

FLOATING PLASTIC BOTTLE ISLAND

Frenchman builds resort on artificial island buoyed by discarded bottles, floats down lagoon

ABIDJAN

THE seaside resort offers visitors a cool drink or tasty meal, a dip in a pool, a karaoke session or an overnight stay, all with a view.

Nothing much new there, you may say — creature comforts like this are standard in tropical hotels.

The big difference, though, is that this mini resort is also a moveable island that floats on plastic bottles.

Riding on the laguna here, Ivory Coast's economic hub, the unusual complex floats on a platform made from 700,000 discarded bottles and other buoyant debris.

Its inventor, Frenchman Eric Becker, says his creation can help greener, more mobile tourism — something less harmful to seas and coastlines than traditional fixed, concrete resorts.

His "Ile Flottante", French for "Floating Island", comprises two thatched bungalows and a restaurant with a bar, two small pools, trees and shrubs and a circular walkway, spread out over 1,000sqkm.

Visitors are brought to the moored island by a boat. Water is provided by a pipe from the shore. Electricity is supplied by solar panels, backed by a generator.

The island is bigger than a moored boat and handier than a



Former journalist Mathurin Yao-Saky walking down the steps to the artificial island resort, made with recycled plastic waste collected in the surrounding area, on the Ebrie Lagoon in Abidjan. AFP PIC

jetty as it can also be taken to other locations.

"It really is an artificial island that floats. You can move it."

Becker, a former computer entrepreneur, first toyed with the idea of building a catamaran.

But it was when he came here and saw the lagoon that the vision of a floating, moveable island came into his mind — and he sold everything he owned to achieve it.

The first step was to forage for everything floatable. "Plastic bottles, bits of polystyrene, even beach sandals."

Bemused locals gave him the nickname of "Eric Bidon", a word that has a subtle dual meaning of "jerrycan" and "phoney".

"We bought disused bottles off

people, we foraged for them in the lagoon. After a while, we learnt to follow the wind and find the places where floating rubbish accumulates."

After living on his island for years, Becker turned it into a hotel last year. He has around 100 customers a week, mostly curious Ivorians or ecologically-friendly tourists.

"When you're competing with major hotels, you need an original idea like a floating island. It's become a tourist attraction," said Mathurin Yao Saky, a friend who has been advising Becker on the scheme.

Charles Moliere, 28, who works in Ivory Coast for a large corporation, read about the resort in a guidebook.

"It's very original, it's a very atypical place. I've seen nothing like it elsewhere," Moliere said.

"I think it's a neat idea to give a second life to plastic like this and make a small technical breakthrough. I like this place a lot."

The island charges 15,000 CFA francs (RM107) per person per day, which includes a meal and the ferry, and 60,000 CFA francs for a night.

Becker says his 200-tonne island could be a prototype for all sorts of projects. It is ideal for the sheltered waters of lagoons, shallow bodies of water separated from the ocean by narrow reefs or barrier islands.

"People could live (on floating islands) in pollution-free lagoons and live on fish farming." AFP