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The Importance of Sustainability in the Hotel and Hospitality Industry

As we live in the 21st century, the time of severe droughts, deforestation, pollution, hunger, and global warming, we have all been given the great responsibility to act as responsibly and environmentally-friendly as possible. Both in our personal lives and on our business endeavors.

Negative impacts of the hospitality industry

Tourism is a billion dollar industry and it keeps growing. It is an industry that can be very harmful for the environment and the local communities and thus make our future even darker. Some experts say that tourism is responsible for 8% of the world's carbon emissions and the hotel industry plays a big part in it. The main environmental impacts of the hospitality industry include CO₂ emissions, CFC emissions, noise pollution, smoke, energy consumption, water consumption, food consumption, waste disposal, chemical disposal, disruption or even destruction of the environment and habitat of native animals. The long-term effects are bad for the environment as well as the hotel costs.

Sustainability in the hotel industry

The trends in the hotel industry have shifted dramatically over the past few years. The younger generation of travelers are demanding sustainability and are twice as likely to support sustainable brands. They are driving the current trends and the hotels that will not make the effort to follow these trends will experience a major decrease in the number of visitors. Millennials (born between 1981-2001) are becoming the backbone of the travel industry and a study shows that 66% of them are willing to pay more for services by companies that are committed to creating a positive environmental impact. Due to businesses' environmental policies business travelers are also more likely to stay in sustainable hotels and to keep conferences and meetings in eco-friendly venues.

Sustainable travel may have begun as a smaller niche in the travel industry, but the demand for eco traveling is growing among consumers. The customer preferences are changing and the trend is here to stay.

The benefits of sustainable hotels

Since the whole travel industry is heading in the same direction, you should also consider going 'green'. Here is how sustainability will benefit your hotel.

- Sustainability saves costs in the long run and improves profitability by reducing energy consumption, water consumption, and waste. Cost reduction can be achieved by investing in better operational procedures and emerging environmental technologies.
- Sustainability preserves our environment for future generations. You want to ensure that the environment surrounding your hotel is preserved for future generations of travelers.
- Sustainability gives you an immediate popularity advantage over the hotels that don't make efforts to become environmentally-friendly, as travelers are looking for sustainable accommodations.
- You can become a market leader in your own hotel niche or on your location, which will give you a competitive advantage.
- Incorporating sustainable values will win you loyal customers as the consumer's loyalty to a brand depends mostly on shared values with the business.
- Becoming sustainable can significantly boost your brand awareness, as eco-travel goes hand in hand with various awards and recognitions, valued by business travelers.
- Businesses with environmental, social, and governance policies tend to outperform those that don't have such policies. Having sustainable business practices leads to an enhanced reputation and brand image.
- Water pollution and similar accusations can severely damage your reputation and becoming sustainable will minimize that risk.
- Governments all around the world are offering funds, grants, tax write-offs and other forms of support to sustainable brands.
- Some of the most popular hotel search engines like TripAdvisor and Booking.com are rating hotels based on their engagement in environmentally-friendly practices.
- Environmental regulations are being enforced by law. By employing green technologies and methods, hoteliers can be better prepared for any new upcoming environmental restrictions that may come in the future.
- Being sustainable is healthy for the people who work in the industry, it can improve the employee's engagement, and help businesses connect with staff. It is becoming increasingly important for people to work for a company that is doing 'the right thing'.

How to Make Your Hotel More Sustainable

First of all, you have to create an environmental policy to establish what your hotel wants to focus on. State your goals and methods and make sure to follow up with regular internal progress checks and reports.

Secondly, you need to educate your employees on sustainability and make sure they stick to your environmental policy. Teach staff members to turn off the lights. Encourage housekeeping to dispose of trash in the right receptacles. Consider hiring a 'responsible' person to oversee and prioritize your sustainability efforts.

Lastly, get an audit to understand what you need to focus on. For example, you can save a lot of money by detecting and fixing cracks under room doors and fixing leaking taps. Also, contact a local energy consultant to get an energy audit.

By now you know why you need to focus on making your hotel as sustainable as possible and how to implement your environmental policy. The next step is knowing exactly how to achieve your goals. Here is a list of concrete steps you can take to create a sustainable brand.

The basics:

- The least you can do is to enact the basic sustainability efforts, like reducing water and energy consumption by asking your customers to re-use their sheets and towels. Reducing water and energy consumption is more cost efficient, plus, it educates your guests and informs them about your conservation efforts.
- Reduce waste by replacing individual toiletries with refillable full-size soap and shampoo bottles.
- Track your energy, water usage, waste, and carbon outputs associated with building operations and set a goal of reducing your carbon emissions.

Recycling and waste management:

- Switch to recyclable products and recycle waste. Install recycler baskets in the kitchen, in public areas and in rooms and add easy instructions to make it as effortless as possible for guests and staff to recycle. By recycling, you would save a lot of money on waste management.
- Switch from disposable cups and dishes to reusable ones and save thousands of kilograms of CO2 emissions each year.
- Say goodbye to any type of single-use plastic, including straws. Reduce the use of paper and other disposables.
- Switch to biodegradable hotel amenities packages and save tons of CO2 emissions annually.

Food waste and food sustainability:

- Reduce food waste by offering a kids' menu, doggy bags, and smaller portions. Leftovers can be donated to food banks and other charity organizations.
- Minimize the use of meat as animal agriculture is proven to have a negative impact on the environment. You can do so by offering vegan and vegetarian dishes and by using the whole animal.
- Shift to more sustainable and healthier cuisine by integrating local products and using fresh, seasonal food. Also, make sure to use organic produce, hormone-free meats and dairy, and other natural products.
- Try to find alternatives to water in plastic bottles and thus reduce plastic waste. Switch to filtered water dispensers, complimentary refillable bottles, or other sustainable options.
- Consider introducing a sustainability certification program for your restaurant.

Eco-friendly products:

- Use environmentally friendly products, such as eco-friendly soaps and cleaning products. The latter have proven to be less irritating to guests, employees, and the environment.
- When purchasing the products you are planning to use in your hotel, make sure to buy them from environmentally-friendly and socially conscious vendors.
- If you run a gift shop, aim to sell eco-friendly and socially conscious products, such as locally produced souvenirs in order to help the environment and to support local entrepreneurs.

- Integrate spa treatments that feature local and indigenous ingredients as well as natural and organic products. It is more sustainable, it offers a more authentic experience, and it offers guests a special connection to the destination.

Investments and installations:

- Shift to paper, wood, or bioplastic room keys, instead of using regular plastic key cards. They are better for the environment and just as durable.
- Increase your use of LED lights and LED television sets, which results in an 85% decrease in energy consumption and extends to an 80% drop in CO2 emissions.
- Switch off air-conditioning units when not in use.
- Block sun with window tinting and/or blinds.
- Install solar water heaters.
- Install efficient shower heads, taps, and low-flow toilets.
- Install an automated in-room energy management system.
- Install special elevators that collect kinetic energy from the moving lift and thus reduce your energy consumption by 50% over conventional elevators.
- Invest in other high energy efficient equipment, such as energy-efficient air conditioning systems, boilers, dish washers, washing machines, refrigerators, and other electronic devices.
- Enforce a fixed maintenance schedule to keep the equipment running appropriately and energy-efficiently.
- Replace fossil energy sources with renewable ones available locally, such as wind or sun (solar power).
- Consider rainwater harvesting, i.e. utilizing rainwater from the roofs to supply water for toilets, laundry and gardening, minimizing wastage of rainwater.
- Consider establishing the grey water system, i.e. utilizing used water from the kitchen, laundry room, or showers to water the garden.

Initiatives:

- Join the 'Earth Hour' initiative by turning out your lights every year for 60 minutes to raise awareness of the consequences of coal, gas and oil being used to power the world's industries and of the importance of saving energy.
- Join the Hotel Carbon Measurement Initiative, which aims to help hotels reduce, measure and communicate their carbon footprints.
- Launch your own sustainable initiative, such as planting trees in order to combat deforestation and global warming and to attract more environmentally conscious customers.
- Get involved with local social programs. Support regional development. Donate towels, clothes and equipment to charitable organizations. Connect with the local community and ensure that locals can benefit from tourism.
- Organize beach clean-ups and minimize your natural impact on the local areas.
- Encourage your guests to go green. Use information banners to inform them about the benefits of switching to eco-friendly products and means of transportation, such as walking trails, bicycling, and public transportation. Consider providing a rideshare or bicycles at your hotel and thus create an extra income stream.

Becoming sustainable may require some initial (somewhat costly) investments. However, as you know you'll get an immediate return on your investment by saving money, sustainability is a no-brainer.

Thank you for caring about the environment, the wildlife, our future generations, and ultimately your own business. The future is in your hands.

With love,

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