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Sustainable Hotels: How Going Green Helps Your Hotel

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The importance of making your hotel more eco-friendly has never been more apparent or immediate.

Studies have shown that the tourism industry accounts for almost one-tenth (8%) of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide, and a study by UK national charity Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) showed that the UK's hotel industry alone produces more than 319,339 tons of waste each year, including 87,082 tons of food waste due to too-large portions, or insufficient food storage facilities. [1]

It's clear that hotels have some way to go to become more sustainable—and many have already taken significant steps to make changes.

Marriott found that offering toiletries only on request rather than as standard allowed it to eliminate 500 million small plastic bottles per year. [2]

Smaller boutique hotels, such as Casal dei Fichi in Italy, have started making a difference too, by implementing practices such as offering each guest a reusable metal bottle made by a sustainable company on arrival and using larger ceramic containers that are refilled regularly to avoid excess single-use plastic. [3]

And it's long been good practice to ask guests to hold onto towels and sheets for longer to avoid washing linen every day. Yet, going green is about more than replacing mini shampoo bottles and washing towels a bit less. It's also about completely changing the way you do things—for the better.

This starts with digital check-in that saves on waste by eliminating keycards to reduce the need for excess plastic, through to saving on energy automatically with smart devices, and taking steps to please guests that are increasingly looking for eco-friendly, modern, and streamlined stays.

In fact, Hilton Hotels estimated that it saved more than 80,000 pounds (40 tons) of plastic in five years by replacing plastic key cards with digital key technology across 4,250 properties. [4] The potential is massive.

That's why we asked 169 travelers for their views on the biggest trends in sustainable travel today and their thoughts on what will be most important for travelers and hotel guests in the next 12 months.

We found that making some small but significant changes to the way your hotel operates—with the help of a partner such as Operto—can have a hugely positive impact on your operations, saving plastic, energy, and water; and boosting revenue, and guest satisfaction too.

WHAT GUESTS WANT

The bottom line is that as well as making your hotel more sustainable and helping the planet, going green can actually boost your revenue and attract more bookings, as guests are becoming increasingly alert to eco-friendly practices.

According to our survey, a growing percentage of guests are willing to pay significantly more per night—up to 75% more in some cases—to a hotel that can demonstrate genuinely green policies, and we found that more than half of our respondents (52.4%) see eco-friendliness as a great "bonus" to their stay.

Our results match data from Booking.com, whose recent research found that 73% of global hotel visitors today would prefer an eco-sustainable hotel over a traditional one, up from 62% in 2016. A full 96% of global travelers admit that sustainable travel is important, and 76% want to make more sustainable travel choices in the future. [5]

In fact, Booking.com says it expects to see travelers take on a more eco-conscious mindset in 2021 and beyond, as the effects of Covid have increased people's awareness of the connections between local communities and their impact on their immediate environment.

While the moral dimension, focusing on environmental sustainability is a primary concern for many, it's also worth considering the benefits of a green approach to individual health. There's evidence to suggest regular use of certain toxic chemicals can have a detrimental effect on the health of staff. [6] Guests with allergies, or who have concerns about chemicals and air quality, will gain additional confidence in hotels taking a green approach.

OUR STUDY

We polled 169 travelers for their views on the biggest trends in sustainable travel today and identified four key reasons why and how going green can help your hotel. The questions we asked were:

- **When traveling, is making eco-friendly travel choices important to you?**
- **If you would pay more for an eco-friendly lodging choice, and your alternative was a standard hotel room for $50/night, what's the most you'd be willing to pay extra for a guaranteed eco-friendly choice before you'd choose the standard hotel instead?**
- **How much does a hotel's sustainability/eco-friendliness influence your choice?**
- **Do you think it's the hotel or the traveler's responsibility to be more eco-friendly?**
- **Finally, which non-sustainable practice are you most worried by?**

Saving on plastic, energy, and water for the good of the planet were key incentives in themselves, but going green was also found to have huge, positive implications on revenue and hotel guest satisfaction.

Going green isn't about prioritizing eco-friendly practices to the detriment of your guests' enjoyment: it's actually the opposite.

Introducing sustainable methods will please your guests more and more, by offering easy, plastic-free, keyless check-in; modern energy-saving devices; and local, planet-friendly policies that make a difference throughout their stay.

LETTER FROM OUR CEO, STEVE DAVIS

If Covid-19 has taught us anything, it's that business leaders have a unique, potentially once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reshape and redefine how they do business. There is a heightened sense of collective responsibility and accountability to take care of the planet that we all share, in partnership with the broader business community. The time for bold, visionary thinking is upon us.

The pandemic has created new ways of doing business that stand to benefit both the broader economy and the environment. "Smart" businesses are having a long look at their business models, budgets, and future plans, with an eye to serve younger generations that demand a shift to green alternatives.

We need to act with conviction and understand that transformational business change will require patience and commitment to our shared goals. To this end, Operto Guest Technologies has entered the United Nations Global Compact on human rights, labor, environment, and anti-corruption, and is committed to working alongside partners and suppliers who share our broad commitment to improved stewardship of the planet, and its resources.

STEVE DAVIS

CEO, Operto Guest Technologies

DATA FINDINGS

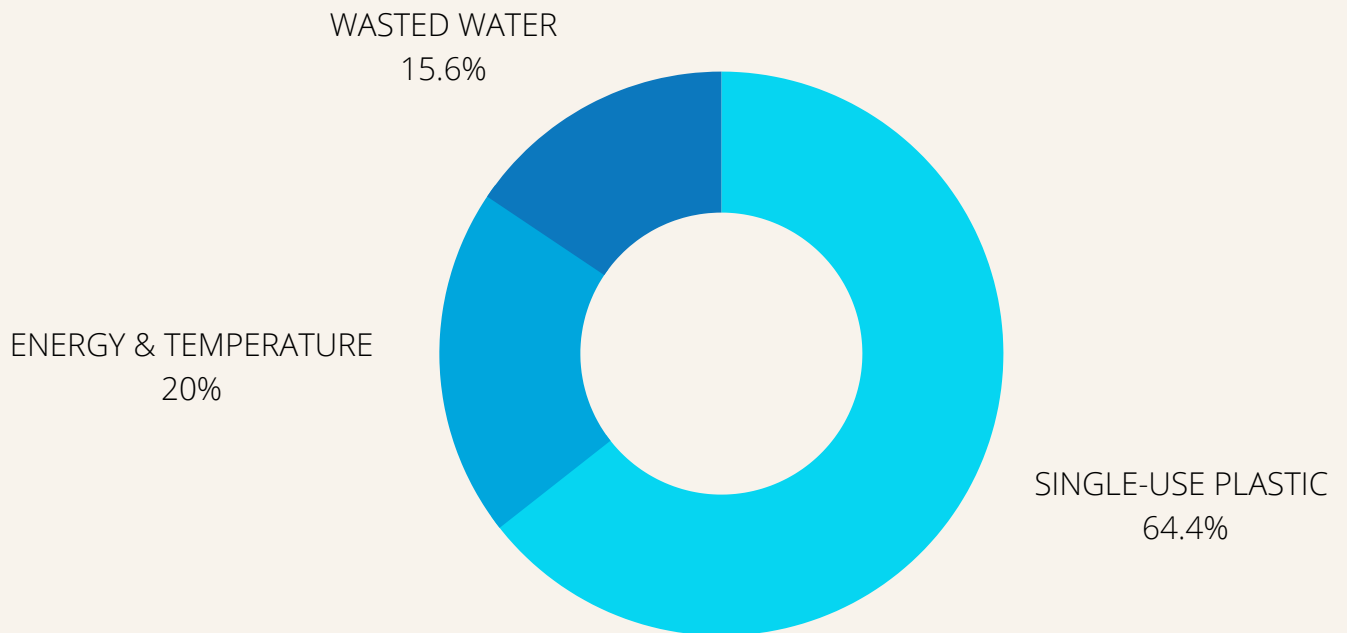# 4 Ways Going Green Helps Your Hotel

HOW IT HELPS #1

GOING GREEN SAVES PLASTIC

The elimination of needless, single-use plastic is a big buzzword in sustainability today, and this is a key way you can improve your eco-friendly credentials while also making life easier and simpler for guests.

As shown on the graph below, excess plastic use in hotels was a major worry for our respondents. More than two-thirds (64.4%) of respondents said they were most worried by single-use plastic, such as keycards, cutlery, and disposable water bottles. Statistics show that plastic bottles alone are a major problem: 35 billion empty water bottles are thrown away in the US each year, and only 12% are recycled. [7]

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WHICH NON–SUSTAINABLE PRACTICE ARE YOU MOST WORRIED ABOUT?

WASTED WATER
15.6%

ENERGY & TEMPERATURE
20%

SINGLE-USE PLASTIC
64.4%

Hotels can target single–use plastic by offering reusable containers—such as glass water bottles in bedrooms and eating spaces, and refillable jars of soap and toiletries in bathrooms.

Enabling modern check–in that is not only keyless but also eliminates plastic keycards or reliance on mobile phones is also a central way to achieve a plastic–free hotel.

Keycard waste is eliminated (not to mention the other risks and issues with cards, such as loss, theft, demagnetization, and requiring a front desk for handover).

Plus, enabling truly contactless, keyless check–in means guests can access their room easily and quickly, without having to wait around or have needless face–to–face interaction. It's a rare example of something that is both eco–friendly and more convenient.

Not only does opting for these green options save plastic, but it's also a priority for guests and professionals.

As Candice Criscione, Founder of TheTuscanMom.com, a resource for families traveling or living in Italy, told us: "I would go out of my way to book a hotel that tries to eliminate plastic waste."

And Matt McKnight, at outdoor product review platform humbersport.com, said:

"There is no excuse in the 21st century for not optimizing the use of reusable, recyclable, or environmentally-friendly materials throughout a stay in a hotel. That includes items like furniture, and food and beverage utensils."

GOING GREEN SAVES ENERGY AND WATER

Saving energy and water were the second-biggest worries for our respondents, with more than one in five (20.5%) most worried about energy & temperature waste when they stay in a hotel, and 15.1% most worried about wasted water.

Daniel Cruz, CEO & founder of tech-enabled linen solution washbnb, understands the challenges involved: "Travel is by its very nature a resource-intensive activity. We must be cognizant of the micro and macro impacts to communities, environments, and other stakeholders as we fulfill our innate desire to travel, explore, learn, and connect with new people and places. Today's travelers increasingly seek individualized experiences in smaller groups with greater privacy, increasing the environmental footprint of their activities.

"This threatens to roll back many of the sustainability gains we've made in travel through economies of scale, public transportation, LEED-certified buildings, and services optimized for fewer points of distribution.

" "We must move beyond awareness and work tirelessly to incorporate or invent best practices in sustainability into our new and rapidly evolving marketplace. We're afforded the luxury of designing business models from the ground up, but with decades of research and innovation to support environmental and social sustainability as core values and practices that live in the heart of our products." **"**

Investing in eco-friendly washing machines and cleaning materials is one way to save water, as is replacing showerheads and faucets with alternatives that use less water.

Asking guests to contribute to sustainable choices, such as not requiring their towels and sheets to be cleaned every day, and asking them to turn off (or reduce) lights, thermostats, heating or air conditioning when not needed can also save you up to 30% off your energy bills each year, as well as helping the planet by saving resources.

Savvy hotels can go one step further and connect their hotel management systems to energy-saving smart devices that can be turned down or off remotely or when not in use. Platforms such as Operto enable you to connect your PMS with keyless arrival and check-in and enable guests to control smart devices and save energy directly from their phone or tablet.

Matt McKnight said: "Energy and water-saving practices are advantageous to hotels—by saving costs—and to the environment."

In the long run, larger hotels might even consider investing in solar panels, wind turbines, or other means of generating sustainable energy, to save even further.

Jenson Heaton, a "tattoo adventurer" from nomadic blog Nomadicinscriptions.com, told us:

"For me personally, the priority is a combination of water and electricity. And hotels today shouldn't aim for being carbon-neutral, but carbon negative."

In addition to saving money on energy (and saving the planet), going green can also help you boost revenue in terms of price per night.
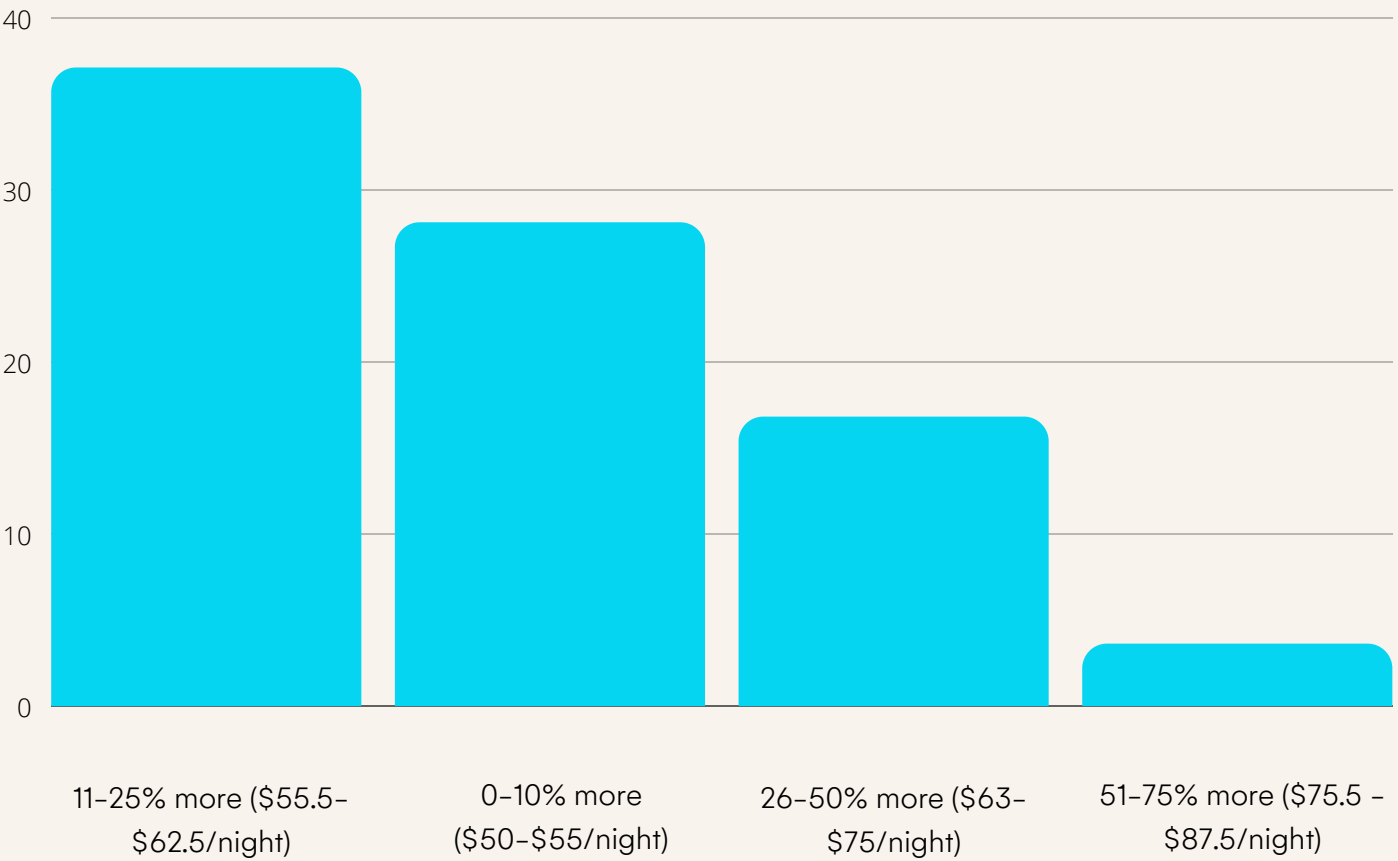
In our survey, a huge 85.6% said they would pay more for an eco-friendly choice of hotels.

A total of 37.1% saying they would pay 11–25% more per night, 28.1% saying they would pay up to 10% more, 16.8% saying they would pay 26–50% more, and a small but mighty 3.6% saying they would pay 51–75% more.

GOING GREEN BOOSTS REVENUE

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IF YOU WOULD PAY MORE FOR AN ECO-FRIENDLY LODGING CHOICE, AND YOUR ALTERNATIVE WAS A STANDARD HOTEL ROOM FOR $50/NIGHT, WHAT'S THE MOST YOU'D BE WILLING TO PAY EXTRA FOR A GUARANTEED ECO-FRIENDLY CHOICE BEFORE YOU'D CHOOSE THE STANDARD HOTEL INSTEAD?

One of our respondents, Wilko van de Kamp, an author, artist, and advisor at the coaching, lifestyle, and travel website Wilko.ca, said that if a hotel is eco-friendly, he sees that as proof of their attention to detail in other areas too.

He told us: "I would pay 76-100% more for an eco-friendly choice; quite a bit more. When hotels pay attention to being eco-friendly they often pay attention to other important matters too such as the traveler's overall experience."

Trace Fontil, a traveler and copywriter for sustainable businesses, explained:

"A traveler can't choose sustainable practices if the hotel doesn't create an environment for it.
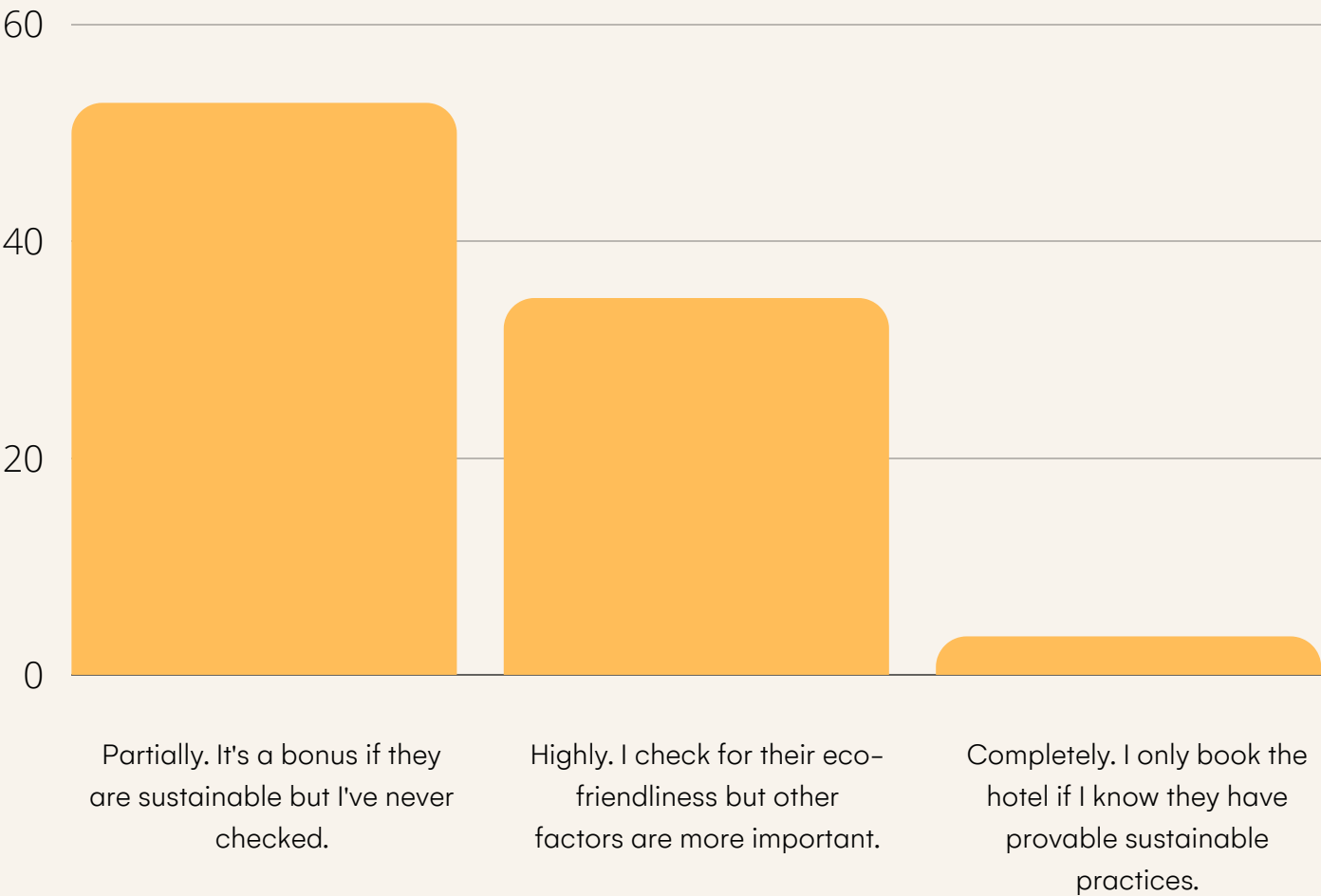
HOW IT HELPS #4

MORE BOOKINGS: GUESTS CHECK IF HOTELS ARE ECO-FRIENDLY

If guests' willingness to pay more per night wasn't enough to convince you of how going green helps your hotel, consider that some guests may not book at all if they can't see your eco-credentials.

More than half (52.7%) of our respondents said that they check for eco-friendliness as a bonus, while 34.7% check for eco-friendliness, even if it's not the most important factor for them. A small but principled 3.6% only book if the hotel has provable sustainable practices.
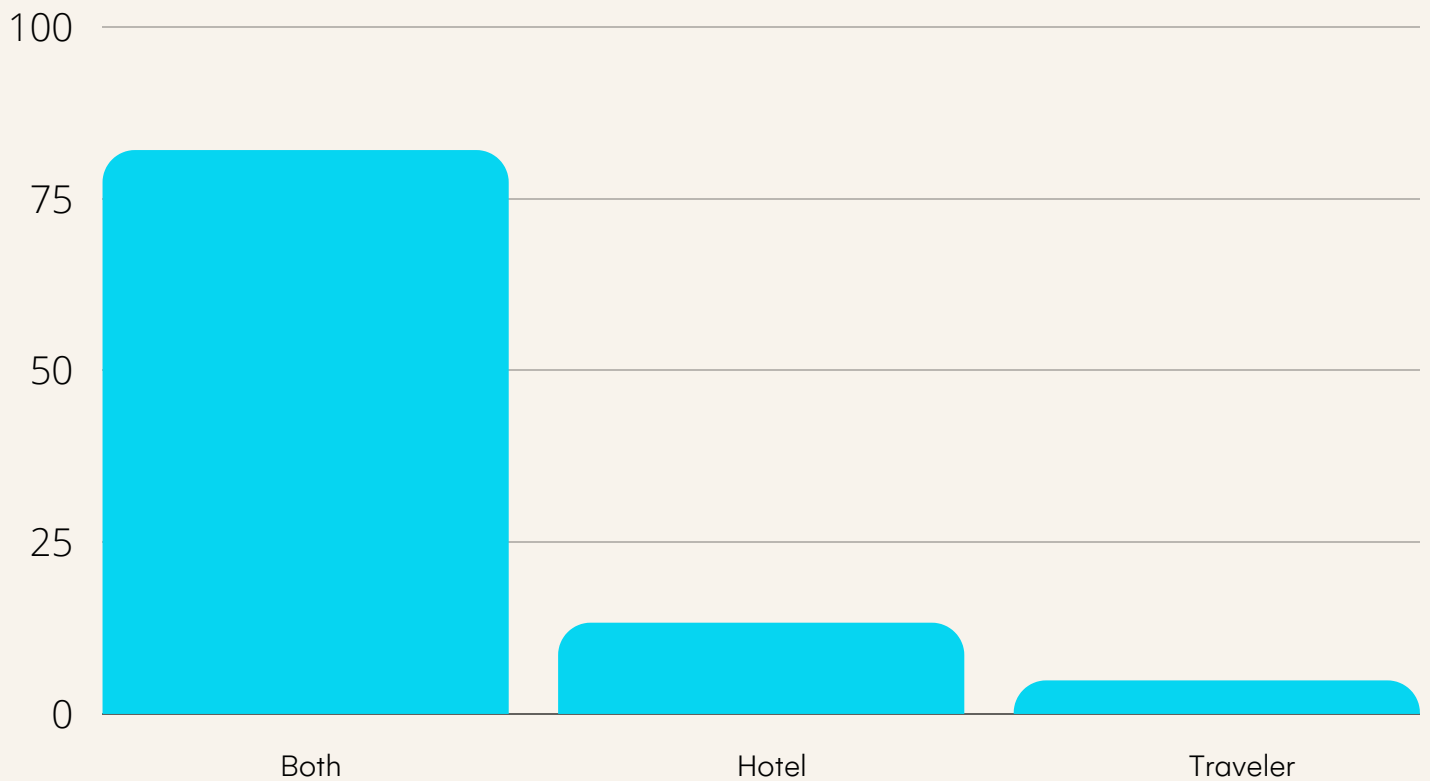
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HOW MUCH DOES A HOTEL'S SUSTAINABILITY/ECO-FRIENDLINESS INFLUENCE YOUR CHOICE?

Chart y-axis values: 60, 40, 20, 0

Categories:
- Partially. It's a bonus if they are sustainable but I've never checked.
- Highly. I check for their eco-friendliness but other factors are more important.
- Completely. I only book the hotel if I know they have provable sustainable practices.

And most respondents (82%) said they believe that providing a sustainable experience is the responsibility of both the hotel and the guest, while 13.2% said the responsibility for providing an eco-friendly experience lay squarely with the guest.

Sustainability is now seen as a shared goal towards which hotel and guest can both play key roles.

DO YOU THINK IT'S THE HOTEL OR THE TRAVELER'S RESPONSIBILITY TO BE MORE ECO–FRIENDLY?

100		
75		
50		
25		
0		
Both	Hotel	Traveler

As Ni Wayan, Editor/Contributor at Bali information website Balipedia.com told us: "As a travel expert, I would say that being environmentally conscious is the responsibility of both the traveler and the hotel.

"Taking a trip has an environmental effect. Of course, this does not mean that we should all stop traveling; rather, it means that we should make better decisions as we do so.

> **"Making small improvements and choices that have a positive effect on the environment will help you become a more responsible and environmentally conscious traveler, and the demand for green goods and services continues to rise as consumers become more conscious of environmental issues."**

And depending on your main hotel guest demographic, eco-friendly practices could be even more important when it comes to consistent bookings and strong occupancy rates.

Younger guests tend to look out for eco-friendly services and consider it a key factor in their decision to travel and book.

Jeremy Scott Foster, Founder & CEO of the adventure travel community TravelFreak, told us: "Our key customers at the moment are GenZ, and a few years ago, it was Millennials. We see breakthrough changes through time.

> **"If some years ago, it was just one or two questions concerning whether the place is environmentally friendly or not, it has now become one of the top-of-mind criteria that many of our customers ask about. The awareness has changed, and it is a trend that's here to stay."**

Andre Robles, Managing Director at South America travel specialists Voyagers Travel Company, said that guests now ask for eco-friendly options as a matter of course.

He said: "Guests already expect all properties we choose for them to be eco-friendly. If a property has bad practices, then no matter how much money they can save, they will not stay there."

Jenson Heaton, perhaps summarized it best when he said: "This is absolutely becoming more and more important to people. If your business can't commit to the health of our planet, then why should guests commit to you?"

CONCLUSION

Overall, our findings show that eco-friendly hotels are more than just a fad. They're here to stay, with both travelers and hotels stepping up to ensure their practices and priorities are as sustainable as possible.

Not only can going green save energy, water, and plastic, save costs, and boost revenue and occupancy, it can also be done remotely and easily, using smart technology throughout your hotel, for a seamless, automated process that makes going green as easy and streamlined as possible.

Small changes add up, and making tiny tweaks to your overall operations with the help of a digital partner such as Operto will quickly deliver fast, sustainable results in every sense.

From getting rid of plastic keycards to switching to digital systems that are more appealing to younger travelers who also prioritize sustainable travel, and enabling direct energy and cost savings, automation using a platform such as Operto is a central part of transforming your hotel from staying stuck on red to going clean and green.

NEXT STEPS

ABOUT OPERTO

At Operto we take pride in being pioneers of guest automation while enabling energy and waste-saving practices such as eliminating plastic keycards, connecting to smart energy devices, and reducing the need for excess space and energy to accommodate large front desk spaces and needless numbers of staff.

Our streamlined, easy-to-install systems are hyper-connected and designed for today's busy, always-online traveler, who wants to explore on-demand while staying safe in the post-Covid world.

Our systems enable not only contactless guest entry but also personalized and automated temperature control, and powerful monitoring features.

By harnessing the power of intelligent and ingenious technology and working with our PMS and hardware integration partners, we are revolutionizing the vacation rental and hotel landscape, boosting the relationship between guests and providers, and ensuring world-class operations at low cost and low energy wastage, for excellent guest experiences.

Operto works with smart partners and integrates with devices from leading companies such as Salto and Yale to make their implementation fuss-free and easy.

We help you oversee every stage of the hotel management process remotely, at the touch of a button, on a single smartphone or web browser portal.

We believe that the days of the front desk and wasteful, clunky old-fashioned hotels are numbered, and a keyless, totally automated, eco-conscious system is the future.

Automated, digital systems are so much more than offering check-in without keys. It's a full-on digital transformation, with us as your partners, helping you make the transition seamlessly while offering great value.

Want to reduce your hotel's plastic and energy consumption today? Chat with a digital hospitality expert today.

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