

Environmental management in the lodging and hospitality industries: A review

Environmental management, from basic initiatives to certification schemes in the lodging and hospitality industries, is a relatively new trend which will further grow in prominence in the future. While the trend has increased, there are still mixed optimism and skepticism among academics and industry stakeholders (Best & Thapa, 2011). Given the proliferation of local, national, and international certification schemes, it is not easy for a property or destination to sign up for a certain seal of approval (Pizam, 2008). Also, more research is needed to understand tourist behaviors with respect to purchase decisions based on certified products (Millar & Baloglu, 2011; Tierney, Hunt & Latkova, 2011). In the past several years, there has been an increase in academic research about environmental certifications in the lodging and hospitality industries (Chan, 2011). However, it has not kept in pace with certification programs as well as the industry with respect to adoption. In order to examine contemporary issues in the industry with respect various programs and processes, this report reviews the Green Lodging and Hospitality Conference which was held from November 7-9, 2011 in Orlando, Florida.

This conference was the third annual national conference organized by the University of Florida's Center for Training, Research and Education for Environmental Occupations (TREEO). The conference agenda and planning were assisted by the American Green Lodging and Hospitality Association, and the Green Meeting Industry Council's Florida/Caribbean Chapter. The first conference was hosted in Gainesville, Florida (2008), followed by the second event in Orlando (2009). This conference was an industry-focused event with attendees who were General Managers, Hotel Engineers, Property Owners, Meeting Professionals, Government Agencies, Associations, Media, and Academics. The allure of this conference is the size and specific niche focus on environmental management in the lodging and hospitality industries. While the event's attendance was slightly below the organizer's expectation which was largely due to the sluggish economy; approximately 150 attendees including exhibitors from 16 U.S. states were in attendance.

This year's conference theme was Making Hospitality Green with Envy, which emphasized on the continued need for the lodging and hospitality industries to refine sustainable processes and practices with respect to environmental management. A major theme was the utilization of green initiatives to increase profitability to the bottom line, with simultaneous reduction in cost and environmental impacts. The overall format of the conference was standard with pre-conference events, opening and closing sessions including breakouts, poster session, and exhibits.

Pre-conference events

The pre-conference consisted of three components scheduled as an all-day event - Tour, Workshop or Community Service. The events were unique and provided value-added to the conference experience as it involved experiential learning, educational tour, and a community service program.

- Sustainable Safari-Tour
 - ✓ Walt Disney World-Environmental overview and behind the scenes tour.
 - Presentation by Disney Environment Department and tour
 - Animal Kingdom tour included the Animal Research Lab and Conservation Station
- The Art and Science of Assessing a Sustainable Lodge-Workshop
 - ✓ Training session to conduct an assessment of a sustainable lodging property with a focus on water, energy, and waste followed by an actual walk-through evaluation at a property.
- Clean the World: Recycling Soap-Saving Lives -Community Service
- Tour of the facility and participation in the process.

Sessions

The opening session of the conference consisted of two speakers. The first speaker was Andy Bray who led the development of the National Sustainable Lodging Network and discussed the utility of this online community of practitioners involved in sustainable practices. Given the type of audience, this network was valuable to learn and join to foster ideas and collaboration. More information can be assessed at www.SustainableLodging.org

The second speaker, Hervé Houdré (General Manager of InterContinental New York Barclay) offered the conference keynote address entitled Sustainable hospitality-A business responsibility and opportunity. His presentation focused on the utility and implementation of sustainable development principles in the lodging industry. He emphasized that the lodging industry is an intensive resource-use sector given the volume of energy consumption and waste generation. Hence, it was paramount that the industry and hoteliers acknowledge the resource use and implement policies and processes to mitigate environmental impacts. He strongly emphasized that sustainability makes business sense and is a shared responsibility, with implementation largely championed by commitment from the top of the organization.

Given his experience in the lodging sector, he noted various constraints that owners and employees have reported to implementation of sustainable practices. Basically, owners considered it too expensive; competition not focused on it; and strategy is to accentuate on short term results. Conversely, employees noted lack training and education, and added job responsibility. However, he noted that all such constraints can be negotiated and sustainability initiatives can be implemented as it has been proven to return on financial investment; decrease operating costs; enhance image; increase revenues and improve the value of the property. Moreover, successful implementation can result in increased employee productivity; engagement and pride; retention; and influences customer loyalty. The key

message stressed was that commitment has to be made, and buy-in from managers and staff are essential along with specific goals, measurements, certifications, and standard operating procedures. These issues have been also supported in the academic literature (Best & Thapa, 2011; Chan, 2011).

He also elaborated about his property's corporate social responsibility in developing countries with respect to education, water wells, adopt-a-river, and adopt-a-school programs), and in the local community (community service, charity events, adopt-a-park, tree planting, etc.). He espoused his philosophy based on the *Triple Bottom Line* approach as advocated by John Elkington that focuses on Economic Prosperity (Profit), Social Responsibility (People), and Environmental Protection (Planet) (Elkington, 1997), which has been the commonly accepted perspective by the business community with respect to implementation of sustainable development. Based on this approach, he promoted a new co-edited book with A.J. Singh entitled, *Hotel Sustainable Development: Principles and Best Practices (2011)*, which is published by the American Hotel & Lodging Educational Institute, and the authors of each chapter are predominantly practitioners who are leading sustainable development experts in the hospitality industry. Overall, Hervé Houdré was insightful as he was able to demonstrate and communicate that adopting sustainable practices actually increases the bottom line and customer loyalty.

Concomitantly, leveraging on the *Triple Bottom Line* approach, Kelly Bricker expanded with respect to sustainable tourism certification. During the luncheon, her presentation entitled *The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) Process: A roadmap for action on the Triple Bottom Line* was delivered. She is currently the Chairperson of the GSTC which is a global initiative led by the United Nations Foundation, which is committed to the practice and promotion of sustainable tourism via universal principles and standards. She elaborated that sustainable tourism with its roots in the parental sustainable development paradigm, is important to implement and maintain a balance between the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development. Essentially, sustainable tourism can preserve destinations, revitalize local economies and communities, create jobs and income locally, and assist to achieve the U.N.'s Millennium Development Goals.

Moreover, given the proliferation of numerous local, national, and international certification schemes, Kelly Bricker noted that it was important to focus on universally accepted common criteria. She remarked that the GSTC was established with the input and global outreach to 80,000 constituencies and 2,000 experts which were conducted in five rounds during an 18-month process. Collectively, 4,500 existing criteria were examined and ultimately consensus was achieved with 37 criteria within 4 pillars:

- Demonstrate effective sustainable management.
- Maximize social and economic benefits to the local community and minimize negative impacts.
- Maximize benefits to cultural heritage and minimize negative impacts.
- Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts.

She emphasized that with common criteria, the supply and demand sectors would benefit given the trust and value in certification. Also, this global certification scheme ensures consumers with respect to integrity, clarity and easy access to certified businesses. For example, there are over 3,000 hotels certified to GSTC aligned standards within the Travelocity Green Hotel Program. Travelocity is the only online travel agency with in-path tagging, and has been a major conduit to mainstreaming sustainable tourism.

Moreover, customers offer better reviews of green hotels; and 75% of Travelocity customers noted that their hotel purchase would be influenced if the property was a green hotel. Hence, the importance of certification makes business sense and adds to the profitability of the business. Currently, the GSTC is active in all U.N. World Tourism Organization's regions with a diverse membership portfolio of tourism and hospitality related industries. Additionally, the criterion has been adopted by more than 170 U.S. cities. Members are benchmarked into three categories *GSTC-Recognized*, *GSTC-Approved*, and *GSTC-Accredited* programs. More information can be assessed at www.gstccouncil.org

Overall, the conference was segmented into eight major themes including concurrent sessions. Certifications followed by Corporate Social Responsibility were the dominant themes for most of the breakout sessions too. While it is not feasible to review each breakout session, however, a highlight session-*The World of Sustainable Hospitality Certification*, included six representatives from different certification schemes who discussed their programs:

- Fredrik M. Realbuto, Director, Audubon *GreenLeaf Program*, Audubon International
- Cerise Bridges, Certification Specialist, *Green Seal*
- Ray Burger, CHA MHS, Pineapple Hospitality, *EcoRooms & EcoSuites*
- Anthony Pollard, Managing Director, *Green Key Global*
- Dr. David W. Randel, Lead Advisor in Florida, *Sustainable Travel International*
- Mike Hess, P.E., LEED AP, USGBC's *LEED* exp. U.S. Services Inc.

This session was highly interactive as each certification scheme was presented and discussed by the audience. While it was clear that all the presented certification schemes had the basic premise of mitigating environmental impacts and positively impacting the bottom line. However, each program had common tenants with variations in cost, process, and program evaluation (More information about each program can be assessed in their respective website). Nevertheless, it was acknowledged that the quantity of such certification programs did create confusion among the supply sector (e.g., hospitality service providers) and consumers. Given the variety of programs, the GSTC's approach as discussed earlier attempts to be a holistic program with broad applicability. However, items specific to the lodging industry such as environmental monitoring (e.g., water consumption, energy use, etc.) were lacking and noted as a limitation, especially for the lodging community. The issue of certification will continue to expand in the future with more programs introduced in the marketplace. It will be interesting to see which programs will have mainstream adoption in the future.

The closing session comprised of featured speakers based on three varying topics and perspectives. First, Katherine Manfredi representing Green Meeting Industry Council- Florida/Caribbean Chapter offered a step-by-step guide for a sustainable event management tool for suppliers and planners. The meetings and convention industry is resource-intensive, and there is a major need to be more *green* in practice as demonstrated by examples. She noted that it takes less energy to wash 14,000 glasses than to make and dispose one plastic cup. Also, a 2.5 day conference event with 500 attendees would result in the average use of 6,250 plates, 8,750 napkins, 7,500 cups or glasses, and 9,000 cans or bottles. In order to minimize environmental as well as social impacts, the sustainable event management tool (SEMT) provides event professionals and the hospitality industry with a framework for three types of

sustainability measurements: 1) water and energy usage, waste creation, and community impacts; 2) event and organization impacts into carbon emissions; and 3) process measurement of organization's sustainable commitment and performance. This tool was developed based on various industry standards and global input from Meetings Professional International members. More information can be assessed at www.sustainableeventtool.com

Dina Belon representing the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC)-Central Florida Chapter presented a timeline and overview of an innovative approach to provide visitors in the region with a sustainable experience via *Green Destination Orlando* community-focused program. Her presentation was entitled, *Green destination program: Piloting to improvements*. This pilot program and its framework are in partnership with the Orlando/Orange County Convention and Visitors Bureau and the USGBC. Since the USGBC is focused on sustainable planning, design, construction and operations, this program is based on reducing the environmental footprint within hospitality facilities with a focus on energy, water efficiency, waste reduction, sustainable and local purchasing, and alternative transportation options. The program is open to all hospitality businesses including restaurants, shopping venues and theme parks, and consists of a stepwise process based on inventory analysis and subsequent annual environmental management improvements. A score card with 100 total available points is awarded based on a color scheme rating of Blue, Teal, Green, and Evergreen. Ultimately, the outcome is to become certified as a LEED (*Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design*) property designated by the USGBC. Orlando is a major international destination and the prospect of greening the tourism and hospitality industry is a primary undertaking given the multitude of business stakeholders. This pilot program is currently being used as a blueprint for other U.S. cities. More information can be assessed at www.usgbc-cf.org

The final speaker, Shawn Seipler, Executive Director for *Clean the World Global* offered an inspiring presentation entitled, *Planner and hotel partner programs-Upcycling to a cleaner world*. His is the co-founder of the organization based in Orlando, Florida. This non-profit organization works in partnership with hotels via their Hospitality Recycling Partners Program to *upcycle* slightly-used soap and bottled amenities which are collected and processed using environmentally-friendly techniques in their facility. The processed products are distributed largely to developing countries to prevent deaths due to respiratory infection and diarrheal disease. Since its establishment, he reported that over 550 tons (1.1 Million lbs.) of soap, shampoo and other amenities were collected and distributed. More specifically, 10 million bars of soap have been distributed to North American homeless shelters and missions, and to more than 45 countries such as, Haiti, Mexico, India, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Nicaragua, Mali, Mongolia, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Albania and Armenia. Distribution is based on a working partnership with local and international organizations such as World Vision, Harvest Time International, Children's International, Floating Doctors, Feed the Children, The Salvation Army, Mission Possible, etc. The organization is currently working with more than 1,300 hotels in 50 U.S. states and 10 provinces in Canada, and includes major international brands such as, Starwood Worldwide, Carlson Hotels, Hilton Worldwide, World Disney World, Caesars Entertainment, Mandarin Oriental Corporate, Marriott Vacation Club, Preferred Hotel Group, etc. This social enterprise organization is saving lives based on discarded hotel soap and shampoo products in North America. This simple idea and turnaround is a remarkable initiative, and it is gratifying to learn that additional hotel properties are joining the movement. More information can be assessed at www.cleantheworld.org

Posters and exhibits

There were six posters displayed with two related to research at a U.S. site which were case studies about a hotel's green program challenges, and management of catering overproduction at a wine & food festival. Four posters focused on: 1) certification and ecolabeling issues, and 2) implementation of environmental sustainable practices. Research was largely conducted at international sites in Thailand, China, Costa Rica, Canada, and the Caribbean region. For example, research examined whether the use of tourism ecolabel was an effective marketing strategy for promoting tourism products in Jiuzhai Valley National Park in China, and Lapa Rios Ecolodge in Costa Rica. In Phuket (Thailand), perceived barriers in implementing environmental sustainability practices were assessed. While manager's perceived motives, barriers, and outcomes to implementation of environmental sustainable practices were examined among nineteen countries in the Caribbean region. The conference also hosted 15 exhibitors that ranged from Publishers (American Hotel & Lodging Educational Institute); Associations (Florida Restaurant & Lodging Association); Multinationals (Procter & Gamble); Government (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency), and other businesses with a focus on green products. The exhibits offered an opportunity for attendees to learn about new and innovative products in the marketplace.

Conclusion

The greening of the tourism and hospitality industries has become popular in the past few years with the introduction of various certification schemes. While the trend for certification among properties and destinations has increased, however, there is still a mixed understanding among consumers given the lack of consistent awareness and knowledge. Additionally, corporate social responsibility within the rubric of sustainable tourism has taken a major new dimension in the tourism and hospitality industries. This conference offered insightful industry perspectives with respect to sustainable practices, certification schemes and process, and corporate social responsibility initiatives.

As academics, it is essential to attend industry-based conferences to understand new and emerging issues that will further strengthen research to assist the industry. While the academic culture is to present and attend academic conferences, it is paramount to shift this mindset and also present research and interact with industry stakeholders at their respective venues. Academic research in the tourism and hospitality industries is generally applied in perspective with managerial and theoretical implications. However, knowledge transfer from the academic community to industry stakeholders is very minimal, especially from leading academic journals. Also, it is plausible that such research is largely consumed within the limited academic community (Frechtling, 2004). Hence, there is a dire need to actively engage (e.g., conferences) with the industry community beyond consulting opportunities.

In conclusion, the planning for the fourth annual National Green Lodging and Hospitality Conference is currently underway with respect to the agenda, dates, and venue. The tentative location is expected to be Atlanta, Georgia. Information about this upcoming event and past conferences can be assessed at www.greenlodgingconference.com

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