

# 2

## Re-imagining the Green Guest

### The key points of this chapter:

- **Knowledge gaps lead to bad practice.** The hospitality sector is hamstrung by a dearth of information and first hand experience. New technology and research can empower us to make smarter long-term choices
- **Tourism can – and should – flip the status quo,** creating market demand rather than waiting for it. Sustainable behaviour can enrich guest experience
- **The most valuable research focuses on real-life case studies.** What people say and what people do does not always match. The beating heart of sustainable tourism is real-world behaviours
- **All guests are potential green guests.** Typecasting people is counterproductive, leading to faulty assumptions and a false sense that ‘green’ guests are a niche market

### Flashback

It was another extended drought in Kangaroo Valley, New South Wales. The normally lush green farms were parched, with deep cracks running across the land. Even the surrounding forests looked fatigued, everything wilting from successive days of +45°C heat. Hard times for an area the National Trust reveres for its ‘outstanding natural beauty’, and especially tough for tourist accommodation providers surviving on harvested rainfall. It was in such situations that Margaret, owner of tourist accommodation Valley Park, would resort to removing taps from all her guest bathrooms to prevent too much water being used. She did not trust her guests not to waste water.

Margaret’s business had faced the challenges of drought and extreme heat on and off for years, but the occurrences were becoming more frequent and were lasting longer. Her desperate measure was the only practical solution she thought existed to avoid paying heavily for water to be carted to her property. Asking guests to be mindful of water didn’t seem enough. In 2003, nobody felt that paying guests would voluntarily reduce their water use. Despite climate change news and government water restrictions, a holiday was just that, a holiday.

---

## Knowledge vacuum

There is a vacuum in understanding how guests behave ‘behind closed doors’, particularly during times of scarcity. Some accommodation providers use signs, and most install water and/or energy saving appliances, but there is still a general distrust of guest attitudes to ‘green’ behaviour. With continued harsh conditions will Margaret’s extreme actions become normal for hospitality?

The year I met Margaret, Sophie and I bought Valley Park and commenced our journey to renovate, extend the accommodation, and ultimately introduce a higher level of self-sufficiency. We renamed the business Crystal Creek Meadows. We kept the bathroom taps and actually offered our guests *more* access to resources. Despite this we use less water and energy, and reduced our waste even though the business has grown tenfold in the years since we bought the original property.

And yet I really felt for Margaret and still sense her worry. It is incredibly stressful to go through droughts and power blackouts – as I, Sophie, and our staff have experienced. Like so many in the industry, Margaret’s decision was based on what she knew and felt was right at that time, even though it contradicts the concept of hospitality.

## Flipping the status quo

During our journey, I have come to realise hospitality is seriously held back by a lack of scientific information and practical solutions. This is preventing us from evolving, which is now so obviously required for the future.

Our solution meant reversing the status quo, directly involving our guests in consuming and wasting less. But it goes much further than this. The solution has transformed our business and significantly improved our productivity. The lessons learned from our research and invention we share globally to help large and small hospitality providers save millions of kilowatts of energy, millions of litres of water, and cut thousands of tonnes of carbon emissions.

Central to our approach is that guests and staff can be persuaded to *participate* and *conserve*, positively enjoying this process.

## Market disruption

The status quo says we cannot disrupt the guests’ experience when saving energy, water, and food waste because they will not accept change. In this book I challenge that belief, as well as the idea that hospitality must evolve *in response to* strong market demand from ‘green minded’ guests.

Instead, I’m going to illustrate a market disruption that is not just positive but revolutionary. This disruption means flipping how we provide services so that we empower guests to participate directly. It means instead of inconveniencing