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## Holidays to help communities

International hotel and resort companies are increasingly developing corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes to reduce their environmental impact and give back to the communities in which they do business.

While this may raise a company's profile, in Hong Kong, the general consensus among travel agents is that these programmes make little difference to which resort groups they promote to travellers.

Sunflower Travel, one of the leading travel agencies in Hong Kong, states that despite running its own CSR campaigns, such as sponsoring charities and hosting educational drives, and working with supply-chain partners who are environmentally-friendly and socially responsible, the Hong Kong market is not yet socially aware enough for the firm to recommend products or hotel groups to customers based on a group's ethical policies.

"According to our statistics, this information does not influence our customers' decision-making process," says a Sunflower spokesman. "Nonetheless, as the green movement progressively becomes more mainstream, we will no doubt see a standardised evaluation for CSR in tourism."

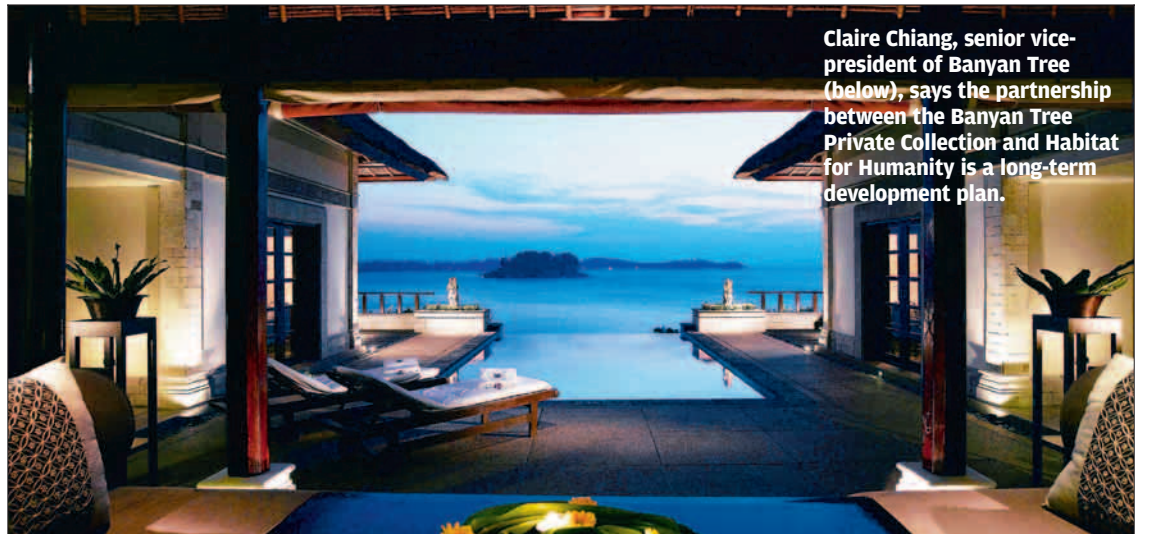
Niche travel agency Concorde Travel

in Central has a similar view. "The quality of the property overrides whatever the management might choose to do in the community," says Graham Elsom, managing director at Concorde. "In fact, I think many hotels and organisations these days do try to contribute to the community in various ways and I daresay, with most, we don't even hear about it."

But Claire Chiang, senior vice-president of Banyan Tree Holdings, which owns the Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts, says that if CSR initiatives have no direct impact on immediate sales, "it doesn't matter". Her company's destination club, the Banyan Tree Private Collection, recently announced its partnership with Habitat for Humanity, an international non-governmental organisation dedicated to eliminating poverty through building affordable housing.

As part of the partnership, new Banyan Tree Private Collection members will be asked to donate US\$10,000 from their individual perpetual membership fee to Habitat for Humanity, which Banyan Tree Private Collection will match. So, of the one-time joining fee of US\$150,000, US\$10,000 will be directly donated to Habitat for Humanity. Banyan Tree Private Collection will match this with an additional US\$10,000.

Banyan Tree Private Collection aims



Claire Chiang, senior vice-president of Banyan Tree (below), says the partnership between the Banyan Tree Private Collection and Habitat for Humanity is a long-term development plan.

to raise enough funds to build 100 homes over the next year. Proceeds from donations will go towards two building projects - one in Guangdong and the other in the Philippines.

"We want to make a meaningful contribution. Our partnership is not [just] about money, it is value driven," Chiang says.

"We are looking ahead [towards the] long-term. Travel agents are not the barometer here; we are leading the way to reaping a broader market in the

future." She points out there is a gap between CSR rhetoric and actual action taken, particularly in Asia. However, a newer generation of travellers are looking for more than to just relax on holiday.

"With increasing levels of education, the newer generation seeks relevance and purpose from their lives and they choose to be associated with companies that reflect their own values," she says.

"Companies that don't learn this soon won't last."

