

# Environmental sustainable practices in the hotels: from existence to implementation

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## ABSTRACT

Hotel industry is considered as one of the industry which consumes lots of energy, water, generates tons of garbage to the environment and ultimately that lead to environmental decay and more. In order to keep in track with the negative environmental consequences, hoteliers should implement and follow sustainable environmental practices in their daily business routine. Hospitality industry in the light of sustainability tourism development can play an important role towards sustainability with regard to triple bottom line of sustainability, i.e.: environmental, social and economical sustainability. So, it is an utmost and foremost responsibility of the hoteliers to implement sustainable tourism practices in their daily business. This study has taken only one dimension of sustainability i.e. environmental sustainability and tries to explore the existing environmental sustainable practices and its implementation in the select hotels. The study has covered nine hotels with the geographical boundaries of Srinagar city only. In Qualitative methods, multi-case studies were used and the data are collected through semi-structured interviews and check-lists. The respondents for the study were only operational managers as they are having the knowledge with regards to the environmental issues. The study concluded with the fact that implementation of eco-friendly practices lead towards environmental sustainability.

*Key words* : Sustainable tourism development, Hotel industry, Environmental sustainability.

## Introduction

Hospitality Industry is such a huge industry and is the amalgamation of so many other industries. It is not about to provide the accommodation to the guest upon their arrival but a lots more of services being offered by the hospitality industry. Many of these services have negative impact on the environment and of course to the natural resources. Some of the natural resources are almost in the depleting stage. If necessary steps not taken by the authorities, then these resources are definitely going to be depleted. As such a guest enters his hotel rooms, the first thing he does that he directly goes to the bath tub and starting refreshing himself. The guest does not haven't estimation, how much water has been

used and how much has been wasted in just 5-10 minutes. After every day, the housekeeping staff comes to the guest room and asking for linen washing if it is dirty or not. The water in any way is to be wasted by the hospitality industry every day. But now globally countries are facing the water shortage and there is water scarcity everywhere. So, now it's a prime time to think about the conservation and preservation of environment and natural resources whilst using the resources in a sustainable way.

Sustainable management practices implemented in the hospitality industry are promoted as an important components for industries to be competitive in today's business context. Hospitality industry should implement sustainable practices with regards to the triple bottom line of sustainability un-

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der its three dimensions i.e., socio-cultural, economical and environmental sustainability. These practices not only increase the profitability in the hospitality business but also developing a clean and green image among their guest. Customers/guests are nowadays more aware and conscious towards the negative environmental consequences. Hospitality industry is considered among those industries whose contribution towards environmental degradation is more. In order to keep in track with competitive business environment, many hotels have been taking steps to do develop relevant strategies to cope up with the negative environmental consequences.

Sustainability is not a new concept for the hospitality industry. Many international hotel chains across the globe and within the India, adopted and implemented sustainable business practices in their hotels. These hotels also received many prestigious green awards by the leading organisations. They are green certified hotels and received a number of repeat guests in their hotels. Therefore, the main aim of this study is to explore the existing sustainable environmental practices and its implementation in the selected hotels with in the Srinagar city.

## Literature Review

### Sustainable tourism development and sustainability in the hotel sector

According to the WCED, 1987, "Sustainable tourism development as the development which meets the need of the present generation both host community and tourist without compromising the ability of future generation to fulfil their own needs". However, the widely accepted definition of sustainable tourism development given by WTO, 2001, "Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourist and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support system".

Hotels should focus on triple bottom line of sustainability and the effects of such practices led in increasing hotel attractiveness and the quality of guest experience and also repeat guest intention. Implementation of sustainable practices in hotels, is

a key driver towards the tourism sustainability. Out of the three dimension of sustainability, environmental sustainability is gaining more importance and many hotels have started implementation of sustainability practices in their daily business routine.

### Environmental Sustainable Practices in the Hospitality Industry

It is not possible in the context of hotel industry to understand the relevance of natural environment for the hotels and the tourism industry; without bringing the detailed discussion of sustainable development (Mensah, 2006). The hotel industry also seemed to respond to the growing importance in the field of sustainability and introduces wide range of industrial regulation, environmental programmes, eco-labs and code of conduct with regard to the environment (Mensah, 2006). Despite of positive impacts of hotels, they are also responsible for the environmental decay and depletion of natural resources.

Energy, water and other non-durable goods is facing threats due to their high consumption in the Hotel industry (Bohdanowicz, 2005; Mensah, 2006; Chan, Wang and Lo, 2009; Bramwell and Alletorp, 2001). Previous research studies have indicated sustainable tourism practices under three major areas i.e. energy management, waste management and water conservation has gained more importance (Bohdanowicz, 2005; Mackie, 1994; Chan, wang and Lo, 2009; Park, 2009; Mensah, 2006; Middleton and Hawkins, 1993; Faulk, 2000; Forte, 1994; Webster, 2000; Sloan *et al.*, 2004; Shanklin, 1993). These sustainable tourism practices in hotels have been identified as most popular practices in promoting the quality of environment, image building, and cost-savings (Forte, 1994; Mensah, 2006).

In the various several studies, it is stated that in the Meditterraian hotels, a guest in a single day could easily utilizes 400 litres of water per day while locals only consumes 70 litters of water per day (Green and Hunter, 1995). In various developing tourism destination and developed destinations, thousand of hectares of land has been taken away from the locals and construct hotel or hill resort there. And the dire consequences of that, the land has been easily swept away in there is rain and causes heavy landslides and flooding because of no trees there which firms the soils tightly with the help of their roots. Once the hotel started their op-

eration, it generates lots of garbage in solid and liquid forms, which find their way ultimately into the nearby water bodies or land and causes a lots of environmental and health hazards. Now it's a high time to rethink towards the environment and save the natural resources.

But now the trend has been gradually shifts towards the conservation and preservation of the natural environment and resources. Many nation and international hotels chains starting taking care of environmental issues seriously and implemented environmental sustainable practices in their daily business routine such as recycling the products wherever possible, reduce the waste by following proper waste management technique, water and energy conservation, environmental programmes and educating and providing the hotels staff and guests towards safe and better environment.

According to the source (Deloitte, 2010), the environmental stress imposed by the hospitality industry is undesirable: it has been found that accommodation sector constitutes 1/5th of the tourism industry's 5% contribution to the annual green house gases(GHG) emission and their dependence on natural resources which are very limited such as water and energy.

### Study AIMS

Environmental sustainable practices is mainly focused on three major areas such water, energy and waste management. Baker,2005 in its research stated that up to 50% of the total hotel's utility cost comprises of heating, ventilation, air-conditioning (HVAC) depending on the geographical location of the hotel. Beside this, Webster (2000), stated that hotel's overall water which is utilized for the eating and drinking is only 5% while the larger part is used for showering, bathing, laundry and dishwashing. Sloan *et al.*, (2004) in their research quoted that "cost can be greatly reduced by waste reduction and replacing conventional waste disposal activities with practices aiming for reuse, disassembly, recycling and composting". Reducing, reusing, recycling and recovering are the 4 R's that has gained more importance over some past decade (Webster,2000; Stipanuk, 2002; Green hotelier, 2004b).

Thus, after thorough reviewing the existing literature to the related research, it has been noted that environmental sustainable practices in the hospitality industry is mainly focused on three major areas

such water, energy and waste management. So, in order to explore more in this area, the main aim of the present research is to explore the existing environmental sustainable practices under three major areas as mentioned above and their implementation in the selected hotels.

### Methodology

Considering the specific objectives of the study, the exploratory nature of the research is applied based on the qualitative approach. As per the philosophical perspective of research, the epistemology of constructivism is used, as it provides space for understanding the reality of different practices adopted in the select hotels of Srinagar Jammu and Kashmir and helps to construct that reality. In the field of management research Buchanan and Bryman (2007) draw attention to the contextual issues surrounding the field of organizational research. The method used in this study followed a case study approach with the application of Grounded theory method. In this study, multiple case lets were used for the data collection, the data has been collected from nine (09) hotels. In which the hotel managers were interviewed as they possess actual knowledge of environmental practices adopted in the hotels after employing the purposive sampling. The data was collected through the self developed interview checklist based on the literature scanning. The data was tape recorded and then transcribed into English. The transcribed data was subjected to the coding method in which different themes were drawn and then explained with the help of inputs received during data collection.

### Discussion

These days, the hospitality industry not only focus on profit maximization, but also on guest retention. The hotel industry is also adopting sustainable environmental practices with the participation of guests in environmental saving procedures and therefore the practices implemented in the selected hotels. Therefore, the data had been transferred into the codes and transcribed as follows:

1. Availability of the Waste management Policy/ Sewage Treatment Plant

Waste management policy must follow the strict implementation in the hotel industry that separates organic waste from non-organic waste, as it is the

sorting of waste or the creation of collection stations for glass, aluminium, paper or organic waste. It was found that only in one case, Waste management policy has been strictly implemented. Where as in rest of the cases either they have the sewage treatment plant but that is not in regular use. Waste management policy should be strictly implemented so that hotel can create new ways of waste avoidance.

### Segregation of the Garbage

Almost in all the cases, garbage has been collected by the municipal department. And a very few hotels do segregation of the garbage.

### Water Conservation

It has been indicated in various secondary research that reusing wastewater can reduce the need for fresh water by 50 per cent (Green hotelier, 2006). Almost all hoteliers agreed that the reuse of water is very difficult due to hygienic and health concerns. Considering that water is a valuable resource, the following water saving practices involve the reduction of water consumption:

- i) **Recycling of the Water:** It was found that only 2-3 cases use filtration technology to the water released from kitchen and washrooms for flush purpose to conserve water, and the recycled water is being used for watering the plants.
- ii) **Rain water harvesting:** It was found that only in 1-2 cases, rain water is being stored in the overhead tank in the hotels. This water is being used for floor cleaning purposes, and other.
- iii) **Low flow toilets:** The flush used in the toilets has low pressure with limited water volume in it. By implementing low flow toilets, water consumption has been reduced by 40% as compared to standards gravity fed toilets. This practices was found to be followed in 5-6 cases. Some hotels uses tab sensors in order to reduce the water consumption.

**Plantation of Trees:** This environmental practices should be followed in almost every industries. But it has been found that only in very few cases this practices is followed to reduce the environmental pollution and enhance the beauty of the hotel.

**Energy Saving Practices:** According to the several secondary researches, it is stated that hotel industry is amongst the industry which consumes huge amount of energy and it requires energy in its every aspect of work routine. It reduces the electricity bills

of the hotel and provides economic benefit to the hotels. The best energy saving practices followed by the selected hotels as follows:

- i) **Replacing the Old bulbs with LED bulbs/ Fluorescent Bulbs:** It was found that almost in all the cases, the hotels replaces the normal bulbs with LED bulbs.
- ii) **Installing Solar Panels:** It has been found that in every select cases, the hotels installed the Solar panels and using the solar electricity and appliances runs on solar electricity in their operations.
- iii) **Electronic Key Cards/Occupancy sensor Key card:** It has been found that in 5-6 cases, occupancy sensor key cards is being used by the hotels in order to detect any light electronic appliances if left open then they are automatically shut them down.

**Eco-friendly Practices:** These practices are nowadays gain much more importance as compared to other sustainable practices and implemented largely by all the sectors. In most of the cases it was found that eco-lab have been established which look after the PH value of the cleaning agents which do not affect the environment. Most of the hotels under study uses bio-pesticides to check control on pest.

**Organic Food :** In 1-2 cases, food production department uses local organic food for preparing meal for the customers. In addition, in 1-2 cases, the hotel uses vegetables grown in its own garden and also encourage the local sellers to sell organic/local food.

**Recycle/ Refillable Practices:** These practices are not common in the hotel sector previously but now gaining popularity day by day. In these practices, various items which hotel thrown away when they are not in use but in fact these can be recycled and some items refill for the reuse again. Like in house-keeping department, hotel replace the old shampoo/conditioner bottle for its every new guest, but now some hotels only refill the empty/half-filled bottles. It has been found that in 7-8 cases, these practices has been implemented on regular basis. Some select hotels keep the stack of previously used paper and then reuse it for internal memos.

### Conclusion

After thorough reviewing the data, it was found that some of the environmental sustainable practices still exists in the hotels but their implementa-

tion is not regular. There are many environmental sustainable practices which are only followed by very few hotels. The hotel managers are very well versed with term sustainability but there is lot of difference from its existence to the final implementation. Now it's a high time to rethink about the environment and it is not like that only hoteliers should concerned about the environment but guests should also think about it. In several secondary researches, it has been stated that hotel industry is among the industry which consumes huge amount of enery, consumes large volume of water and also generates tons of garbage and waste water in its daily routine. If hotel effectively uses the resources in sustainable way, only then natural resources will be left for the today's generation and also for the next generation.

Tourism industry was previously considered as smokeless industry as compared with the traditional industries. But now it has many negative impact rather than its positive impact. In general, widely followed practices in hotels are; energy and water conservation. There are also other areas which also need attention like housekeeping department, food and production department, front-office Department and more in order to conserve and preserve the resources. Hoteliers should use grey water for cleaning the floor, reuse last rinse of water that is left once they washed the linen into toilets for flush purposes. The other practices that hotels can use, is to store rain water and use that water for watering the plants in its own kitchen gardens. Hoteliers should encourage their staff to use organic products and eco-friendly detergents and pesticides for cleaning the hotels and get rid of pests.

Managers could play their great role towards the conservation and preservation of the environment. So, first thing that a hotels should implement is; to impart in-house training to their staff and then to their guests, so that guests would easily cooperate with the hotel's environmental sustainable practices. There should be incentive programmes being offered by the hotels to the guests and staff who strictly follow the environmental sustainable practices. Some best practices that hoteliers could easily implement in their daily operation are as follows:

- i) Managers should offer the water to the guest only upon their request.
- ii) Plastic water bottles should be replaced with the Glass ones.

- iii) Issuance of Occupancy sensor key card to their Guests.
- iv) Refill the empty shampoo bottles and other items rather than replacing them with the new one.
- v) Encourage their guest to participate in the environmental programmes by offering some discounts in their next booking or existing booking.
- vi) Motivate the hotel staff for Car pooling or provide a common transportation in order to reduce the air and noise pollution.
- vii) Bath tub inside hotel's rooms should be removed in order to save the water.
- viii) There should be strict environmental law applicable to the Hospitality industry.

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