

A Vision of Change: Sustainability in the Hotel Industry

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Sustainable Hospitality and Tourism
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“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” United Nations

What is sustainability? This word describes the ability to keep or maintain a process over time continuously. In a business context it refers to avoiding finishing natural resources so that they may be available for future uses. (Purvis, et al., 2018)

Sustainability is broken into three concepts, this includes economic, environmental and social, (Mollenkamp, 2022) Over the recent years policies have been put in place in businesses to increase their sustainability as everyone is increasingly growing aware of the damages that are being done to our planet. Concerns regarding climate change and pollution have been gaining more attention and company policies are in a need to shift in order to preserve what is left of the natural resources.

Hotel Industries are not foreign to Sustainability as a lot of the time hospitality industries depend on future success as well as present success. If there is a lot of pollution near an area of a hotel would that attract customers? For example, in 2018, Thai Government had to shut down Maya Bay, a famous beach which attracted over 5,000 customers a day as their corals and sea life were being destroyed. This meant for the local businesses, which include hotels, had to go out of business (UCF ONLINE, 2022)

That is why, hospitality leaders must adopt sustainable business strategies going forward. This would not only benefit the planet and resources but also attract customers towards their business and increase their revenue.

Sustainability and hotel industry

As mentioned earlier, sustainability has become a large topic and even a larger debate in all businesses as we are growing increasingly aware of the lack of resources we are leaving for future generations. Systems in hotel industries are supported by a lot of energy, this energy often coming from fossil fuels which is both

running out and increasing carbon dioxide in the environment which further impacts the environment.

However, sustainability is not just protecting the environment, as stated earlier, sustainability is split in three core parts. These parts are Economic, Environmental and Social. These are often also referred to as the three pillars of sustainability. They provide a framework for applying solutions to sustainability problems in industry.

Firstly, social sustainability focuses on environmental justice and paying attention to the lack of security, it also includes human health and education and how to better society. (Allen, 2021) In a business stand point, particularly in the tourism sector, it responds to how the company engages with its workers, customers, suppliers and the overall community. This sector will define human's rights, inclusion, health and safety and the impact it has on it's community. (Hotel Management Network, 2022) Most recently, with COVID-19, the number of people in poverty has increased and is now somewhere between 73 and 117 million. (Sivaraman, 2020) This economic crisis can be boiled down to the long standing exclusion that society has to people. Social Sustainability aims to combat that.

CSR stands for Corporate Social Responsibility; this is what hoteliers are shifting their focus on. (Gentinetta, 2022) CSR can be split into four sections which is environmental responsibility, which include the companies' responsibility in environment, ethics, philanthropic and economic. Some benefits of CSR include, it increases employee engagement, support communities and enhance employer branding. (Grawehr, 2022)

An example of this will be Nairobi's Luxury Boutique Hotel, the Tribe Hotel, was built with a strong purpose in helping the tribes within the state settle with each other. (Estabrook, 2013) This hotel created a working culture among employees that were in opposing tribes and had century long feuds. This not only employed those living in poverty in the city but also created relationship between those who due to tribalism did not get along. The Tribe Hotel also aimed to promote awareness about living with the community and helping their community, this includes community clean ups,

tree-planting and donating to local charities and orphanages. (Conscious Hotel, 2022)

Next, environmental sustainability is increasingly becoming an important aspect in the hospitality industry alongside communication and marketing, being an environmental business attracts guest at high rates (Duric & Topler, 2021) The main parts of trying to make a business, particularly a hotel, sustainable is establishing the performance and environmental indicators against the hotels actions towards sustainability.

Hotel industries take part in a large proportion of electricity and water compared to other tourism areas therefore it is important for hoteliers to put a plan in action to reduce their consumption of this. Water usage is extensive due to it being used in many parts of the hotel, such as a kitchens, air circulation, heating, guest bathrooms etc if this consumptions goes without monitoring then it is most likely that water shortage will take place.

Furthermore, the carbon impact that tourism has on the earth is around 2% but will likely increase to 3% as tourism demand sours and increase. (Vadam, 2018) 60 percent of the energy consumption is responsible for 60 percent of CO₂ emission. And with the continuous growth of technology and development of hotels it is most likely this will rise.

In order to reduce energy consumption in hotels, hoteliers have to implement practices and tools within their businesses. This can sometimes be proven to be expensive however in terms of the environment and cost reduction the benefits will be proven to be more significant. For example, including efficient isolation, lower heating temperatures, lower cooling temperatures when there is no guest would help the environment greatly. Some adaptations such as in-room thermostat can be difficult to implement and can also have high cost (Vadam, 2018) But other ways to be environmentally such as reusing towels, reusing linen, switching off computers are easier ways to help as well.

Another way the hotel industry is changing its environmental sustainability is there are now a growing number of eco-friendly hotels, these hotels practice green living by using clean energy and organic products (Joshi, 2022) These hotels are often located near forest, waterfalls or even by mountain sides. They strive to entertain the idea of being placed in a non-toxic environment hence their locations. These hotels hold strong commitment to minimize their impact on the environment. These accommodations attract customers that are wanting to lower their carbon footprint and supporting the long battle of helping the environment. These specific places can offer locally-sourced produce, indoor plants, freshly picked fruit and onside spring water to put in reusable water bottles (ecotravelist, 2018) Other hotels may offer, low-flow faucets, energy saving through light sensors and environmentally friendly cleaning products (Moise, et al., 2021)

Green practices can be split into four segments, 1. Solid Waste and Water in Rooms, 2. Energy, 3. Solid Waste and Water in Cleaning 4. Water Saving Options. Why would hotels want to strive for better green practices? This is because, improves their position amongst their competitors, it demonstrates their responsibility and it helps them build a good reputation. However, research suggest that a lot of the motivation for green practices and what drives hotel to strive towards it, is the customers. (Moise, et al., 2021)

According to Operto survey, up to 75% customers are willing to pay more if a hotel can demonstrate green policies, and 52.4% see eco-friendliness as a more rewarding aspect to staying in the hotel. (Operto, 2021) This survey showcases that customers are increasingly becoming more adamant about their environmental awareness and want to implement it into their lives even as they travel whether that is for leisure or for work. Hoteliers knowledge of this drives them to make changes within their business to support not only the environment but also to please their customers.

Lastly, economic sustainability is the practice that supports long term-economic development of a business without harming environment, society and cultural elements. (Bish, 2021) Businesses aim to make a set of decisions and business

practices to obtain economic growth whilst also supporting the environment and the future. This means that for it to be sustainable that these ideas, these operations will use natural resources so that future generations can also continue to use them in their practices.

This practice is important as developing new processes using different resources that are reusable keeps the global economy from failing. For hotels, this implies that guest, current and future, and stakeholders benefit from the experience they get from the hotel. It usually focuses on the services, service quality, product readiness and technology usages. This promotes hotels with sustainable growth, manages resources and satisfies customers and chain managements. (Njoroge, et al., 2019)

Hoteliers are aware that the needs of customers are continuously changing which means for this business to grow, they must find products or update previous products to suit the needs of customers. They may exploit other sectors of sustainability such as environment and social sustainability and incorporate them into new ideas to appease customers are growing more aware of the environment. As stated earlier, hotels may try to introduce environmentally friendly business ideas such as recycling to please customers and attract them.

Sustainability is becoming a key focus for all businesses, whether that's the tourism sector or even the retail sectors, the effects that predecessors have made on the environment is harming and is causing almost everyone to change their ways in making sure the world can keep on running with what little resources it has. Therefore, it has become a responsibility to aid in reducing waste and emission.

These focuses are not only better for the environment but it introduces cost-effective living changes, as technology improves significantly, it aims to achieve better performance. It is true that sometimes the start-up cost for being environmentally friendly can be expensive however the long term operational procedures makes up for the cost (Sharma, 2018). And as recycling and reusing programs are put into place, it will reduce cost naturally.

It also includes a better experience for guest and improve the image of the brand that they are selling.

Having a platform that can include sustainability transforms a hotel into a place that is to be desired and welcomed by guest.

In conclusion, sustainability is now on the minds of all businessmen and businesses. The actions of today reflect on the outcomes of tomorrow. Resources are becoming limited and the increasing awareness of this is the result of Sustainability being practiced through the work forces. The three sectors of sustainability, environment, social and economic play a big part in the hospitality industry as it paves ways for the tourism sectors future and implementing these ideas not only brings customer attraction but also profit. A business cannot run if they do not attract customers. Although, the environment of the hotel is the attraction to customers, travellers grow aware of practices that are in place in hotels so despite it can be argued that it is just a place to stay, it can also be argued that a hotel shows initiative in bettering themselves shows that they are willing to make improvement for the better of the world and it's future.

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