

SUSTAINABILITY IN HOSPITALITY

The **Operational Playbook** for Hotels

The hospitality operator's guide to building verifiable sustainability practices that earn guest trust and drive revenue

For: GMs, Operations Managers, Revenue Managers, Regional VPs, and Corporate Directors at multi-location hotel groups, restaurant chains, and venue operators across the US

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Foreword

Running a multi-property hospitality business in 2026 means managing more with less. Teams are leaner, margins are tighter, and guest expectations remain as high as ever. Sustainability arriving as the next mandatory priority can feel like the last straw.

But here's the thing: sustainability is not another cost to manage. For multi-location operators who execute it correctly, sustainability is a direct booking driver, a commission-reduction strategy, and a guest-loyalty engine — all in one.

The properties that figured this out early are not the ones with the biggest ESG budgets. They're the ones that connected operational decisions to guest-facing proof points that convert at the booking stage. Going paperless, sourcing locally, installing refillable dispensers: each of these became evidence, not decoration. They replaced vague claims with numbers.

How are they pulling it off? This report shows you how to achieve your sustainability goals, with measurable returns in RevPAR, NPS, and direct bookings, and without rebranding or a new budget line.

— Uniqode Research Team, 2026

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Executive Summary



The challenge

Sustainability is now a booking filter, not a differentiator. Eco-certified hotels see booking share increase by as much as 24.5% compared to uncertified properties.¹ Travelers are willing to pay a 5% premium for eco-certified hotel accommodation.²

The opportunity is clear. However, most properties that want to act on sustainability run into the same three failures. They underestimate what real sustainability requires operationally. They overclaim what they have done, exposing themselves to greenwashing risk. And they stay silent about what they are genuinely doing well, handing a booking-stage advantage to competitors who communicate more loudly — even if less accurately.

The gap between what properties are doing and what they are saying is where revenue is being lost.

The five questions this report answers

1. Why does sustainability affect revenue per available room (RevPAR), not just brand reputation?
2. Why do well-intentioned sustainability programs fail to generate guest trust, and what does that cost in reviews and loyalty?
3. What does real sustainability look like at an operational level for individual or multi-property chains without a six-figure ESG program?
4. How do you communicate sustainability in a way that converts at the booking stage and moves the metrics your CFO cares about?
5. How to reimagine the guest experience using paperless, contact-free touchpoints that feed into your sustainability story, using a 150-room sample hotel as an example

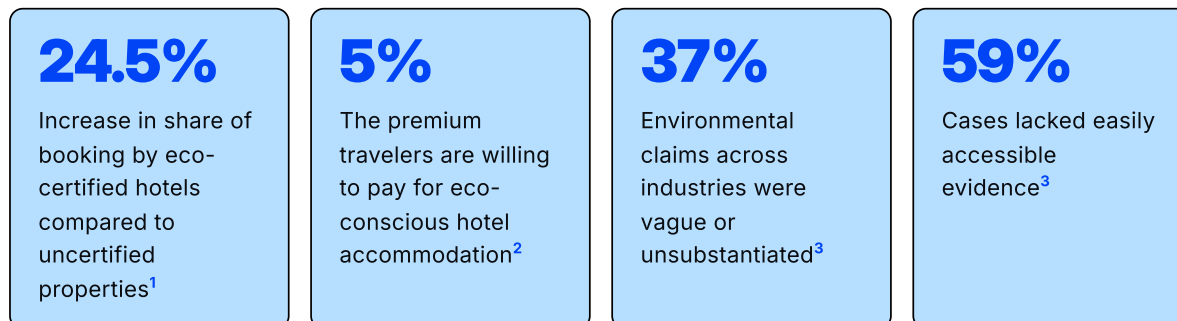
^[1] Green Key Global. (2026). Sustainability That Delivers: How Green Key Certification Drives Real Business Performance. Green Key Global.

^[2] Emerald Insight. (2025) International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management Green premiums: assessing the revenue impact of eco-certification in the hospitality sector Volume 37, Issue 13

Who this report is written for

This report is for anyone running hospitality operations — GMs, owners, ops and revenue leaders, and guest experience directors who have to prove ROI and defend budgets, plus marketing leaders repositioning their properties as eco-conscious.

KEY STATS



TL;DR

Sustainability is a revenue lever, not a cost center. Eco-certified properties see up to 24.5% higher booking share and 12% higher ADR. For a 150-room hotel, that translates to ~\$184,000 in additional annual room revenue from eco-conscious guests alone.

The biggest risk isn't inaction — it's overclaiming. 67% of travelers encounter misleading environmental claims during hotel stays. When a sustainability claim can't be verified, guests doubt the brand itself, along with the claim. That shows up in OTA reviews, repeat bookings, and loyalty.

You don't need a six-figure ESG program to start. The three-tier framework (quick wins → operational investments → structural commitments) lets any property build momentum without overhauling operations. Start with what's visible to guests and measurable by your team.

Numbers beat adjectives, every time. "We eliminated 40,000 single-use plastic items" outperforms "we're committed to sustainability." Specific, dated, quantified claims convert at the booking stage.

Going paperless is the most measurable sustainability win available. Replacing paper touchpoints with QR Codes simultaneously cuts printing costs, generates first-party guest data, and creates a sustainability story you can actually report. The Marriott Aruba case produced 150,000 scans, 80,000 unique guests reached, and \$150,000 in printing costs saved — from one property.

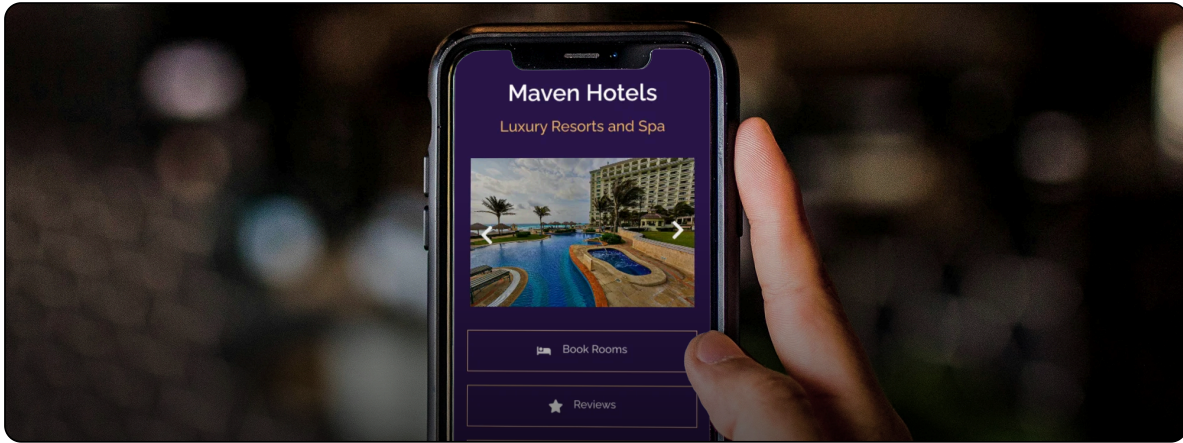
Communicate at the point of experience, not just at the point of booking. In-stay proof points (QR Codes linking to sourcing data, impact pages, certifications) build a different quality of trust than pre-stay marketing. Guests experiencing sustainability directly are more likely to return and advocate.

[1] Green Key Global. (2026). Sustainability That Delivers: How Green Key Certification Drives Real Business Performance. Green Key Global.

[2] Emerald Insight. (2025) International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management Green premiums: assessing the revenue impact of eco-certification in the hospitality sector Volume 37, Issue 13

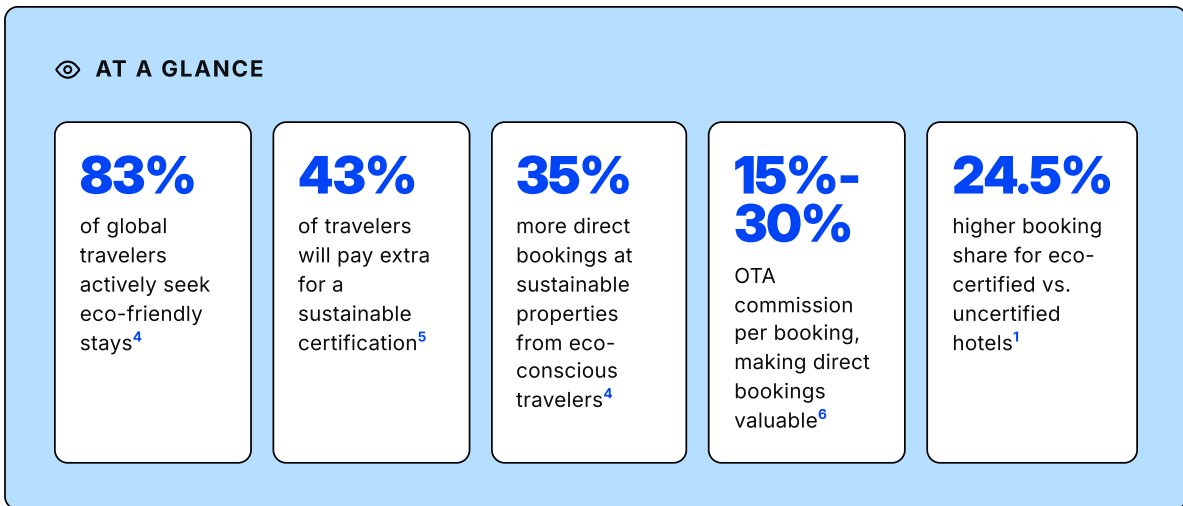
[3] European Commission. (2021). Screening of Websites for 'Greenwashing': Half of Green Claims Lack Evidence. European Commission Press Release.

Why Hotel Sustainability Now Drives Booking Decisions



A sustainability investment that cannot be connected to RevPAR is unlikely to survive a conversation with a CFO. Fortunately, sustainability is no longer just an environmental consideration. It is increasingly influencing booking decisions, guest loyalty, and revenue performance across the hospitality industry.

This chapter explores why sustainability has become a commercial advantage for hotels and how that advantage translates into measurable business outcomes.



[1] Green Key Global. (2026). Sustainability That Delivers: How Green Key Certification Drives Real Business Performance. Green Key Global.

[4] Guestara (2025) Sustainable Hotel Business: Complete Strategy Guide

[5] Booking.com (2023) Cost vs Conscience: Booking.com Delves into the Dilemma Dividing Sustainable Travel in 2023

[6] Cloudbeds. (2025). A Guide to OTA Commission Rates. Cloudbeds.

Why eco-conscious travelers matter in 2026

Online discussions involving eco-friendly travel surged 57% in 2025 compared to the prior year, with 49% more unique authors joining the conversation.⁷

As traveler interest rises, sustainability increasingly influences booking decisions. Travelers are willing to pay more for properties with credible sustainability credentials, and booking platforms such as Expedia now help guests identify certified stays through filters such as Green Key and EarthCheck.⁸ Properties that fail to communicate sustainability efforts risk being overlooked by eco-conscious guests.

The value of this audience extends beyond a single booking. Sustainability is becoming a measurable driver of guest retention, loyalty, and revenue growth.⁹ Properties that establish credibility today are better positioned to attract repeat guests and build long-term relationships with travelers who factor sustainability into their bookings. One guest retained through a well-communicated sustainability experience can generate far more value than the cost of the initiative that earned their loyalty.

For hotel operators, these advantages ultimately show up in occupancy, Average Daily Rate (ADR), and RevPAR. Sustainable properties reportedly achieve 12% higher ADR and 23% better occupancy rates.⁴ Consider a 150-room property operating at 70% occupancy with a \$200 ADR. The property generates around \$7.6 million in annual room revenue. If eco-conscious travelers represent 20% of bookings, a 12% ADR premium on that segment alone would generate roughly \$184,000 in additional annual room revenue.

This is not simply a reputational benefit. It is a measurable revenue opportunity that becomes harder to capture when sustainability efforts remain invisible during the booking journey.

Protecting RevPAR starts with protecting the location

Global ecological overshoot, the point at which humanity's annual resource consumption exceeds what the planet can regenerate in a year, has occurred every year since the 1970s and now arrives earlier each calendar year.

For hospitality businesses, this is not an abstract environmental concern. Hotels depend directly on stable weather patterns, reliable water access, healthy coastlines, predictable tourism seasons, and resilient local food systems.

A coastal resort losing beachfront to erosion, a mountain property facing shorter ski seasons, or a farm-to-table restaurant struggling with supplier instability are not hypothetical scenarios. These conditions are already affecting destination economics in vulnerable markets.

In that context, sustainability investments are not only about brand perception. They also function as a hedge against the operational disruptions and cost pressures that increasingly threaten long-term RevPAR performance.

[4] Guestara (2025) Sustainable Hotel Business: Complete Strategy Guide

[7] Brandwatch (2026). 3 Travel Trends Every Brand Should Know in 2026

[8] CarbonClick. (2024). Booking Low-Impact Lodges via Expedia for Sustainable Travel. CarbonClick.

[9] Comarch (2025) Green Loyalty Programs: How to Drive Sustainable Customer Engagement?

Sustainability resonates across generations

While sustainability is clearly influencing booking decisions, the travelers driving that demand are not a monolithic group. Understanding how different generations engage with sustainability helps operators position their efforts more effectively.

Millennials are now the largest segment of the US population and have an estimated \$200 billion in spending power.¹⁰ Among millennials who travel, 82% want vacations with minimal environmental impact.¹⁰ Gen Z travelers show even stronger sustainability preferences. For many of them, luxury is defined less by excess and more by quality, unique experiences, and sustainable practices, all of which they are willing to pay for.¹¹

At first glance, sustainability appears to be a younger traveler's priority. However, the data reveals an interesting paradox: while younger generations are often the most vocal advocates for sustainability, baby boomers are more likely to translate sustainability values into everyday behaviors such as reducing waste, conserving energy, and shopping locally.¹²

For hospitality operators, the takeaway is clear. Sustainability is not a niche appeal limited to one generation. Different age groups may engage with sustainability for different reasons, but the opportunity spans the entire guest base. Hotels that communicate their sustainability efforts effectively across multiple channels can strengthen their appeal to both emerging and established traveler segments.

[10] Brittany Ferries (2025) Millennials Travels Statistics and Trends 2025

[11] Green Pearls (2025) Gen Z: The New Traveling Generation with a Digital Compass and Clear Values

[12] Booking.com. (2026). Travel and Sustainability Report 2026: 11th Annual Research into Consumer Attitudes and Understanding of the Social and Environmental Impact of Travel. Booking.com B.V. Published 20 April 2026.

The Greenwashing Trap — and Why Honest Properties Still Fall Into It

Most greenwashing in hospitality is not deliberate. More often, it is a documentation gap: the distance between a well-meaning sustainability claim and the evidence required to defend it. As travelers, platforms, and regulators become more sophisticated, that gap is becoming harder to ignore.

Why sustainability claims fail

Many sustainability practices are real. However, a statement such as "we are committed to sustainability" without a specific action, measurable outcome, or credible source of validation is unlikely to build trust and may invite scrutiny instead.

The overstatement is often unintentional. A marketing team may describe a pilot program as if it were a company-wide standard, or a property may promote an aspirational goal as a current achievement. Regardless of intent, guests evaluate claims based on what they can verify.

This credibility gap is not unique to hospitality. Across industries, the European Commission found that 42% of sustainability claims were deceptive and therefore potentially amounted to unfair practices.³

As sustainability expectations rise, good intentions alone are no longer enough. Properties must be able to demonstrate what they are doing, how they are doing it, and what results they have achieved.

The business cost of losing guest trust

The consequences of weak sustainability claims extend far beyond reputation. Greenwashing significantly undermines consumer trust,¹³ and according to the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, 67% of travelers encounter misleading environmental claims during hotel stays.¹⁴

When guests discover that a sustainability claim is exaggerated or unsupported, they do not simply question the claim itself. They begin to question the brand's credibility. In hospitality, that loss of trust can affect OTA reviews, loyalty enrollment, repeat bookings, and word-of-mouth recommendations.

The financial impact can compound quickly. Review scores and guest sentiment influence booking decisions and overall performance on OTA and review platforms.¹⁵ When sustainability claims are challenged publicly, the resulting loss of trust can affect conversion rates, repeat bookings, and long-term brand perception.

[3] European Commission. (2021). Screening of Websites for 'Greenwashing': Half of Green Claims Lack Evidence. European Commission Press Release.

[13] Chen, Y-S. & Chang, C-H. (2013). Greenwash and green trust: The mediation effects of green consumer confusion and green perceived risk. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 114(3), 489–500.

[14] Hospitality Academy (2025) Greenwashing in Hospitality: How to Spot It and Why It's Hurting the Industry

[15] Oxmaint AI (2026) How Hotel Maintenance Impacts OTA Reviews & Ratings

CASE STUDY

When sustainability claims fail scrutiny

In March 2024, the Netherlands Authority for Consumers and Markets ruled that Booking.com's Travel Sustainable program was a possibly misleading sustainability claim. The regulator concluded that the label could give travelers the impression that participating accommodations were sustainable, even though that had not been sufficiently substantiated.¹⁶

Booking.com responded by discontinuing the program and shifting toward third-party sustainability certifications from March 25, 2024. In March 2024, the Netherlands Authority for Consumers and Markets ruled that Booking.com's Travel Sustainable program was a possibly misleading sustainability claim. The regulator concluded that the label could give travelers the impression that participating accommodations were sustainable, even though that had not been sufficiently substantiated.

The lesson is not that sustainability labels are ineffective. It is that sustainability claims increasingly require evidence that can withstand both regulatory and consumer scrutiny. If one of the world's largest online travel platforms could not rely on a self-assessed sustainability label, individual properties should be cautious about making claims they cannot independently support.

📌 KEY TAKEAWAY

Credibility is built through evidence, not intent. Sustainability initiatives create value only when guests, platforms, and regulators can verify them. Clear documentation, measurable outcomes, and credible third-party validation are among the most effective ways to build trust in sustainability claims.

^[16] Netherlands Authority for Consumers and Markets (ACM). (2024). Booking.com takes Travel Sustainable program offline following ACM action. ACM.

What Real Sustainability Looks Like Operationally



Sustainability in hospitality means more than installing solar panels or switching to paper straws. It has to work for your staff, your suppliers, and the bottom line, or it won't last.

Sustainability has to contribute to the triple bottom line, a framework that balances environmental, social, and economic outcomes.¹⁷ In practice, that means reducing environmental impact, supporting employees and local communities, and ensuring sustainability initiatives generate measurable business value.

The most successful properties treat sustainability as an operational discipline rather than a marketing initiative. Every sustainability decision should either reduce costs, improve guest experience, generate measurable data, or strengthen credibility with travelers. The framework below provides a practical way to identify where your property is today and the next step.

Tier	Actions	Guest Signal	Marketability
Tier 1: Quick wins	Paper straws, refillable dispensers, linen reuse opt-in, digital receipts via QR Codes	Immediately visible; signals intent at check-in	Tangible, easy to communicate, visible on OTA listing
Tier 2: Operational investments	QR Code digital menus, in-room directories, contactless check-in, local sourcing, zero-waste kitchen, energy-efficient rooms	Reduces friction and improves the guest experience	Generates measurable data for sustainable reporting
Tier 3: Structural commitments	LEED, Green Key, EarthCheck certification; GHG Protocol carbon reporting, wastewater infrastructure	Builds deep trust and long-term credibility	Third-party verified and recognizable to travelers, OTAs, corporate buyers

Table 1: Three-tier framework for hospitality sustainability initiatives by level of complexity, guest impact, and marketability.

[17] Indiana Business Review (2011) The Triple Bottom Line: What Is It and How Does It Work?

Tier 1: Quick wins for any hotel

Tier 1 initiatives are low-cost, highly visible actions that guests see immediately. Refillable dispensers, linen reuse programs, paper alternatives, and digital receipts demonstrate intent without requiring significant operational change.

These actions are not substitutes for deeper sustainability work, but they help establish credibility and create the visible proof points guests expect to see. For a GM at a boutique group, Tier 1 is where the sustainable story starts.

PRO TIP

Green Key is often the most accessible certification pathway for properties beginning their sustainability journey. Recognized by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, it offers a practical starting point for hotels seeking third-party validation without the cost and complexity associated with larger certification programs.^{18,19}

Tier 2: Operational investments

Tier 2 initiatives require greater coordination but generate measurable operational benefits. Digital guest communications, local sourcing programs, energy-efficient room controls, and waste-reduction initiatives all create data that can support sustainability reporting while improving efficiency.

Digital menus, in-room hubs, and checkout receipts delivered via QR Codes are practical Tier 2 starting points because they combine low implementation costs with measurable outcomes. In addition to reducing paper consumption and printing costs, QR Code interactions generate data on guest engagement. This helps operators understand which services, offers, and experiences attract the most attention. For many hotels, QR Codes become one of the few sustainability initiatives that can simultaneously support environmental goals, operational efficiency, and revenue generation.

Other Tier 2 investments, such as local sourcing programs and energy-management systems, create similar benefits by reducing waste, lowering operating costs, and strengthening community relationships. Unlike Tier 1 initiatives, Tier 2 actions produce measurable outcomes that can be tracked, reported, and communicated to guests.

For many multi-property operators, Tier 2 marks the point at which sustainability shifts from a collection of individual initiatives to an integrated operating strategy.

[18] Foundation for Environmental Education. (2024). Green Key International: Participation Cost 2026

[19] US Green Building Council. LEED Certification Fees

Tier 3: Structural commitments

Tier 3 initiatives carry the highest level of credibility because they rely on independent verification. Certifications such as LEED, Green Key, and EarthCheck require external assessment and provide signals that travelers, OTAs, corporate travel programs, and franchise systems recognize and trust.

These investments often require executive sponsorship and long-term planning, but they also create the strongest sustainability credentials. Carbon reporting aligned with the GHG Protocol and infrastructure improvements, such as wastewater management systems, demonstrate a level of commitment that extends beyond marketing claims.

Some organizations go further by conducting a Life Cycle Assessment (LCA), which measures the environmental impact of activities across the hotel's supply chain, from procurement and operations to guest-facing services.²⁰ While an LCA is not a certification, it can strengthen sustainability disclosures by providing a more comprehensive view of environmental impact.

For hospitality brands operating at scale, Tier 3 initiatives provide the evidence needed to support sustainability messaging, satisfy stakeholder expectations, and withstand increasing regulatory scrutiny.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The goal is not to reach Tier 3 immediately. The goal is to start where your property is today and build momentum over time. Properties that succeed with sustainability are not necessarily the ones making the largest investments. They are the ones that consistently turn sustainability initiatives into measurable operational outcomes, guest-facing proof points, and long-term business value.

^[20] Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute (2025). Experimenting with Sustainable Hospitality: A Life Cycle Assessment Analysis of the Set-Up Phase of a Public Hostel in Italy

Measuring and Reporting What You've Done

The most underused competitive advantage in hospitality sustainability is keeping score and showing your work. Sustainability initiatives create value when they are measured consistently, reported transparently, and communicated at the moments that matter most to guests. Properties that track progress and communicate it credibly are better positioned to convert sustainability investments into guest trust, booking confidence, and long-term loyalty.

Six metrics and how to report them

Hotels that integrate measurable sustainability practices into daily operations and communicate them transparently are better positioned to build guest trust. Research suggests that travelers become skeptical when sustainability claims lack specificity, appear overly promotional, or lack credible evidence.²¹

Each metric in the scorecard below connects an operational outcome to a reportable claim and marketing channel.

Metric	What to measure	How to report	Channel
Paper reduction	Reams eliminated vs. prior year; % touchpoints digitized	Annual sustainability page + in-room QR Code	Website, OTA listing, in-room QR Codes
Energy per room per night	kWh per occupied room night, YoY change vs. benchmark	In-stay impact page	QR Codes in post-stay email, investor deck
Food waste diverted	Kg diverted; % composted or donated	F&B menu callout	Menu QR Code, social, Google Business Profile (GBP)
Local sourcing %	% of F&B ingredients sourced within 150 miles	Menu story + sourcing page	Menu QR Code, OTA listing, social
Carbon per room night	kg CO ₂ e per occupied room night vs. prior year	Annual sustainability report	Website, investor/franchise deck
Guest participation rate	% opting into linen reuse, paperless checkout, carbon offset	Quarterly guest comms + loyalty program update	Post-stay email, loyalty portal

Table 2: Sustainability scorecard showing recommended sustainability metrics, reporting formats, and communication channels.

[21] Sage Journals. (2025). Green hotels and greener choices: Impact of environmental claims on traveler perceptions

🔗 PRO TIP

For properties considering Tier 2 and Tier 3 initiatives, align carbon measurement with the Hotel Carbon Measurement Initiative (HCMI), a recognized methodology for calculating hotel carbon emissions.²² Water measurement should follow the Hotel Water Measurement Initiative (HWMI), while waste reporting should align with the Hotel Waste Measurement Methodology (HWMM).^{23,24}

Properties looking to benchmark performance against peers can also use the Cornell Hotel Sustainability Benchmarking Index (CHSB).²⁵

Three reporting channels by guest journey stage

Collecting sustainability data is only the first step. To create value, properties must communicate progress at the right moments in the guest journey. Different reporting channels serve different objectives, from influencing booking decisions before arrival to reinforcing loyalty after checkout.

- 1. Pre-stay: influence the booking decision.** Pre-stay reporting reaches guests while they are still choosing between properties. Certification badges on OTA listings, sustainability statistics on Google Business Profiles, and booking-confirmation emails that highlight sustainability achievements help establish credibility before arrival.
- 2. In-stay: reinforce the experience.** In-stay reporting turns sustainability from a claim into something guests can see and verify. QR Code-powered impact pages, menu callouts highlighting local sourcing, and staff equipped to answer relevant questions help transform guests into advocates.
- 3. Post-stay: strengthen loyalty.** Post-stay reporting extends the sustainability story beyond checkout. Impact summaries, loyalty-program communications, and annual guest-facing sustainability updates help maintain engagement and reinforce the property's commitment over time.

Together, these touchpoints ensure sustainability is communicated throughout the guest journey rather than appearing as a single marketing message.

🔗 PRO TIP

For sustainability reports prepared for investor relations, corporate travel RFPs, or franchise compliance, align your disclosures with the GRI Sustainability Reporting Standards. Used by thousands of organizations globally, GRI provides a common framework for translating operational sustainability metrics into the formats expected by investors, corporate buyers, and other stakeholders.²⁶

[22] World Sustainability Hospitality Alliance (2022) Hospitality sector updates carbon tool to further industry-wide, robust approach to environmental measurement.

[23] World Sustainability Hospitality Alliance. (2022) Hotel Water Measurement Initiative (HWMI)

[24] World Sustainability Hospitality Alliance. (2022) Hotel Waste Measurement Methodology

[25] Cornell Hospitality Research. (2023). CHSB Index. Cornell School of Hotel Administration.

[26] Global Reporting Initiative. (2021). GRI 1: Foundation 2021 — GRI Universal Standards. Global Sustainability Standards Board (GSSB).

How to Communicate Sustainability Without Sounding Like a Press Release



Most sustainability practices are genuine. Sustainability marketing fails when the communication is corporate, vague, or impossible for guests to verify. Four principles separate messaging that earns trust from messaging that gets ignored.

Principle 1: Numbers beat adjectives

“We eliminated 40,000 single-use plastic items last year” is more persuasive than “we are committed to reducing our environmental footprint.”

Effective sustainability communication relies on specific, measurable claims rather than broad aspirations. Travelers increasingly expect evidence in the form of dated actions, quantified outcomes, and clear attribution to the property they are evaluating. If sustainability messaging is perceived as greenwashing, it can damage brand attitude, brand trust, and consumer loyalty.²⁷

Principle 2: Translate operations into guest impact

“We reduced water consumption by 18%” is an operational fact.

“Your towel reuse saves 18 liters of water per stay” is a guest story.

The underlying achievement is the same, but the second version helps guests understand their role in the outcome. Eco-conscious guests who feel their stay made a difference are more likely to return and engage with sustainability initiatives in the future.²⁸

[27] Bernard, S., Chen, H. & Rahman, I. (2024). Greenwashing practices and its consequences in hospitality industry: A systematic literature review. *Janaprakash Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 2, 121-131.

[28] Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute (2025). *Assessing Green Practices on Eco-Friendly Hotel Customer Loyalty: A Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling and Fuzzy-Set Qualitative Comparative Analysis Hybrid Approach*

The 4Cs of sustainability marketing

Belz and Peattie argue that sustainability marketing should focus less on what a company offers and more on what a customer experiences. Their 4Cs framework provides a useful lens for hospitality operators communicating sustainability efforts.²⁹

4Cs	What it means in hospitality
Consumer solution	The specific outcome a guest experiences, such as fresher air, locally sourced food, or faster paperless check-in
Consumer cost	The full cost of consumption, including environmental impact, not just the room rate
Convenience	Making sustainable choices the easiest option for guests
Communication	Sharing evidence at the moment of experience, not only at the moment of booking

Table 3: The 4Cs sustainability marketing framework adapted for hospitality.

Principle 3: The physical space outperforms the website footer

A QR Code on a dining table linking to a sourcing story, paper-reduction statistics, or third-party certification is more credible than a sustainability paragraph in the website footer. Credibility is built at the point of experience, when the guest is most receptive.

In-stay sustainability communication earns a different quality of trust than pre-stay marketing. A guest who scans a QR Code at breakfast to read about the local farm that supplied their eggs is not evaluating a claim; they are experiencing the direct outcome of the property's sustainability measures.

For multi-property operators, this is where QR Code infrastructure creates value beyond convenience. The same touchpoints that communicate sustainability can improve guest engagement, strengthen review sentiment, and reinforce the property's sustainability story throughout the stay.

[29] Belz, F.-M. & Peattie, K. (2012). Sustainability Marketing: A Global Perspective (2nd ed.). Wiley. pp. 178–195.

Principle 4: Third-party signals over self-reported claims

Certification logos on OTA profiles, booking confirmation emails, and in-room QR Code landing pages reduce the skepticism that self-reported claims generate.

Properties that hold Green Key, LEED, or EarthCheck credentials and do not display them at the booking stage are leaving their strongest trust signal unused.

For a Corporate VP defending a tech and sustainability budget to a CFO, third-party certification displayed at the booking stage is also the clearest available proof that the investment is influencing conversion.

✗ Don't say this	✓ Say this instead
We are committed to protecting the environment.	We eliminated 40,000 single-use plastic items across 18 properties in 2026.
Our hotel is eco-friendly.	We hold Green Key certification, verified by independent auditors. Scan here to see our full impact report.
We care about sustainability.	We reduced food waste by 31% last year — the equivalent of 18,000 meals. Here's how.
Our linen program supports the planet.	Guests who reuse towels save 18L of water per stay. 61% of our guests participated in 2025.
We're working toward a greener future.	Scan here to see our 2026 progress: energy, waste, and sourcing data — updated quarterly.
Our team is passionate about sustainability.	Every front-desk team member completes a 4-hour sustainability training. Ask them about it.

Table 4: Examples of vague sustainability messaging compared with specific, evidence-based alternatives.

The Paperless Property: A Sustainability Win You Can Measure



Going paperless delivers multiple payoffs that matter across the hospitality organization. It reduces operating costs, generates first-party behavioral data, and creates the guest-facing sustainability story that can be measured and communicated.

This section explores how a model 150-room hotel can replace paper-based touchpoints with digital alternatives, reducing waste while creating operational and marketing value.

The paper footprint of a 150-room US hotel

A typical 150-room property generates paper across multiple guest touchpoints, including menus, in-room directories, event programs, receipts, loyalty enrollment forms, and feedback cards.

Each touchpoint carries both a direct printing cost and an ongoing update cost. For multi-property operators, those costs multiply every time menus change, directories are updated, or marketing materials are redistributed.

While exact costs vary by property and operating model, paper-based systems often create recurring expenses that digital alternatives can significantly reduce while improving speed, consistency, and guest access to information. For example, updating a printed menu or in-room directory typically requires redesign, reprinting, and redistribution. In contrast, QR Code-powered content can be updated centrally and reflected across properties almost instantly through a single dashboard.

QR Code touchpoint map: paper out, data in

The table below maps each major paper touchpoint at a sample 150-room US hotel to its QR Code alternative and the first-party data generated by that digital touchpoint.

Paper touchpoint	QR Code replacement	First-party data captured
Printed menu	QR Code digital menu with photos + ordering	Item views, peak times, room type, upsell clicks
In-room directory/compendium	QR Code in-room hub (Wi-Fi, requests, local guides)	Service requests, FAQ clicks, loyalty opt-ins
Event signage & programs	QR Code event page with schedule + timed entry	Attendance, session interest, post-event upsell
Checkout receipt	QR Code digital receipt + rebooking offer	Email capture, post-stay engagement, OTA-to-direct attribution
Loyalty enrollment card	QR Code scan-to-join with personalized welcome	Enrollment source, loyalty tier, consented opt-in
Feedback/survey cards	QR Code instant survey with real-time staff alert	Real-time NPS, room-level satisfaction, service recovery triggers

Table 5: Mapping of common hotel paper touchpoints to QR Code-enabled digital alternatives and the first-party data each touchpoint can capture.

The first-party data dividend: why does it matter now?

Privacy regulations are tightening, and access to third-party data is becoming more restricted. As a result, first-party behavioral data has become one of the most valuable assets in hospitality marketing.³⁰

Every paper touchpoint replaced with a QR Code alternative generates data that the paper version never could and that OTA platforms do not share. QR Code digital receipts, in-room hubs, menus, and loyalty enrollment experiences generate insights into guest preferences, engagement patterns, and booking behavior.

This makes going paperless more than a sustainability initiative. It becomes a foundation for personalization, loyalty growth, and more effective marketing.

Uniqode's survey of 1,000 US consumers found that 83% are willing to share information after scanning a QR Code when data collection is transparent.

In hospitality alone, QR Codes generated nearly 27 million scans in 2025, demonstrating the scale of guest engagement with digital touchpoints.³¹

[30] Ireckonu. (2024). End of Third-Party Cookies and the Rise of First-Party Data for Hotels. Ireckonu.

[31] Uniqode (2026) The State of QR Codes 2026 Report

CASE STUDY

How Marriott Aruba reached 80,000 unique customers with Uniqode as its QR Code partner

When Aruba Marriott Resort needed to eliminate physical menus and guest handouts in 2020, the marketing team deployed Uniqode QR Codes across eight on-property restaurants and multiple guest touchpoints: towel huts, gym schedules, resort maps, COVID testing booking, and Marriott Bonvoy loyalty enrollment.

The result over one year: **150,000** total QR Code scans, **80,000** unique guests reached, and an estimated **\$150,000** in printing costs saved. That saving came primarily from eliminating disposable menu copies that cost \$0.20–\$0.50 per print across eight restaurants running multiple daily covers.

The commercial outcome extended beyond paper reduction. Dynamic QR Code menus updated automatically by mealtime, eliminating the reprint cycle entirely. QR Codes placed at booking touchpoints captured guest interest for island experiences and fed the loyalty pipeline directly.

The Aruba property's experience illustrates the core argument of this section: going paperless at a single resort generates cost savings, guest engagement data, and a loyalty pipeline, all from the same QR Code infrastructure.

Going paperless: Non QR Code solutions

Paperless hospitality does not begin and end with QR Codes. Hotel apps, digital key platforms, mobile check-in systems, and in-room tablets can all replace paper-based guest experiences.

However, these approaches often require app downloads, hardware investments, PMS integrations, or additional guest setup steps. QR Codes remain popular because they reduce adoption friction. Most guests already carry a smartphone, making QR Codes one of the fastest and lowest-cost ways to digitize guest touchpoints at scale.

For many operators, that simplicity makes QR Codes a practical starting point for paperless transformation.

📌 KEY TAKEAWAY

The strongest paperless strategies do more than eliminate printing costs. They create a digital layer across the guest journey that improves convenience, generates first-party data, and provides measurable evidence of sustainability progress.

For hospitality operators, that combination makes paperless infrastructure one of the few sustainability investments capable of simultaneously reducing costs, improving the guest experience, and strengthening marketing performance.

TAKE ACTION

Start Today



The hospitality operators making progress on sustainability are not waiting for a perfect program before taking action. They are measuring what matters, communicating it honestly, and building the trust signals that influence booking decisions.

Three actions can move the needle immediately:

- 1. Complete a paper touchpoint audit.** Identify where paper still exists across the guest journey and where digital alternatives could reduce costs, improve efficiency, and create measurable sustainability outcomes.
- 2. Display existing certifications wherever booking decisions happen.** OTA listings, booking confirmation emails, and guest-facing digital experiences should all reinforce the credibility you've already earned.
- 3. Replace one paper touchpoint with a digital alternative.** A menu, directory, receipt, or feedback card is often enough to begin generating operational insights and guest engagement data.

OTAs will not build guest relationships for you. Greenwashing will not survive increasing scrutiny from travelers, platforms, and regulators. And staying silent about genuine sustainability efforts simply leaves room for competitors to tell a more visible story.

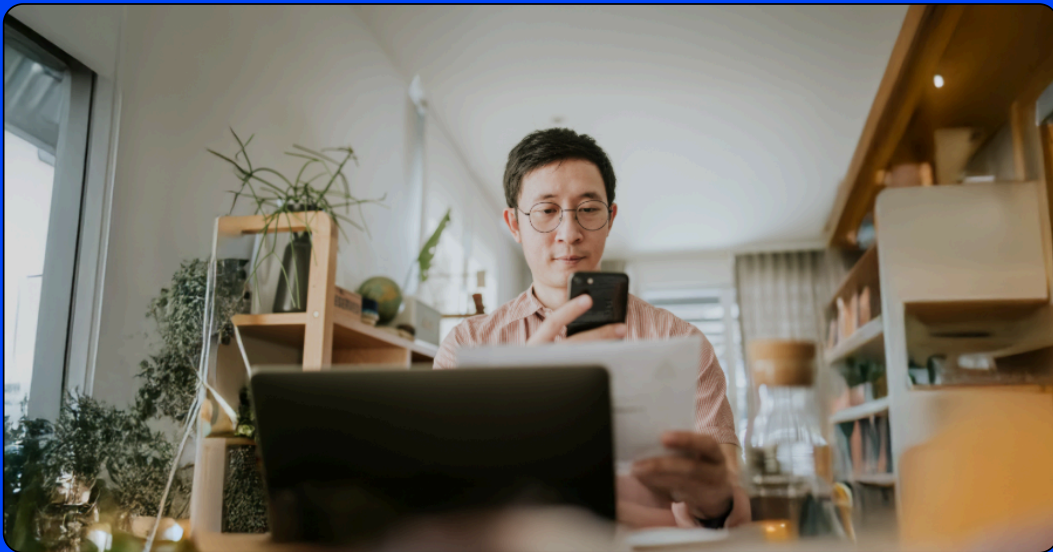
Start with one touchpoint. Measure the outcome. Share the result. Then repeat. Sustainable hospitality is rarely built through a single initiative. It is built through a series of measurable improvements that compound over time.

Ready to take the first step?

Uniqode helps hotel groups, restaurant chains, and venue operators replace paper touchpoints with QR Code-powered guest experiences that reduce printing costs, support sustainability goals, and generate first-party guest data.

Request a demo to see how paperless guest experiences can support your sustainability strategy.

[Request a demo](#)



Appendix

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B. Methodology note

This report draws on publicly available industry research published between 2021 and 2026, including reports from Green Key Global, Booking.com, Cornell Hospitality Research, Global Reporting Initiative, European Commission, and Uniqode. All statistics are cited in-line with superscript reference numbers corresponding to the reference list above.

C. Glossary

Average Daily Rate (ADR)

Average revenue earned per occupied room. The primary metric used alongside occupancy to compute RevPAR.

Net Promoter Score (NPS)

A metric used by the hotel industry to measure customer satisfaction. It is calculated by asking customers to rate their level of satisfaction with their experience and then subtracting the percentage of customers who responded with a negative review from the percentage of customers who responded with a positive review.

Direct Booking %

The percentage of total bookings generated through a property's owned channels — website, phone, app — rather than through OTA platforms that charge commission.

EarthCheck

An independent sustainability certification and benchmarking program for the travel and hospitality industry, recognized by the UN Environment Program.

GHG Protocol

The Greenhouse Gas Protocol — the most widely used international accounting tool for measuring and managing greenhouse gas emissions from private and public sector operations.

Green Key

A globally recognized eco-label awarded to tourism establishments that meet strict criteria for environmental responsibility, operated by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE).

Greenwashing

Making misleading or unsubstantiated claims about the environmental benefits of a product, service, or organization — whether intentionally or through omission.

Guest LTV (Lifetime Value)

Total revenue or profit attributed to a single guest across all stays, ancillary spend, and referrals over their relationship with a property or brand.

Global ecological overshoot

The point at which humanity's annual resource consumption exceeds what the planet can regenerate in a year.

LEED

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design — the most widely used green building rating system in the world, administered by the US Green Building Council (USGBC).

Online Travel Agency (OTA)

A third-party booking platform (e.g., Booking.com, Expedia, Hotels.com) that charges properties 15–30% commission per booking referred.

Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR)

Total room revenue divided by total rooms available. The primary North Star metric for hotel performance is calculated as $ADR \times Occupancy Rate$.

Scope 1/2/3 Emissions

GHG Protocol classifications: Scope 1 covers direct on-site emissions; Scope 2 covers indirect emissions from purchased energy; Scope 3 covers all other indirect emissions, including guest travel and supply chain.