

Case study – YHA



The world's biggest budget accommodation network promotes the benefits of low-impact travel

YHA likes to remind guests that every night they spend in a hostel generates an average of nine kilograms of carbon emissions; not to make them feel guilty, but to garner small contributions to a carbon reduction program which helps fund sustainability projects at its properties.

Such contributions recently helped to pay for a \$10,000 solar hot water system for the YHA property in Byron Bay.

YHA is a not-for-profit organisation and the world's biggest budget accommodation network with over 4000 properties in more than 80 countries. There are over 100 YHA properties around Australia and 30 in NSW. YHA Ltd owns and operates seven properties in NSW – Blue Mountains, Byron Bay, Thredbo, and four in Sydney (Glebe, Railway Square, Sydney Central, and Sydney Harbour).

Ross Lardner is Manager of Sydney Harbour YHA and the Sustainability Coordinator for YHA. He says the unique aspect of the YHA customer base is its skew towards younger people – aged 18 to 35 – and international visitors.

'We have many Europeans who come from countries where sustainability is more ingrained than Australia,' Lardner says. ►

In brief

YHA has used the Sustainability Advantage Program to reduce carbon emissions, water use, and power consumption over the past three years. Across the seven properties it owns and operates in NSW – Blue Mountains, Byron Bay, Thredbo, and four in Sydney.

YHA Ltd has:

- cut gross electricity use from all properties by 489,583 kilowatt hours between 2008 and 2010 – a drop of 16.3 per cent*
- cut electricity use per overnight guest from 7.19 kilowatt hours in 2008 to 6.87 kilowatt hours in 2010
- cut gross gas use from all properties by 883,752 megajoules between 2008 and 2010 – a drop of 17.4 per cent*
- cut gas use per overnight guest from 18.24 megajoules in 2008 to 17.05 megajoules in 2010
- cut average greenhouse gas emissions per overnight guest from 9.11 kilograms in 2008 to 8.87 kilograms in 2010
- cut waste generated per overnight guest by 60 grams between 2008 and 2010.

**Gross usage does not include Sydney Harbour YHA as this new property has no previous year data for usage comparison.*



- 'What we might regard as being special is standard practice in Europe. And younger people seem to be more environmentally aware.

'We focus on sustainability not only because it's what our customers expect, but we also think it's the right thing to do. We see it as part of our role to educate people and give them the opportunity to travel more responsibly and have the facilities to recycle, minimise water use and reduce power consumption.'

YHA has had an environmental policy since 1998 but found its approach to sustainability was ad hoc. YHA wanted to be more strategic, gain senior management buy-in, and make sustainability part of its business structure. Lardner says YHA was making changes but had no real understanding of their impacts or benefits.

'Three years ago we were about to hire a consultancy to help us when the Sustainability Advantage Program came across our desk,' says Lardner. 'We realised it would be much better because we could network, work with government, and make a longer term commitment.'

YHA joined Sustainability Advantage in 2008 and has since completed work in many areas, including climate change, and engaging staff and stakeholders.

Since starting Sustainability Advantage six hostels have significantly reduced their power consumption.

Gross electricity use from all properties decreased by 357,448 kilowatt hours between 2008 and 2009 – a drop of 11.5 per cent. Excluding the new Sydney Harbour YHA*, electricity use decreased a further 132,135 kilowatt hours – or 4.8 per cent

– in 2010. Electricity use per overnight guest fell from 7.19 kilowatt hours in 2008 to 6.87 kilowatt hours in 2010.

Gross gas use from all properties decreased by 371,932 megajoules between 2008 and 2009 – a drop of 4.9 per cent. Excluding the new property, gas use decreased a further 883,752 megajoules – or 12.5 per cent – in 2010. Gas use per overnight guest fell from 18.24 megajoules in 2008 to 17.05 megajoules in 2010.

Also, average greenhouse gas emissions per overnight guest decreased from 9.11 kilograms in 2008 to 8.87 kilograms in 2010. Waste generated per overnight guest fell 60 grams between 2008 and 2010.

'We had made all the obvious changes, but with Sustainability Advantage, and especially through the energy audit, we got some extra surprises,' says Lardner. 'We aren't experts in this field, but the experts found things we would never have identified ourselves. That has been very useful.'

'YHA has always been conscious of sustainability, but it is now a more integral part of our business,' says Lardner.

Your next step

To find out how your business can join the Sustainability Advantage Program, contact the team:

Email sustainbus@environment.nsw.gov.au
Call 02 8837 6000
Visit environment.nsw.gov.au/sustainbus/sustainabilityadvantage.htm

*Sydney Harbour YHA has been excluded from some of the measurements as it is a new building with no previous data for usage comparison.