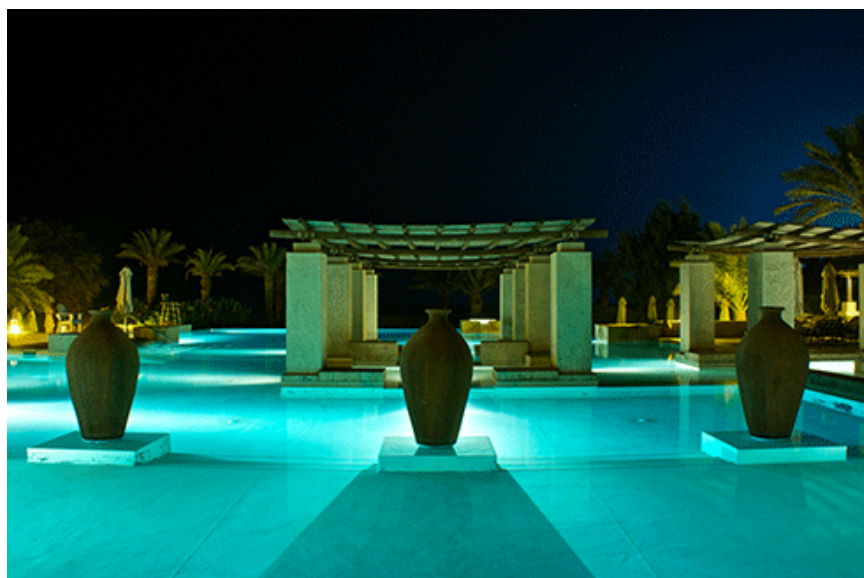


Mopping up tourism's water footprint

In the lead up to UN World Water Day on 22 March, a research consortium supported by the EarthCheck Research Institute, Ecolab and Griffith University, released a white paper on water, calling on the tourism industry – a heavy user of water – to act fast.



Credit: [Nicolas Fleury](#)/CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Addressing tourism industry professionals in Hong Kong, Dr Susanne Becken a Professor of Sustainability from Australia's Griffith University, said the tourism industry is at risk as the white paper shows water and its combined effect with energy use could become the most contested resource of the future.

'Tourism in the Asia Pacific region is growing at five per cent per annum. At the same time, more than 75 per cent of the countries are experiencing water stress at least at some critical period throughout the year.

'The quality of the available water supply is diminishing, while the demands on volume and the costs to use are increasing.

'Layer into this the inequity of water use by large hotels where the consumption of water by guests can outpace that of the local population by up to eight times, and the potential for conflict becomes a significant new business risk.'

Contributor to the white paper and co-presenter, EarthCheck CEO Mr Stewart Moore, believes water is currently undervalued relative to its true environmental cost, although the situation is changing.

'There's a nexus between energy and water – water forms part of the production process, and energy is required to produce water. The two are inextricably linked and this puts strains on both resources.

'We've all become accustomed to carbon footprinting. Next, it will be about [water footprinting](#). That completely

changes our thinking and makes us realise that hotel and tourism businesses need to have dedicated water management plans – plans that are actually implemented.’

EarthCheck Research Institute Chairman, Professor David Simmons from New Zealand’s Lincoln University, said the tourism industry has to change rapidly to meet the new risks, including introducing responsible design and operational practices before hotel developments are approved.

‘Developers have to look beyond the box that they are building and see if it fits in with the existing environment.

‘If we destabilise destinations by developing a “giant box” in the middle of a village – one that soaks up precious resources for the rare few – then we are bound to face issues.’

EarthCheck has developed the world’s largest database on the operational performance of 181 hotels reaching back some 15 years. In gathering the data, EarthCheck found water consumption varied considerably, from around 200 litres per day in Europe to more than 900 litres in the Philippines, Malaysia and China.

‘With this data we can help facilities understand how much water they are using, understand their footprint, and provide benchmarks, monitoring tools and practical insights to guide them toward improved operational performance,’ said Mr Moore.

‘Major changes are required that involve leaps in the way we use water and how we deploy technology.’

Source: EC3 Global

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