

HOTELS

PASSION FOR HOSPITALITY

By [Barbara Bohn](#) on 1/15/2018

“For hotels, the nonsense about sustainability performance starts in the rooms,” Onno Poortier, a longtime hotelier and co-founder of Now, an initiative calling for accountability around sustainability, said in a speech at ILTM Cannes in December. “Greenwash and poor environmental and social performance are no longer acceptable. If our customers and guests have to tell us to be sustainable, then we’re too late.”

Many hotel companies track such items as water usage and energy performance in different ways and to varying degrees. But for many others, good intentions around laundering the bathroom towels are belied by the thermostat and the source of the power that chills the room (even when the guest isn’t there).

Measurement and benchmarking, backed up with increasingly cost-effective and innovative alternatives in building materials, design and operations, and leveraging the Internet of Things, are critical. Just as critical, say the firms that help hotels track that data, is starting the sustainability discussion early.

“Smart businesses do get the fact that if you do not address these issues they will come back and hit you on the bottom line,” says Stewart Moore, CEO of EarthCheck, a benchmarking and certification advisory group. “It’s always been difficult because these issues have never been mandated. You don’t have to be a good operator. You don’t have to ‘do’ sustainability, even though there are some compliance obligations depending on which economy you’re in.” That means that “the majority of operators don’t have good data” on exactly how big their carbon footprint is, he says. “And you can’t manage what you don’t collect.”



The Ion Adventure in Iceland: “In our process more we like to peel it back, to find out what we don’t need, and use less in materials,” says Tryggvi Thorsteinsson, co-founder of Minarc, an architecture and design firm that focuses on sustainable materials and design.

Start at the beginning

“In order to make any meaningful progress, the decisions (to be sustainable) need to be made at the very beginning of the hotel development cycle,” says Eric Ricaurte, founder of Greenview, a Singapore-based consulting firm that specializes in measurement of carbon and other energy performance indicators for hospitality companies. “The question is, how do we get sustainability into the discussion among hotel owners and the development community?”

Ricaurte says that while some owners actively prioritize sustainability, often a brand’s sustainability team will enter the discussion long after the budget has been committed and design decisions made. And sometimes, he says, “because this is just the nature of it, the hotel development people from the brands have a disincentive to talk about this because they want to do the deals. And their concern is the more hurdles you put up, or barriers, someone might just go to another brand.”

Just about every hotel company has sustainability goals, however: Marriott International’s Serve 360 platform, launched in November, uses United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals to prioritize responsible operations from development to supply chain, including a goal to reduce, at each hotel property, water usage by 15%, carbon by 30%, waste by 45% and food waste by 50%, by 2025.

“One of the biggest challenges we’re facing is making sure we have a high-quality data collection process in place that fits each of our systems, across the world,” says Denise Naguib, vice president of sustainability and supplier diversity. “It can be tricky to get the data that we need to support these goals. On both sides of the company, we have worked for many years on our water and carbon goals – but waste, for example, is newer territory. We’re now working with our hotels, waste haulers and other vendors to support the collection of this data and ultimately to develop best practices for our hotels.”

In December, Hilton Worldwide introduced its Connected Room: The technology allows a guest to control their room environment from the Hilton Honors app and owners to track property functions and energy information from a mobile dashboard. Digital networks gather information and track performance on connected devices. Currently in beta testing, the goal is to launch this year. “We can start to let technology take over,” says Randy Gaines, senior vice president of operations at Hilton.

‘Logical, environmental approaches’

Sustainability is an “integral, ethical part of brand DNA” at Singapore-based Alila Hotels & Resorts, says CEO Frederic Flageat-Simon. But he agrees that even for Alila, luxury lifestyle owners that support sustainable operations sometimes balk at investing in energy- and water-saving innovations during the design phase. “We have been able to demonstrate to them that you actually do get a return on investment, and when you follow sustainable design practice, what you are really doing is following natural, logical, environmental approaches to the hotel experience and to your resort,” he says.

Another challenge: persuading them to go for accreditation with an organization like EarthCheck, used by Alila to benchmark energy use against its competitive set. Flageat-Simon says its Alila Villas Uluwatu in Indonesia performs 34% above regional average in energy use, 46% above regional average for water use, and 56% above regional average for waste, creating about US\$260,000 in savings annually, or about 25% of the resort’s total utility bill.

“To me there is a myth in saying that if you’re doing an environmentally sustainable hotel, it has to be more expensive than not,” he says. In 2018 the company’s Bali resorts will launch a program called Zero to Landfill with a company that will treat waste.

'Money is not the driver'

"If the hotel can be designed correctly to start with, then the property and the investment of the owner is way ahead," says Alexa Poortier, founder of Now. The organization is introducing an online tool this month that tracks the sustainability and performance of hotels that join it; results are shown in a dashboard to hotel employees and guests.

1 Hotels' sustainable ethos was explored more fully with the 1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge, the brand's first new-build, including water capture, wind power, bird safety, solar gain and integrated landscaping, says Donna Rodriguez, vice president of marketing at parent SH Group. "All of these factors required small incremental investments but were also sound business practices and supported our LEED certification." The hotel installed a building management system to monitor and control energy performance, and is undergoing a measurement and verification plan to "more directly contribute to better energy performance and provide useful information to the building operators," she says.

Conscious Hotels, an independent brand in Amsterdam founded in 2009, has three hotels there and will open a fourth, entirely powered by Dutch wind energy, in 2018.

"One reason for maybe not growing as fast as that is that we don't have a large pool of investors that are keen to work together with us in transforming (their) building to the most energy-efficient one could imagine," he says. "So it's always, I wouldn't say a fight, but it's part of the negotiations. Sometimes, and as not being the building owner, you have to compromise on a few things in order to get them to do something and other things – maybe they are not ready to do it, and maybe they are willing to do it afterwards."

He adds, "Money is not the driver. Return on investment is not the driver. The driver is to create cool meeting places, nice hotels where we see people that visit us enjoy the environment."