

Budget hotel invests in solar energy

Last Updated: Apr 17, 2011



A view of the skylight shaft from a room at the energy-efficient easyHotel in Jebel Ali. Jaime Puebla / The National

DUBAI // The easyHotel in Jebel Ali charges just Dh99 per night, but there's nothing low-budget about the investment the developers made in energy efficiency.

From the solar water-heating system on the roof right down to the ground, the hotel uses technology that reduces energy use by about 19 per cent compared with an ordinary building the same size says Istithmar World, the developer.

The measures raised the initial investment by about 15 per cent, said Andrew Jordan, executive director - development at the firm.

"There is a premium for sure," he said. "But from the operations side, there are many benefits."

Powered by 63 solar collectors on the roof, the hot-water system has been heating 9,500 litres per day to about 60°C since September, without glitches, said Arun Mudhartha, the hotel manager.

"There is no negative feedback" he said.

The developer also invested in high-performance insulation and glazing, efficient pumps, motors and chillers and energy and water-saving fixtures and bulbs

The hotel also features four shafts, running the full height of the hotel, which are designed to bring daylight into 96 interior rooms that do not have windows onto a street. The shaft walls are covered in reflective material.

The hotel is the first one in the UAE to achieve a gold rating, the second highest, under the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) green building rating system.

Solar hot water systems make sense here, said Deetish Budkuley, general manager of Ecoval, the company that fitted the system.

"Europe has much less sunshine per year and these systems are common there," he said. "The UAE has so much more sunshine but here it is only just starting."

The company, which opened in 2002, has so far installed solar hot water systems at five other hotels, as well as at the Tourism Development and Investment Company's labour accommodation in Abu Dhabi, where solar power is supplying 700,000 litres of hot water per day.

Heating water usually accounts for about 10 per cent of a building's energy demand, said Mr Budkuley.