

Small investments pay big dividends at Kwazulu-Natal guesthouse

Bob Hunter, owner of the Honey Pot Guesthouse in Umhlanga Rocks and an office-bearer of the National Accommodation Association of South Africa, says “going green is a top priority for the industry at present.”

However, he also notes that guesthouse owners are usually very focused on their cash flows and few can afford to spend large amounts on energy-efficient retrofits. His own experience at the Honey Pot, though, has convinced him and his wife and co-owner, Heather, that the investments they have made are saving them plenty of money.

“Basically what we’ve done is to install solar water heating, energy-efficient lighting and gas cookers,” says Hunter. “We have six rooms and four geysers, all of which run off solar. From 04:00 to 0:600 in the morning the geysers normally use electricity, which switches off automatically as the day gets warmer.”

Solar heating is sufficient to keep water at a constant 35° or 36°C throughout the day. If the temperature drops below 35°C, electricity kicks in - usually when the weather is overcast or it is raining - at about 16:00. Often, especially during the hot KwaZulu-Natal summers, it is not necessary to use electricity in the mornings as the pipes are well insulated and the water stays hot overnight. “The result is that our guests always have hot water and we’re saving about R1 000 a month,” says Hunter. He adds that installing a solar heating system - which included two new geysers, six solar panels, piping and controls - as well as energy-efficient Compact Fluorescent Lamps (CFL) cost some R35 000 in total. “So, yes, we’re definitely saving money and will pay off our investment in under five years.”

Hunter adds that five of the six guest rooms and the communal areas are fitted with CFLs that cost in the region of R35 each. The Honey Pot has some 90 light bulbs – all incandescent bulbs were replaced as each came to the end of its standard lifespan. “We really like the light you get from the CFLs and, most importantly, so do our guests. Because of their longer life, they are definitely cost-effective. Together, the solar water heating and energy-efficient bulbs are cutting R1 000 off our monthly electricity bills.”

About nine years ago the Honey Pot switched its cooking (breakfasts are prepared every day and dinners on request) from electric to gas – an investment that Hunter says paid for itself some time ago. “We find that a 19kg gas bottle will last us about three months. Using gas has saved us about R400 a month; although gas cookers are expensive, they are worth it.”

One bit of advice he has for other guesthouse owners: don't use an electric grill with a gas stove. "Grillers", he says, "are energy intensive and you are well advised to spend another R2 000 or so on a gas griller and save yourself much money in the long run".

One spin-off from the Honey Pot's investment in energy efficiency is that the guesthouse is able to market itself as being "green" and environmentally friendly – the establishment also captures and recycles rainwater and grows vegetables using hydroponics. "Being environmentally friendly is a big selling point for us; it certainly appeals to more and more guests," says Hunter.

Eskom Energy Advisors are available to assist guesthouses with advice on how to implement energy efficiency measures as a way to reduce costs - supported by energy efficient technology suppliers and Energy Services Companies (ESCOs), Eskom Energy Advisors excel in:

- Understanding and having access to the latest energy efficient technologies;
- Analysing the energy consumption of guesthouses or specific processes in guesthouses;
- Identifying areas of energy wastage in guesthouses;
- Assessing the current and future energy needs of guesthouses; and
- Identifying the most cost effective and energy efficient technology solutions for guesthouses.

Call 08600 37566 and ask to speak to an Eskom Energy Advisor.

Ends

Sidebar:

Cutting guesthouse energy bills – a step-by-step approach

Lorraine Jenks, founder of Hotelstuff/Greenstuff and a specialist consultant and trainer on "Green and Sustainable Hospitality", advises that guesthouse owners follow these simple-to-implement steps to "green" their establishments and cut their energy bills:

- Educate staff and guests about being "green" and why it's important;
- Select a Green Team and vote in a leader;
- Do regular consumption measurements to monitor progress;
- Invest in a formal carbon audit, or do it yourself with one of the very user-friendly online monitoring programmes;
- Install energy and water saving shower heads and dual-flush toilets;
- Set geyser thermostats to 60°C;
- Use energy-saving CFL or LED light bulbs;
- Use daylight whenever possible;
- Replace kitchen appliances with energy-efficient versions or gas; and
- Invite guests to indicate which towels need replacing and which can remain in the room.

End