

TRAVEL WEEKLY

OPINIONCHECKING IN

Sustainable down to the last grain of sand

By Christina Jelski

Apart from admiring a particularly stunning beachfront, chances are you've likely never given much thought to sand.

But sand, it turns out, is one of the world's most vital natural resources.

That's a fact I learned from Kurt Bjorkman, COO of the luxury California resort **The Ranch at Laguna Beach**, during an April lunch event hosted by Beyond Green, Preferred Hotel Group's network of sustainability minded properties.

Bjorkman may be in the hospitality business, but as a hotelier with a sustainable ethos, he knows quite a bit about sand. (For the sand curious, he highly recommends picking up a copy of the book "The World in a Grain: The Story of Sand and How It Transformed Civilization," by Vince Beiser.)

"Other than water and air, sand is the most consumed resource in the world," said Bjorkman. "Pretty much everything we use has sand of some sort in it -- from the concrete used to make roads, buildings and bridges to windows, computers, sunglasses. The list is endless."

Sand, on the other hand, can be the bane of a golfer. Home to a nine-hole course, The Ranch at Laguna Beach requires a steady supply of the stuff to keep the course's bunkers in pristine condition.

"Getting fresh sand is something most golf courses do on a regular basis," said Bjorkman, citing the fact that every time players hit out of the bunker, some sand gets displaced into the nearby grass. Golf course sand also tends to degrade over time.

And it's not just any ordinary sand but a specific type that's required on the course.

"It has to be the perfect grain size and shape to hit a ball out of," said Bjorkman, adding that the grain needs to be small enough that when hit out of the bunker, it will filter through into the soil rather than create a layer of grass-killing sediment.

But with sand mining an inherently unsustainable practice, causing environmental degradation and the disruption of ecosystems, Bjorkman sought a more ecofriendly solution.

The answer came to him after reading about a New Zealand-based company, called Expleco Limited, that had developed a system for crushing glass bottles and turning that product into high-quality sand. In 2018, Expleco Limited began distributing its products in the U.S., and The Ranch at Laguna Beach was among the first in line to purchase one of the company's bottle-crushing systems, which consists of two machines and costs approximately \$15,000.

According to Bjorkman, the sand made from crushed glass is identical in feel to regular bunker sand and is "almost indistinguishable" visually, save for a faint emerald tinge caused by the crushing of some green glass. The

machines also save The Ranch at Laguna Beach hundreds of thousands of dollars each year in sand importation costs.

And in addition to creating a cost-effective and sustainable sand alternative, the system eliminates any need to transport and process the property's glass waste.

But sand isn't the only sustainable element The Ranch at Laguna Beach has incorporated into its golf course operations. The property uses only reclaimed, treated wastewater to irrigate all of its landscaping, including the golf course. And the course's turf is maintained using only organic products. The resort has also reduced its overall turf area over the past few years, replacing a significant portion with native vegetation that has less environmental impact.

"It's one thing to have a sustainable resort," Bjorkman said. "It's another to have a golf course that's sustainable."