

Identifying the path to sustainable hospitality in 2019

Dr Dimitrios Diamantis and
Dr. Alain Imboden

• letters@hindustantimes.com

Responding to the demands of conscientious travellers, global hospitality businesses take a more comprehensive approach to sustainability.

Sustainability within the hospitality industry has come a long way since the arrival of in-room suggestions to reuse towels and save water. Hotels and other hospitality businesses are increasingly taking a more mature approach that incorporates socially responsible practices as well as sound environmental and economic policies.

As public awareness and consumer confidence in sustainability grow, the pressure is on for the travel and tourism sector to walk the talk — according to Booking.com's 2018 Sustainable Travel Report, 87% of global travellers say they want to travel sustainably. In 2019, we can expect to see hospitality companies implementing more innovative practices to benefit people and the planet as well as financial performance, while also ensuring that guests are aware of their good deeds.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM: THE BIG PICTURE

Government and public support for the promotion of sustainabil-



■ Sustainability can transform the hospitality industry //ISTOCKPHOTO

ity across industries has been mounting in recent years. In 2015, 193 nations agreed to work towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, a set of 17 goals designed to ensure a better future for all through the introduction of significant changes by 2030. Representing 10.4% of global GDP and supporting one in 10 jobs worldwide according to the World Travel and Tourism Council, the travel and tourism sector has the potential to make enormous social, environmental and economic contributions—a fact that travellers increasingly recognise.

FROM GREEN TO TRANS- PARENT: THE PROOF IS IN THE REPORT

As going green becomes mainstream, it will take more than claims of good intentions for busi-

nesses to convince conscientious consumers. Transparency will become even more important in the future as ethical travellers seek evidence to back up messages of corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Leading the way are hotel groups such as Nordic Choice Hotels, Scandic Hotels Group and Accor Hotels, which have set new industry standards in CSR transparency by releasing annual public reports and other detailed information on the sustainable practices they follow. Notably, the most effective brands focus not only on their environmental impact, but on their impact on society; for example, Nordic Choice's "WeCare" sustainability approach highlights six areas of action, which include local social responsibility, ethical trade, diversity and initiatives

against child trafficking.

SOCIAL COMMITMENT AND TRAVELLING WITH PURPOSE

Innovative brands are also highlighting their engagement with social causes, often resulting in a more authentic experience for guests, who play an essential role in making these community initiatives possible. For example, Good Hotel London combines premium hospitality with a social business concept. The floating hotel docked on the River Thames provides long-term unemployed locals with hospitality skills, on-the-job training and a full-time salary. Afterwards, trainees are redirected to permanent job opportunities in the local economy. As socially minded travellers continue to seek brands that reflect their values, many may also turn to volunteering as a way to interact with and contribute to local communities. Organisations like Adventure Alternative, World Ventures Foundation, and Beyond and The Village Experience offer travellers the opportunity to work on humanitarian projects during their journey.

ENTERING THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Finally, the shift towards a circular economy system has the potential to transform the hospi-

tality industry. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation defines a circular economy as one that is "restorative and regenerative by design," as opposed to a linear "take, make and dispose" economy. It's a model that resonates with the "leave no trace" ethos championed by nature lovers and the ideals of responsible travellers. The exterior of QO Amsterdam, a hotel built on circular economy principles, features thermal panels that react to the outside climate to conserve the energy needed to regulate indoor temperatures. The hotel has also been designed with recycled materials, such as carpeting made from 100% recycled yarn previously used in fishing nets. And to reduce wastewater, QO has developed a grey water system in which all water that comes from showers and sinks is used again to flush toilets.

More sustainable innovations are on the way. Scheduled to open in 2021, Norwegian hotel Svart will be the world's first energy positive hotel concept by the Arctic Circle. Reducing its yearly energy consumption by 85% compared to modern hotels, Svart will harvest enough solar energy to cover both hotel operations and the construction of the building.

Diamantis is Dean of Graduate Studies and Imboden is Associate Professor at Les Roches