

Montego Bay resort harnesses solar power

BY HORACE HINES Observer staff reporter

MONTEGO BAY, St James — The world's first Eco-Village hotel rooms were launched at Sandals Montego Bay last week as the resort group moved to reduce its energy footprint.

The technology, born out of a partnership between consumer electronics giant Panasonic, Sandals and its sister company, Appliance Traders Limited, is to be rolled out across the hotel chain.

Adam Stewart, CEO of Sandals and ATL, and deputy chairman of the Jamaica Observer, described the new system as “awesome” at the launch on Friday. “Not only is this new to Jamaica, it is the first of these Eco-Villages Panasonic has done anywhere in the world,” he said.

Under the system, rooftop solar panels turn sunbeams into electricity to power lights and appliances in the rooms below.

A sophisticated Green Room Controller System ensures that the power is not wasted when the rooms are empty, diverting it to other uses or sending it back to the Jamaica Public Service.

The initiative is particularly important for the tourism and manufacturing industries, which are having trouble making ends meet due to high electricity costs, Stewart said.

Sandals properties attract a staggering annual energy bill of nearly US\$7 million (\$600 million), Stewart said. The company hopes to realise a return on the Eco-Village project, which cost US\$87,000 to initiate, in seven to eight years.

Hiroki Kaji, the president of Panasonic Latin America, explained how the energy for the Eco-Village will be generated.

“Solar systems work when sunlight strikes a solar photovoltaic module and excite electrons,” he said. “The electrons exit through wires on the back to the solar panel and enter your house through your circuit breakers and electric meter.

“The solar electricity is used immediately to power electronics and appliances within your house,” he said. “Excess electricity is sent back to your electric utility. During the night, power for your house is provided by your utility”.

In the resorts, the fully integrated system can be controlled from the front desk and excess energy can be diverted to other parts of the hotel, Stewart said.

“A lot of times in the hotel industry you start a room and the guest takes two, three hours before they actually check in. You are wasting kilowatt hours that are unnecessary,” Stewart said. “This gives you the opportunity to shut it down at that point in time or start up the room immediately.”

ATL, which will distribute the technology, will be launching ATL Energy Solution in 2012.



From left: Adam Stewart, CEO of the Sandals and Appliance Traders Limited groups, Hiroki Kaji, president of Panasonic Latin America and Roy Kobayakawa, a director of Panasonic Corporation at the world launch of Eco-Village. (Photo: Horace Hines)

From left: Adam Stewart, CEO of the Sandals and Appliance Traders Limited groups, Hiroki Kaji, president of Panasonic Latin America and Roy Kobayakawa, a director of Panasonic Corporation at the world launch of Eco-Village. (Photo: Horace Hines)