

# ADVERT 108

# CAPE TOWN'S HOTEL VERDE

GREEN MACHINE: GREEN FROM THE GROUND UP, THE HOTEL VERDE IS FAR AND AWAY THE MOST ECO-FRIENDLY HOTEL ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT.

BY: NICK DALL



**THE FIRST CLUE THAT** the recently opened 145-room Hotel Verde in Cape Town is not an average airport hotel comes from the three futuristic wind turbines outside the entrance. Upon closer inspection, the hotel reveals myriad other sustainable features and practices which are in keeping with owner Mario Delicio's firm belief that "we have a responsibility as a company, as an employer and as a visitor on this planet to live as sustainably as possible."



The plot on a stagnant wetland in a semi-industrial area would have scared others off, but not Delicio. The wetland has been resuscitated and all that remains is for the fish, frogs and birds to move back in. It features a jogging trail, an outdoor gym and a 100 percent natural swimming pool on its perimeter. The pool, which looks more like a pond, is filtered by an aquatic garden and contains no harmful chemicals.

Yet it's the building itself that is most remarkable. Because Hotel Verde began life as an ecologically friendly project, it is at a significant advantage over competitors who want to 'go green.' Sustainability Manager André Harms was given the freedom to build as greenly as possible. Instead of relying on conventional air-conditioning to cool the interior

of the building, a geothermal system provides the hotel with cool air from deep beneath the earth's surface. The system required drilling one hundred 65-metre deep holes before the building's foundations were laid.

The use of recycled plastic Cobiax void formers greatly reduced the amount of concrete required in the hotel's construction, while the installation of a cutting-edge grey water recycling plant – which is responsible for (at least) a 37 percent reduction in the hotel's reliance on municipal water – was made far easier by the fact that the hotel had no existing plumbing systems.

While this may all seem out of reach to established hotels, one thing that they could imitate is Hotel Verde's



WE MIGHT HAVE THE SLOGAN 'AFRICA'S GREENEST HOTEL' RIGHT NOW, BUT WE HOPE IT WON'T BE FOR LONG.









dependence on solar energy, although they would be hard-pressed to go to the same extremes. Photovoltaic panels on the roof and on the North-facing façade of the building provide 54 kilowatts on sunny days and take care of between 14 and 40 percent of the hotel's electricity needs, depending on occupancy.

But, explains General Manager Samantha Annandale, it's not only the big things that make Hotel Verde green. "We want to educate guests as well as encourage them to minimise their impact on the environment. We have come up with fun, subtle ways to do that, which will hopefully become second nature that guests then take home with them."

A walk around the hotel premises confirms this attitude. Verdinos, the hotel's in-house currency, are awarded to guests who don't use the air-conditioners in their rooms and those who re-use their towels and bed linens. But the most innovative use of the Verdino is in the hotel gym, where exercise machines harness the energy created by guests and

transform it into usable electricity.

Annandale observes that even guests who don't earn Verdinos view the hotel's greenness in a positive light, and the marketing team is able to use Hotel Verde's status as the greenest hotel in Africa as a unique selling point.

"Eco-friendly technology added 14.5 percent to construction costs, but we are already recouping our investment, not only in terms of huge savings on water and electricity bills, but also as a result of the enormous publicity that has surrounded our launch."

Hotel Verde is green in every aspect of its day-to-day operations. In pursuit of their goal of 'zero waste to landfill', for example, food suppliers are required to unpack their produce directly into the hotel pantry. The restaurant grows its own salad leaves and herbs aquaponically and sources all of its other food from local suppliers. One such supplier is Delicious Biscuits – a one-woman operation running out of a garage in nearby Belville, who has



114

been able to take on two staff members as a direct result of hotel business.

The local community has also been heavily involved in the decoration of the hotel's interior spaces. Every piece of art in Hotel Verde is a South African original, and a large proportion of the pieces come from nearby. Pupils from underprivileged local schools were provided with materials and tuition and encouraged to submit environmentally-themed pieces. The best of these were then interpreted by local bead makers, sculptors and weavers.

Hotel Verde is undeniably green from the ground up, but perhaps its greenest attribute is its people's keenness to share knowledge and expertise. "We might have the slogan 'Africa's Greenest Hotel' right now, but we hope it won't be for long," says Harms. "We want to show the continent what can be done and challenge the industry as a whole."

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Nick Dall is a freelance journalist based in Cape Town. Most of his work is travel-related and has been published extensively both locally and abroad. [www.nickdall.co.za](http://www.nickdall.co.za)



115