

Analysing the Relevance of Green Hotels in the Indian Hospitality Sector

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Abstract

This paper examines the relevance of eco-friendly hotels in the Indian tourism sector. In recent years, the concept of ecologically sustainable tourism has become very popular. As a result, there is a pressing need for hotels to incorporate ecologically sustainable practices as well. In other words, hotels have to go 'green'. Green hotels depend on the natural environment, conserve energy, efficiently process waste, contribute to conservation, incorporate cultural considerations and provide economic returns to local communities. Some of the benefits of green hotels include lower costs of operations, efficient management of resources, higher profitability and increase in customer goodwill (Buckley, 2014). It may be inferred that the label of a 'green hotel' is one of the ways for a hotel to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. In India, there is a growing awareness of the importance of green hotels in five star hotels. However, the extent to which non-five star hotels in India are aware of the need to go green, the nature of the eco-friendly methods that have already been implemented in Indian non-five hotels and the accruing benefits have not been examined. Hence it is not possible to make recommendations on the unique steps and measures that must be taken to ensure that hotels in India go green. It is this gap in the literature on the Indian tourism sector that this paper attempts to bridge. A qualitative methodology was followed in this paper using both secondary and primary data. The analysis of the secondary data indicated 7 elements that a green hotel must incorporate into its construction and operations including water, energy, waste, procurement, air quality, landscaping & design and local community development. Primary data was collected from 50 hotel managers of non-five star hotels in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. It was found that foreign guests who stay in non-five star hotels in India prefer that their hotels follow sustainable, green practices. This indicates that the concept of green is as relevant for the non – five star hotels in India as it is for their five star counterparts. The primary data also indicated how, for each of the green elements considered, what are

the attributes that will have to be achieved and the steps that can be implemented to ensure that the hotels go green. The challenge is to create a perception amongst guests that the hotel is in fact following green management principles. How such a perception may be created has been indicated in the recommendations section.

Keywords: Destination Ratings, Tourism Products, Travelers Choices

Introduction

Across the world, commercial organizations are going 'green' to reduce the negative impact their operations has on the environment (Pearce, 2013). Going 'green' refers to incorporating the principles of sustainability principles in operations. The hospitality sector across the world is also going green. These are properties that are environmentally friendly and have implemented those initiatives that conserve energy, water and reduce waste generation (Yesawich, 2008). Green initiatives include recycling programs, installation of energy efficient lighting systems, communicating with guests on how the hotel is doing its bit in conserving the environment. There are substantial business benefits in implementing green principles as well. These include lower costs of operations, efficient management of resources, higher profitability and increase in customer goodwill (Buckley, 2014). It may be inferred that the label of a 'green hotel' is one of the ways for a hotel to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Across the world, a newly emerging trend is that of tourists who prefer to stay in 'green' hotels. According to Teare and Olsen (2012), hotels that have green certifications like Leed, Ecotel, CDMs and ISO14000 are preferred by the environmentally conscious tourist. This

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trend is visible in India as well with Rathod et al., (2013) pointing out that 66% of all tourists in India prefer to stay in eco-friendly hotels with 62% stating that they prefer to pay 10% more for green hotels. However, Rathod et al., (2013)'s research was conducted only in 5 star hotels in India. It is not known whether the concept of green is relevant for Indian hotels that fall in the non – five-star category. These hotels comprise the bulk of the Indian accommodation sector. It is not known, whether tourists who stay in non – five star properties in India have 'green' expectations and how these expectations are manifested. It is these gaps in the literature that this paper will bridge.

Research Question—How relevant is the concept of green hotels in the Indian Hospitality sector.

Literature Review

Across the world, commercial organizations are going 'green' to reduce the negative impact their operations has on the environment (Pearce, 2013). Going 'green' refers to incorporating the principles of sustainability principles in operations. The hospitality sector across the world is also going green. These are properties that are environmentally friendly and have implemented those initiatives that conserve energy, water and reduce waste generation (Yesawich, 2008). Green initiatives include recycling programs, installation of energy efficient lighting systems, communicating with guests on how the hotel is doing its bit in conserving the environment. There are substantial business benefits in implementing green principles as well. These include lower costs of operations, efficient management of resources, higher profitability and increase in customer goodwill (Buckley, 2014). It may be inferred that the label of a 'green hotel' is one of the ways for a hotel to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Across the world, a newly emerging trend is that of tourists who prefer to stay in 'green' hotels. According to Teare and Olsen (2012), hotels that have green certifications like Leed, Ecotel, CDMs and ISO14000 are preferred by the environmentally conscious tourist. This trend is visible in India as well with Rathod et al., (2013) pointing out that 66% of all tourists in India prefer to stay in eco-friendly hotels with 62% stating that they prefer to pay 10% more for green hotels. However, Rathod et al., (2013)'s research was conducted only in 5 star hotels in India. It is not known whether the concept of green is relevant for Indian hotels that fall in the non – five-star category. These hotels comprise the bulk of the Indian

accommodation sector. It is not known; whether tourists who stay in non – five star properties in India have 'green' expectations and how these expectations are manifested. It is these gaps in the literature that this paper will bridge.



Fig. 1: Green Hotels – Theoretical Framework

From figure 1, it is observed that the concept of 'green' includes 7 sub-elements summarized on the left side. There are compelling reasons for going green for hotels because of the numerous advantages summarized on the right side of figure 1. The gap in the literature is whether hotels in India need to go green, what benefits will accrue to them by doing so and whether tourists who stay in Indian hotels demand that they should be green.

Methodology

The researcher administered an online questionnaire to the hotel managers of 50 non 5 star hotels of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka . The questionnaire comprised of both open and closed ended questions that collected information on awareness of green practises and implementation of these principles in hotels of India.

The primary data was analysed to highlight how hotels in india may implement sustainable eco friendly practises and the benefits of going green.

Analysis and Discussion

Guest Preference: Respondents were asked as to whether their guests preferred to stay in green hotels or standard hotels. Figure 2 indicates their responses.

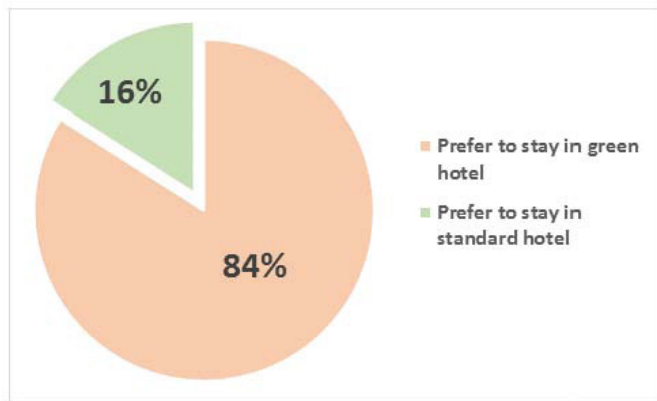


Fig. 2: Guest Preference

From figure 2 it is observed that 84% of the respondents indicated their guest preference for staying in green hotels. This confirms that the concept of ‘green’ is as relevant as ‘customer pull factor’ for non – five star hotels as it is for the 5-star sector in India. Guest respondents indicated that they preferred green hotels *because it was the ethically right & responsible thing to do when travelling*. Guests indicate their preference for *not just reuse of towels and linen but for tangible evidence that hotels were following socially & environmentally responsible practices*. These included *energy efficiency, waste management and water conservation*. Guests were however, *not willing to pay more to stay in a green hotel, demanded the same comforts and amenities as provided by standard hotels and also wished to be rewarded in some way for patronizing green hotels*. These indicate challenges to ‘go green’ for the non – five-star hotel category in India.

Those guests who preferred standard hotels stated that *they feared green hotels are more expensive and they would not get many of the amenities available in standard hotels*. This indicates the need to change perception amongst tourists about green hotels in matters related to price and amenities.

Water: Respondents were asked as to what water saving mechanisms could be instituted inexpensively at their hotels and how these mechanisms could be tangibly visible to their guests. Figure 3 summarizes their responses. Respondents indicated the use of water saving devices such as water flow regulators, flow sensors, automated taps and low – flush toilets could be done at no major extra cost and would serve to conserve water and demonstrate to tourists that the hotel is committed to water conservation. Monitoring water consumption

could be done through water meter installation for all departments. Water management at the level of guest rooms afforded the best opportunity to exhibit water conservation practices to guests.

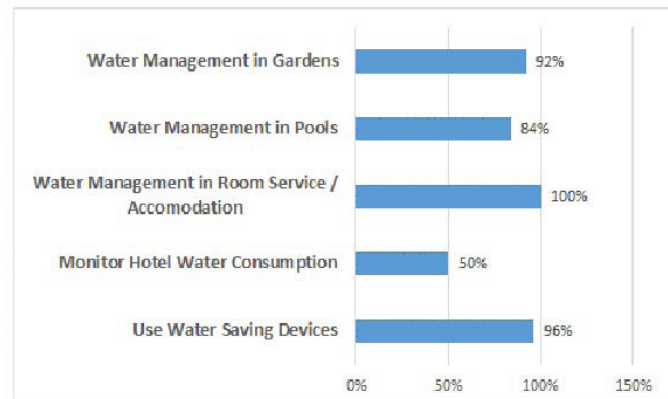


Fig. 3: Water Conservation

Suggested measures include installation of water flow regulars on showerheads, self-closing faucets that close automatically after a certain period, water saving toilets, inviting guests to reuse their towels and bed sheets, training staff in reuse of towels / bed sheets and using collateral such as brochures, flyers, stickers and posters in guest rooms informing guests on the need to conserve water. For the gardens, use of automated water sprinklers, rain water harvesting and maximising reuse of water would help conserve water.

Energy Conservation: Figure 4 depicts how respondents stated, energy can be saved in visible ways in hotels.

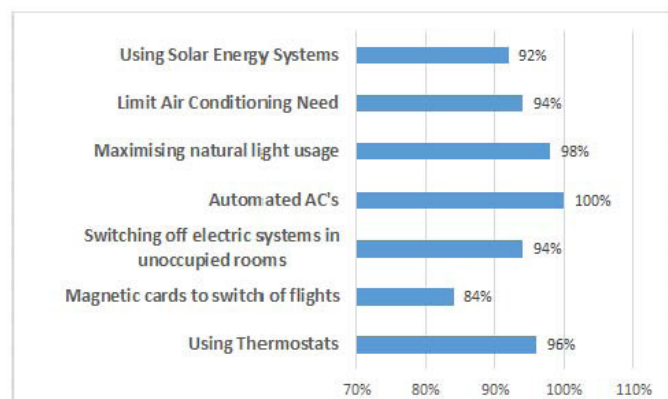


Fig. 4: Energy Conservation

Respondents indicated that the use of thermostats which would automatically turn off electrical equipment, magnetic cards to automatically switch off lights in

unoccupied rooms, automated air conditioners, limiting the need for air conditioners through use of room shading mechanisms, and designing the building to maximise natural light utilization are some of the ways that can conserve electricity and do so tangibly to guests as well.

Waste Management: Figure 5 depicts respondent views on waste management in the hotels.



Fig. 5: Waste Management

Reduce, Reuse and Recycle are the three ways respondents indicated with respect to waste management. That the hotel is committed to efficient waste management can be tangibly demonstrated to guests through use of refillable dispensers for hygiene related items, as far as possible only using items made from bio-degradable materials such as paper, cardboard, natural materials, organizing waste segregation in guest rooms through clear communication to guests and adequate provisioning of waste baskets, reuse of old linen as rags for cleaning and not burning / burying / dispersing waste in hotel premises.

Procurement: Figure 6 depicts respondent views on sustainable procurement in hotels.



Fig. 6: Sustainable Procurement

Respondents indicated that the challenge is to demonstrate sustainable procurement methods being followed in the

hotels to the guests. This can be done by using items – such as furniture – that can be easily disposed or recycled, avoiding use of items made from rare, exotic or endangered materials, educating guests through suitable collateral on the rational usage of materials, using environmentally friendly items – such as cleaning agents as much as possible and explicitly mentioning on items that they have been procured from ‘green’ vendors only.

Air Quality / Landscape: Figure 7 depicts respondent views on how to maintain air quality and preserve natural landscapes in the hotels.

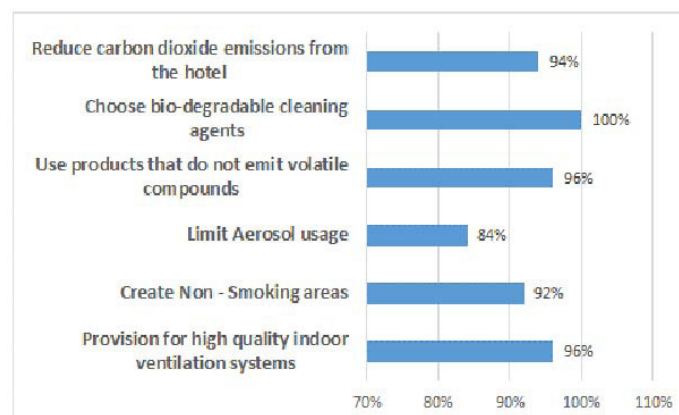


Fig. 7: Preserving Air Quality

Respondents indicated that from their experience with guest requirements, air quality is one of the indicators of a healthy and sustainable environment. Fumes and other gases were indicators of non – sustainable practices being followed in the hotel. They pointed out that providing high quality ventilation systems, creating non – smoking areas and reducing the use of products with emissions – such as aerosols were some of the ways of preserving the quality of indoor air in the hotels. Figure 8 indicates respondent’s views on building design and landscaping.

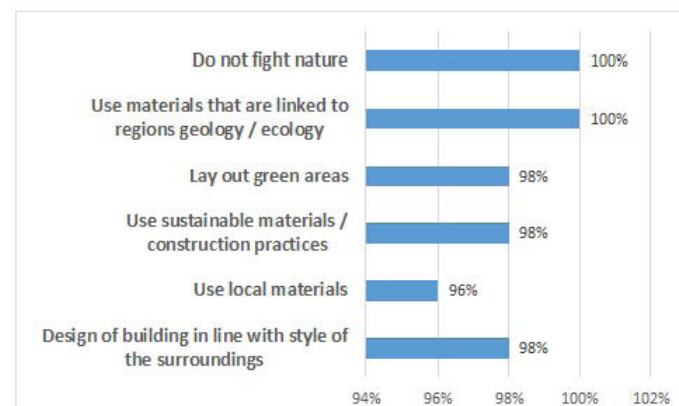


Fig. 8: Building Design / Landscaping

Respondents reported that guests perceive hotels are following sustainable, green practices from the way the buildings and its surroundings are designed. The architectural style must match with the surroundings, with local materials incorporated into the building. There must be large green areas. The golden rule is to design and operate the building such that it is in harmony with the surroundings and with nature and not in opposition to them.

Local Community Development: Figure 9 indicates how local communities in hotel surroundings can be nurtured and developed.

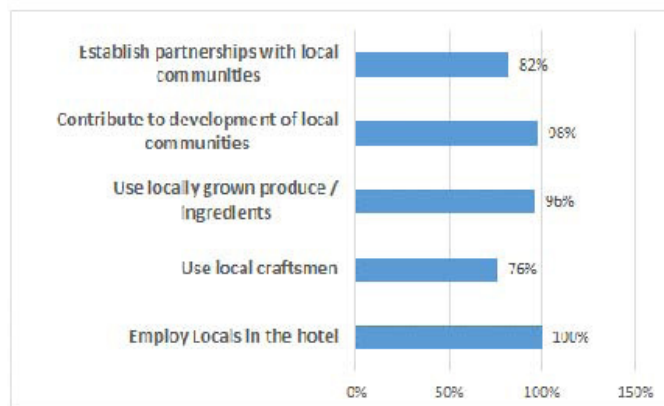


Fig. 9: Local Community Development

Respondents indicated that by hiring local people within the hotel as much as possible, using locally grown ingredients in foods prepared at the hotel, promoting the use of local craftsmen and crafts, through contributions made to local development programs and facilitating private player investment and participation in local community development, hotels can create the perception amongst their guests that they actively contribute to developing local communities.

Benefits: The respondents themselves indicated that there are several benefits by going green. These are summarized in figure 10.

From figure 10, it is observed that the benefits of going green match those discussed in the literature. According to the respondents, the many benefits of going green offer a compelling reason for more hotels in India to adopt sustainable design, construction and operating methods.

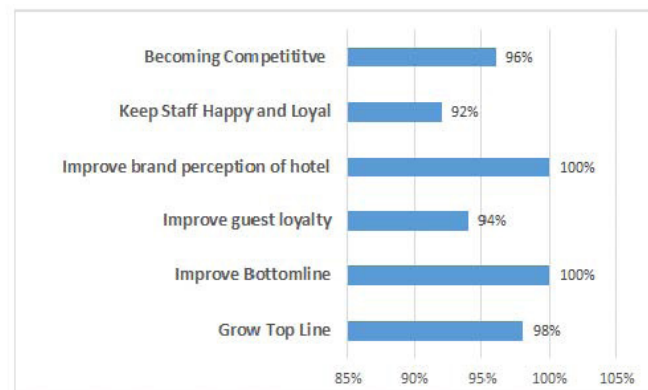


Fig. 10: Benefits of Going Green

On the basis of the findings in the above sections, the conceptual model in figure 11 was developed.



Fig. 11: Conceptual Model – Rationale for Going Green for Hotels

Figure 11 contains the 7 elements of a green hotel identified in the theoretical framework of figure 1. However, the analysis of primary data has been able to identify various attributes related to each element as indicated in figure 11. If fulfilled or achieved, these attributes lead to the creation of a 'green' hotel which in turn leads to several benefits accruing.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The main purpose of this research was to identify if there are compelling reasons for non – five star hotels to go 'green' in India. From the primary data, it was observed

that customer themselves prefer to stay in hotels that are perceivably following green practices. In addition, there are several benefits that can accrue to Indian hotels by going green. These include improved profitability, lower costs of operation, enhance customer goodwill and brand perceptions. The 'greening' of Indian hotels, then becomes a potent customer pull factor, drawing in more numbers of foreign footfalls. A combination of all these factors leads to the supposition that green hotels are as relevant to the Indian hospitality sector as they are for hotels in the rest of the world. Having confirmed the relevance of green hotels, the challenge for Indian hoteliers is to go green in a manner that is cost effective and can tangibly create a perception of 'greenness' amongst guests. To achieve this, the following recommendations derived from the primary data are made:

Any hotel seeking to go green will have to consider measures related to water management, energy efficiency, waste management, procurement practices, air quality, landscaping and local community development.

Steps taken to conserve water are related to measuring the overall consumption of water in the hotel and the implementation of water saving practices in the hotel. The challenge is to achieve water conservation cost effectively and perceptibly. Some of these practices, identified from the primary data include installation of water flow regulators in bathrooms, use of automated taps and faucets, installing water saving toilets, asking guests to reuse their towels and bed linen as well as educating guests on the importance of water conservation. These measures have the advantage of alerting guests, that the hotel is concerned about water conservation.

Energy efficiency may be achieved through installation of thermostats for temperature control, automated lighting and heating systems, use of solar power to heat water, leveraging the power of wind to generate electricity and leveraging natural light as much as possible. These measures have the advantage of being perceived by tourist guests as well which helps in creating the impression that the hotel is following green energy conservation measures.

There are several sustainable waste management practices that centre around the 3R's of reuse, reduce and recycle. Of these, the most important are those that are visible and

perceivable to the guests. They involve use of furniture, hygiene and laundry items that can be disposed or recycled back into the system, the absence of materials made from endangered or rare raw materials, the use of market collateral that educate guests about waste management practices being followed in the hotel and markings on products that certify that they are procured from green vendors only.

The ability to create an internal atmosphere and environment where guests feel they are breathing air that is fresh and healthy also creates a perception that the hotel is green. To achieve this hotel can institute special smoking / non – smoking zones, incorporate greenery and green spaces in the hotel campus, and avoid using fume emitting chemicals in hotel premises and investing in high performance internal ventilating systems.

Another method of creating a perception of 'greenness' is by designing, building and landscaping the hotel using local materials, with the architectural style matching the local culture and environment.

By employing locals in the hotel, by promoting the use of local foods, products, arts and crafts and by making their guests aware of local development programs instituted by the hotel, a perception that the hotel is following green principles that promotes tourism responsibly can be created.

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