

TRAVEL AND HOSPITALITY

Mandarin Oriental, slightly slowed by pandemic crisis, on track to eliminate single-use plastic

May 13, 2020



Mandarin Oriental campaign: Model Kate Upton is a fan. Image credit: Mandarin Oriental

By LUXURY DAILY NEWS SERVICE

The COVID-19 coronavirus outbreak may have affected its speed, but Hong Kong's Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group claims it is on track to eliminate single-use plastic across its chain of properties.

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The company had pledged to meet its plastic-elimination goals by March 2021, initially focusing on 60 of the most common single-use plastic products identified that make up 95 percent of those items in use at its hotels. These products have either been dropped or being phased out as the current plastic stock depletes, per the chain's first progress report.

"Whilst our timeline is likely to be adjusted as a consequence of the pandemic, we remain focused on achieving our goals and we believe we can provide valuable leadership to our industry and to the world at large," said James Riley, group chief executive of Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group, in a statement.

Hong Kong-based conglomerate Jardine Matheson Group owns [Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group](#), which includes 12,500 employees working across 33 hotels and seven residences in 23 countries and territories.

Paper trail

Hotels within the group are working towards defined eco-sensitive goals as outlined in Mandarin Oriental's recent [Sustainability Report](#). Each property will issue progress reports every six months ([see story](#)).

The chain has pledged to cut single-use plastic across all areas of the hotels, including rooms, spa, transport, restaurants and bars, as well as in those areas unseen by the guest, such as offices, kitchens and back of house.

A key elimination is the commonly used plastic water bottles.

On-site water bottling has been introduced at Mandarin Oriental hotels in Hong Kong, Macau, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Taipei, Geneva, London, Miami and New York. Plans call for it to extend across all hotels.

Some properties have done it far more aggressively.

Mandarin Oriental, Kuala Lumpur, has eliminated almost a half-million plastic water bottles from rooms and food and beverage facilities in the span of a year.

Across hotels, many commonly used plastic items have been replaced with eco-alternative materials. Examples include sanitized, re-usable cloth laundry bags and shoe mitts, paper, metal or bamboo straws, natural loofahs, wooden spatulas and metal tasting spoons in the kitchens.

Many bathroom amenities have been replaced with sustainably certified non-plastic alternatives, including cotton pads, razors, earbuds, shower caps and shaving foam, the company said.

Mandarin Oriental hotels are also experimenting with wall-mounted dispensers to replace small plastic shower gel, shampoo and conditioner containers. They are working with brands such as Fig & Yarrow and Diptyque to fill and re-fill the dispensers with appropriate, chemical-free produce.

However, some challenges do remain.



Mandarin Oriental will donate 10 percent of online gift card sales through May 31 to the U.N. Foundation COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund in support of WHO, up to \$20,000. Image credit: Mandarin Oriental

Clinging to some

As Mandarin Oriental points out, some materials, such as cling film and waste bags, are not only difficult to eliminate, but have few sustainable alternatives.

Trials are currently underway to replace cling film with re-usable items that can be easily sanitized, including containers, silicone and beeswax wraps, and waste bags with water-soluble toxin-free options, the company said.

Also, while the group can obtain toothbrushes that are 97 percent plastic-free, 100 percent plant-based toothbrush bristles are not currently available. Ongoing research in this area is likely to lead to an eco-friendly toothbrush option.

Not only that, but alternatives for toothpaste tubes have also proved difficult to locate.

Many months of supplier research yielded toothpaste bites, which are small tablets of toothpaste packaged in FSC-certified paper and currently being rolled out across the Mandarin Oriental properties.

As for the remaining single-use plastic items, the hotels have been encouraged to pick reusable or unprocessed plant-fiber-based green alternatives and then see if those products can be introduced across the Mandarin Oriental portfolio.

MANDARIN ORIENTAL is collaborating with its suppliers to push for responsible procurement. A second progress report is due out in October.

"The next challenge, that was not included in our initial timeline, is an external one namely the continued use of single-use plastic packaging used to deliver goods into our hotels," the company said.

"We recognize that elimination here may take much longer to achieve, as this is an area that is proving hard to influence. We will continue in our efforts to resolve this through our own Supplier Code of Conduct and ongoing supplier engagement.

"The current COVID-19 pandemic has already had some impact on our efforts. The depletion of our existing stock of plastic products across our portfolio has slowed, and new hygiene protocols and requirements arising from the pandemic pose challenges that may well affect our timeline.

"However, we remain committed to our original objective of 100 percent elimination while recognizing the potential for delay in the removal of some items. Work is ongoing to achieve the very best results possible across the portfolio and within our timeframe."

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