

A Study of Sustainability Trends in the Hotel Industry

Ms. Kainaz R. Dastoor

Department of Food & Beverage Service

Anjuman-I-Islam's Institute of Hospitality Management, Mumbai, India

Abstract: *Tourism, an industry that has evolved alongside human progress, hinges on the relationship between accommodations and destinations. Hotels' long-term success relies on preserving the very environment that attracts tourists. Recognizing this, the concept of sustainability, defined at the 1992 UN conference in Rio de Janeiro, is gaining prominence in the 21st-century hotel industry. As costs rise, demand grows more sensitive, and the pressure for economic, social, and environmental responsibility intensifies.*

The hotel industry is experiencing a significant shift towards sustainability as global environmental concerns and consumer preferences drive a growing demand for eco-conscious travel. This research paper delves into the latest sustainability trends within the hotel sector. It examines the various sustainability initiatives adopted by hotels, assesses their impact on the environment, the economy, and local communities, and explores the challenges and opportunities faced by the industry in embracing sustainability.

Keywords: Sustainability, hotel industry, tourism, trends.

I. INTRODUCTION

As global tourism surges, the dynamics of supply and demand are evolving in terms of sustainability. Both organizations and individual travellers are becoming more conscious of the future's conditions and the corresponding responsibility that hotels bear. To meet these changing expectations while maintaining attractiveness to patrons, hotel owners and operators must adapt while ensuring the changes remain economically viable.

Calculating the exact scale of the global hotel industry is challenging due to its rapid expansion over the past 25 years, now acknowledged as a global sector. The roots of hotel sustainability can be traced back to the 1960s, with increasing awareness of the environmental and social impacts of hotel operations. However, a systematic approach towards corporate sustainability has only gained momentum in the past two decades.

While cost control, profit maximization, and shareholder value have traditionally taken precedence for hospitality managers, globalization and emerging sustainable development priorities are pushing sustainability into all areas of management. Hoteliers, from owners to line managers, must acknowledge and address these developments. Recent observations indicate that the hotel industry is undergoing a "sustainability awakening."

In light of these trends, this paper aims to review the various strategies employed by hotels to seamlessly integrate sustainability into their daily operations, minimizing harm to the ecosystem.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Effective Sustainable Management Implementation

Accommodation providers should establish and maintain a long-term sustainability management system tailored to their specific context and size. This system should address various aspects, including environmental, socio-cultural, quality, health, and safety concerns. Adherence to national legislation and regulations is mandatory. Regular training on environmental, socio-cultural, quality, health, and safety practices should be provided to all staff. Customer satisfaction assessments are conducted, and corrective actions are taken as needed. Promotional materials must accurately represent the services offered without overpromising.

Building and Infrastructure Design and Construction

Accommodation providers are required to comply with land use regulations and guidelines pertaining to protected or heritage areas. They must exhibit respect for the natural, cultural, social, and heritage surroundings in the siting, design, and impact assessment of new construction, extensions, or additions to existing properties. Utilizing locally appropriate sustainable construction methods, including local architectural styles, skills, and materials, is essential. Facilities and access for individuals with special needs should align with principles of universal design. Visitors should be offered information about the natural surroundings, local customs, culture, and heritage, along with guidelines on appropriate behavior when visiting natural areas and cultural sites.

Maximizing Social and Economic Benefits while Minimizing Negative Impacts

Accommodation providers are encouraged to actively support community participation and development initiatives, encompassing infrastructure, education, health, and sanitation. Local residents should be employed, including in managerial roles, wherever feasible. Efforts to purchase local and fair-trade goods and services, particularly from micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), are promoted. Additionally, providers should facilitate opportunities for local entrepreneurs to create and sell sustainable products reflecting the region's nature, history, and culture. A code of behavior for activities in indigenous and local communities should be collaboratively developed and implemented. Strict policies against commercial exploitation, especially concerning children and adolescents, should be in place. Equal opportunities for recruitment and career growth should be provided to all members of society, regardless of caste, creed, religion, ethnicity, or gender, with a strong stance against child labor. All employees, including contractual labor, should receive fair wages in compliance with national laws, and the accommodation's operations should not jeopardize the provision of essential services to neighboring communities, such as water, energy, and sanitation.

Maximizing Benefits to Cultural and Historical Heritage while Minimizing Negative Impacts

Accommodation providers are advised to follow established guidelines or a code of conduct at culturally, ecologically, or historically sensitive sites to minimize visitor impact and enhance visitor satisfaction. The sale, trade, or display of historical and archaeological artifacts is not permitted, except as allowed by law. Accommodation providers should contribute to the preservation of local historical, archaeological, cultural, and spiritually significant properties and sites, ensuring local residents' access to them. Intellectual property rights of local communities should always be respected when using elements of local art, tradition, architecture, or cultural heritage in operations, design, decoration, food, or shops.

Maximizing Benefits to the Environment while Minimizing Negative Impacts

Accommodation providers are encouraged to adopt sustainable practices that conserve resources. This includes a purchasing policy favoring environmentally responsible and eco-friendly products for building materials, capital goods, food, and consumables. Efforts to reduce the use of disposable and consumer goods are actively pursued. Monitoring energy consumption, identifying energy sources, and adopting measures to decrease overall consumption while promoting renewable energy are essential. Similarly, water consumption should be monitored, sources identified, and measures to reduce overall consumption should be put in place. Rainwater harvesting practices should be adopted wherever water tables are depleting.

Reducing Pollution

Accommodation providers should implement a plan to identify and quantify sources of greenhouse gas emissions within their control, with a commitment to offset climate change in a time-bound manner. Wastewater, including gray water, should be effectively treated and reused where possible. An effective solid waste management plan with quantifiable goals to minimize non-biodegradable waste should be implemented. Harmful substances, including pesticides, chemicals, swimming pool disinfectants, and cleaning materials, should be minimized and replaced with benign alternatives wherever possible. Adequate management of all chemical use is necessary. Accommodation

providers should adopt practices to reduce noise, light, runoff, erosion, ozone-depleting compounds, and air and soil contaminants.

Conserving Biodiversity, Ecosystems, and Landscapes

Accommodation providers should not participate in, accept, or encourage the use, display, or trade of endangered species of flora and fauna, except when permitted by law for trophy displays. The holding of wildlife in captivity is not allowed. The use of native species for landscaping and restoration is encouraged, and measures should be taken to prevent the introduction of invasive alien species. Support for biodiversity conservation, including the protection of natural and high biodiversity areas, is essential. Interactions with wildlife should not negatively impact wild populations. Any inadvertent disturbance of natural ecosystems should be minimized, with immediate rehabilitation efforts and contributions to conservation management when necessary.

Trends in hotels towards sustainability

In the context of a research paper, the shift towards environmentally friendly luxury hospitality was previously uncharted territory. However, environmentally conscious customers have spurred hoteliers to reconsider their practices. Luxury properties are now pursuing Ecotel status or LEED certification in their architectural designs, incorporating measures like careful material selection and investment in waste management equipment. Although these practices initially entail substantial costs, they eventually yield reductions of around 20-25% in operational expenses.

(AGARWAL, 2012) For example, the Sothe D Caves boutique hotel in Hyderabad, designed by Sanjay Puri Architects, has integrated itself within the natural landscape, utilizing large boulders. This approach not only leads to higher room rates but also offers guests an eco-friendly experience, allowing them to feel at one with nature. Features such as green walks, bird sanctuaries, reserve forests, or lakes contribute to the overall ambiance of the stay.

Another example is The Orchid in Mumbai, a zero-waste hotel that extends its commitment to maintaining a clean neighborhood. The hotel boasts an in-house vermiculture project, which not only reduces waste but also nurtures the gardens on the property and in its vicinity. The Orchid holds the distinction of being Asia's first certified eco-friendly five-star hotel and the world's sole Ecotel to attain ISO: 14001 certification (Environmental Management Standard). Their sustainability initiatives include using potted plants throughout their properties, environmentally friendly room amenities and stationery, and employing natural and herbal products such as lemongrass, coconut oil, and aromatic Ayurvedic oils in their health clubs to minimize chemical wastewater contamination. Instead of employing carcinogenic chlorine, they use ozone to treat swimming pool and drinking water. During construction, The Orchid opted for eco-friendly alternatives, such as using Portland Pozzolanic cement with 13-35% fly ash from thermal power plants, fertilizer waste for QED walls, and medium-density fireboard instead of natural wood to curb deforestation.

The Rain Tree in Chennai is a completely self-sustaining property, generating its required energy through windmills and substantially reducing water consumption. The hotel does this by reducing water flow in bathroom showers and basin taps from the standard 12-15 liters per minute to 8-9 liters per minute.

Alila Diva in Goa stands out as a paradise for birdwatchers. During its design phase, significant attention was given to preserving the surrounding forest and nearby paddy fields. The hotel's construction incorporates locally available eco-friendly brick-red stone.

The Fern Gir Forest Resort in Gujarat distinguishes itself by using organic, homegrown food, rustic furniture made from reclaimed wood, and holding an Ecotel certification for its energy and water conservation initiatives.

The brand Ginger has implemented various measures to reduce consumption, offering easy-to-clean spaces and efficient services that prioritize guest comfort.

(ITC, 2018) ITC Group, a leader in embracing green architecture across its properties in India, introduced the concept of 'Responsible Luxury.' Notably, the ITC Grand Chola in Chennai is the world's largest LEED Platinum-certified green hotel. Several ITC properties, including ITC Maratha, ITC Windsor, and ITC Gardenia, are powered entirely by renewable energy sources. More than 50% of the chain's energy comes from renewable sources, with an emphasis on indoor air quality (IAQ) management through extensive use of CO₂ sensors. ITC hotels recycle treated water to irrigate 65,000 trees, sequestering 13,000 tonnes of CO₂, and utilize solar energy for hot water generation, equivalent to the consumption of 6,000 households. Locally sourced food and beverage offerings, along with the use of over 50% locally

or recycled stationary, wood, and paper endorsed by the Forest Stewardship Council, demonstrate their commitment to sustainability.

(IHCL, 2018) In the ongoing global effort to combat the detrimental impact of plastic, The Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL) pledged to eliminate single-use plastic from all its properties during Earth Hour, playing a significant role in environmental protection. This initiative resulted in the replacement of two million plastic straws with bamboo and paper alternatives. IHCL introduced its "Zero Single Use Plastic" program at the Taj Exotica Resort and Spa to support environmental rejuvenation and promote green tourism. Across 25 of its properties in India, IHCL has substituted plastic wrappers used for dry in-room amenities with oxo-biodegradable wrapping. They've also replaced plastic trays with paper trays and plastic cutlery with corn starch or wood-based alternatives, and shifted from plastic garbage bags to oxo-biodegradable ones. These plastic waste products are then sent to authorized scrap traders for recycling.

(IHCL) One of IHCL's properties in Bengaluru has collaborated with the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Rural Energy and Development to implement a unique circular economy project called "Waste to Gold." This innovative process converts waste cooking oil into biodiesel through a transesterification process, with the byproduct glycerine being used in soap production. Each liter of waste cooking oil from the hotel generates approximately 0.7 liters of biodiesel and five soap bars, each weighing 20 grams.

All these initiatives demonstrate the industry's increasing commitment to sustainable and eco-friendly practices, offering guests not only luxurious experiences but also environmentally responsible ones.

The Oberoi Hotels and Resorts have implemented a range of sustainability practices across their properties. These initiatives encompass the installation of compost machines and pits for waste recycling, particularly in hotels with expansive gardens. Some hotels have adopted water-saving measures by employing dual water flow WC systems, and garden irrigation is executed using recycled water. Guests are actively encouraged to engage in environmentally conscious behaviours, such as the efficient management of bed linens and towels during their stay. The hotels prioritize eco-friendliness by employing biodegradable laundry chemicals and water-efficient detergents. Furthermore, they utilize cloth bags in lieu of plastic ones for collecting and delivering guest laundry, dry cleaning, and pressing services, while all stationery and shopping bags are crafted from recycled paper.

III. CONCLUSION

When tourists plan their trips, they select hotels based on their proximity to desired experiences that align with both their personal preferences and accommodation needs. It's crucial to recognize that hotels themselves aren't the ultimate destinations; instead, preserving the ecosystem in their surroundings is vital for the sustainability of their business in the future. Consequently, the responsibility for adopting responsible business practices rests with the hoteliers. As awareness of the detrimental impact of ecosystem exploitation has grown, hotels, both individually and across their chains, have taken sustainability extremely seriously. They are now vigorously committed to minimizing harm to the ecosystem. Their efforts extend beyond conserving the natural beauty in their vicinity, as they have also undertaken initiatives to support the well-being of local communities in the areas surrounding their properties.

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