

# The Green Hotel of the Future

How to embrace sustainability  
throughout your property

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# Introduction

What does it mean to be an eco hotel? As humans, we largely have a shared understanding of sustainability. We know what practices and habits are environmentally friendly, and we know what isn't. As hoteliers, being eco is less easily defined.

In hospitality, 'eco' covers a broad spectrum of philosophies and actions. At one end of the scale, there are 'hard eco' hotels: properties for which sustainability is built into their very core, down to the building materials and design. At the other end of the scale, 'soft eco' hotels are properties that weren't built with sustainability in mind, but are increasingly championing environmentally friendly practices throughout daily operations, from F&B to housekeeping.

This guide is for any hotelier who wants to be more environmentally conscious, regardless of how much your property is already doing, and outlines some of the tangible steps you can make to get there.





# The case for going green

It's an uncomfortable truth that we are carbon footprint enablers. Hotel guests often travel from afar, taking trains, planes and taxis to get to where they want to go, creating a trail of pollution. It all adds up: transportation represents almost a quarter of Europe's greenhouse gas emissions and is also the main cause of air pollution in cities. Everyone, from tech providers to hoteliers to guests, has a responsibility to champion **environmentally friendly practices** to offset the costs of travel.

The good news for hoteliers is that there's a growing demand for eco-tourism and conscious traveling. There's a business case for going green as well as a moral one. Booking.com's 2019 [Sustainability Travel Report](#) found that 72% of travelers believe that we need to act now and make sustainable travel choices. 73% said they were intending to stay in an eco-friendly or green accommodation in the year ahead.

Most guests know that this comes with a premium. But it doesn't have to. The cost of going eco isn't as high as you might think, and it can even cut costs in some areas. Nevertheless, a [Skift report](#) found that 53% are willing to pay more for environmentally responsible providers. Dive into the data and it's much higher in particular demographics. 76% of Millennials and Gen Z from India are willing to pay more for an eco-friendly stay. In China, it's 78%. Going green is a good way to attract a new customer base to your hotel – or appeal to the guests you already have.





# How to be eco

There are hundreds of things your property can do to be more **environmentally conscious**. It can be difficult to know where to start. We've highlighted seven key areas that most hoteliers will be able to action without dramatic overhauls. No rebuilding, no redesigning.

Many of these changes come down to organization. Once you've implemented new processes, they'll become second nature. And don't try to go it alone. Get your team involved. It's likely that some of them will already be green advocates and will have great ideas about how to improve their specific working areas. This is especially true as a new generation enter the workforce, who are more environmentally aware than their predecessors.

A focus on sustainability can also help you attract the best talent – team members who are aligned with your strategic goals as a business. This goes beyond a sanitized CSR policy that's flung up on your website as a box ticking exercise; it has a real business benefit. A more engaged team means any changes you make are more likely to stick, and will have a greater impact than if you're barking orders without accepting input.

Enough of the preamble. Here's what you can do.

# 1

## Go paperless



Being green is something that I know Mews stands for, and we're a Green Globe hotel so that works perfectly. You don't have to print out anything anymore for payments, for reservations... everything is in the cloud."

Carol Domacassé, Reservations Manager,  
The Dylan Amsterdam

Traditional hotel operations use a lot of paper. Even if this paper is recycled (and it usually isn't), it's unnecessary waste in a digital age. The first thing a hotelier can do is to take a long, hard look at their hospitality solution and find out whether it enables **paperless processes**.

A guest who stays at a Mews-powered hotel can do so without a single piece of paper being printed. Digital registration cards are a part of online check-in, and Mews Payments sends automatic email receipts instead of printing physical copies. Much of a hotel's paper waste comes from printing out daily reports, often for morning management meetings. Again, there's no need. Reports can be automatically emailed to relevant parties every morning, or even better, dynamic dashboards like Mews Analytics and PowerBI provide the most up-to-date data and are faster to prepare.

A quick glance around your hotel's reception and back office might reveal some of the telltale signs of old-fashioned practices. Big piles of reports printed out as backups in case of a fire or a power outage? You don't need it. A cloud system can easily run on a smartphone. A messy desk full of staplers and paper clips to keep bills and receipts together? Again, no need. If your front desk team are still asking, "Would you like an envelope with that?", you're definitely not eco-conscious.

Housekeeping is another common area for paper waste. Most shifts start with printouts of the day's tasks, which housekeepers mark off manually as they work, and which might eventually find their way to front of house where the information can be updated. It's inefficient, and it's unnecessary. There are plenty of good housekeeping software solutions you can use, including the Mews housekeeping app, which digitalize the entire task-management process. Zero fuss, zero paper.

# WestCord Hotels



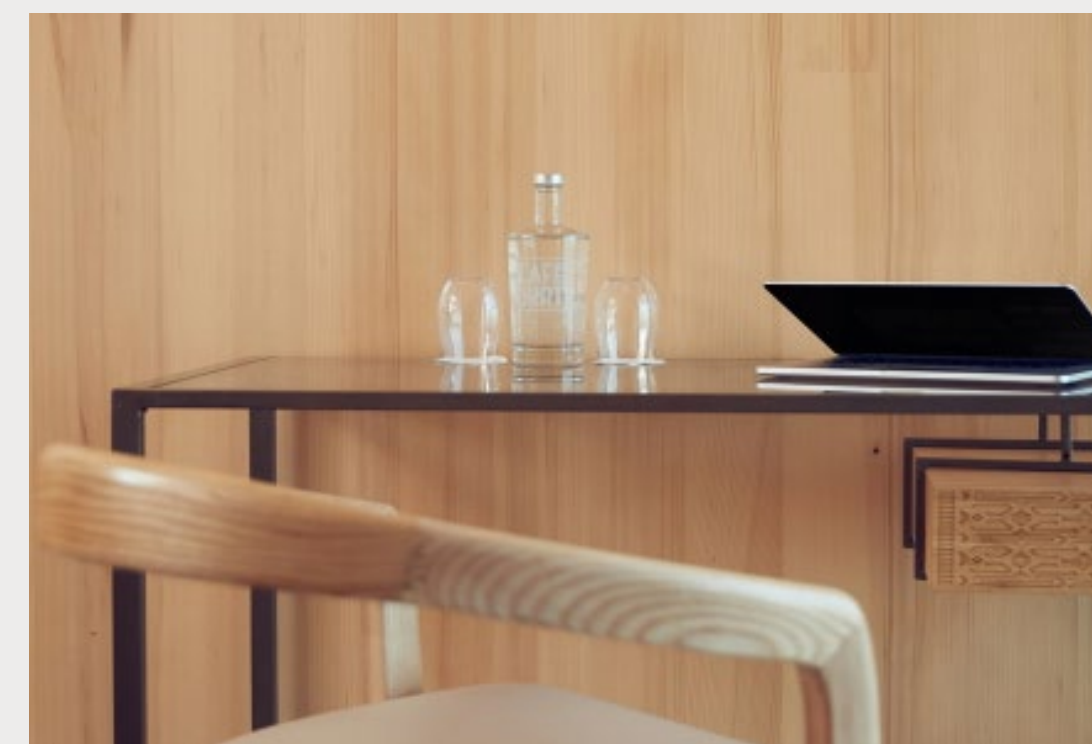
We are convinced that working sustainably is the future. Our clients also like to see that we're focusing on sustainability. And we are happy to invest in that. We can already see the use of gas decreasing, as well as water and power. That's good for the environment and the company."

**Edo Garretsen, General Manager,**  
WestCord Hotel Delft

**WestCord Hotels** is a chain of 16 hotels that has a commitment to operating sustainably, with 13 of their properties certified by Green Key.

Their sustainable activities include:

- + Installing water savers in showers and taps, plus a sophisticated water irrigation system that uses rainwater and greywater to water the garden and plants
- + Installing solar panels, charging points for electric vehicles, and LED lighting
- + Staff training to encourage environmentally friendly practices
- + On-site waste separation, including glass, plastic, paper, batteries and more
- + Using eco-friendly cleaning and laundry products
- + Organic, local and fair-trade produce served at restaurants





# 2

## Improve energy and water efficiency

Changing energy provider for your business isn't as easy as changing it for your home. But although it's something that typically falls down the priority list, it's never as painful as you expect. And it's well worth doing. **Green energy** (energy from renewable sources like wind and solar) is cheaper and more widely available than ever, and there's a good chance you can make cost savings as well as reducing your environmental impact.

Hotels can save as much as 40% on energy bills and up to 20% on water bills just by switching suppliers. With energy consumption in hotels expected to rise by 10-25% in the next few years – driven largely by guests bringing more devices with them – there's no better moment than now to start looking into cheaper, greener providers.

When it comes to reducing energy consumption, modern PMSs are already doing a small amount to help: cloud-based solutions consume less energy than local servers and use a cleaner energy mix too. A Berkeley Lab study found that if US businesses were to shift their key software to the cloud (email, CRM, and productivity software such as MS Office), the primary energy footprint could be reduced by as much as 87%. That's a massive amount.





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There are plenty of things you can do to reduce the amount of energy and water used by your property:

- + **Use smart key cards** that activate energy-using items like lights and the TV – this means it doesn't matter if a guest forgets to turn something off, as it'll automatically switch off once they've taken their key to leave the room
- + **Install motion sensors** in public areas like hallways and staff areas like break rooms, and even in guest rooms if you're not using smart key cards – this can save upwards of 30% on lighting costs
- + **Change your lightbulbs and signs** to energy efficient LED lighting and save up to 50% on electricity
- + **Optimize your HVAC system** (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) through smart climate control that adjusts depending on occupancy and demand – even a one degree adjustment can save up to 8% in HVAC energy use
- + **Consider rain water harvesting** to combat water costs

Many hotels have enlisted guests to help, challenging the notion that sheets and towels need to be changed and cleaned every day. Take the Amsterdam Teleport Hotel. They give guests the option of swapping housekeeping for a free pizza in order to reduce their energy consumption. Saving the world through pizza is something we can definitely get on board with, and guests usually only need a small incentive in order to act.

Accor properties ask customers to reuse their towels, with the savings passed on to fund tree planting. This simple action means that one tree is planted every minute. This is part of a wider CSR program, Planet 21, which runs across the entire Accor group and sets out mandatory benchmark actions for hotels to meet. Through this program, 1,882 Accor hotels have rolled out food waste programs, 1,218 have created their own urban vegetable gardens, and 7.2 million trees have been planted.

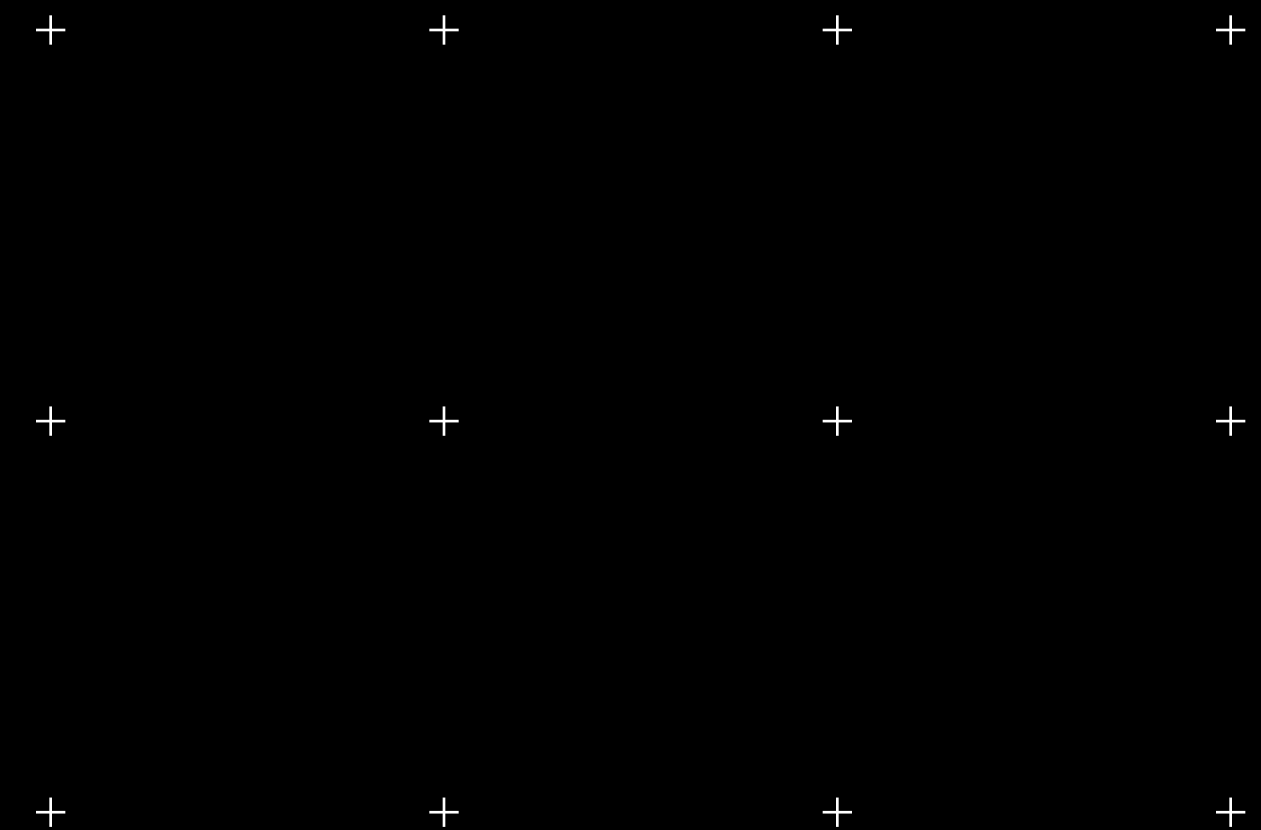
The success of schemes like this depends on buy-in from your team and clear, actionable goals. If you set a target to reduce the energy spend on laundry by 20%, your housekeeping team need to be properly informed. If they aren't, they may end up cleaning rooms and replacing towels anyway – so make sure your policies are clear internally as well as externally.

# 3

## Eliminate single use plastics and other waste

Few items demonstrate the eco mindset shift better than tiny shampoo bottles. When we were younger, they were a fun novelty, one of the little perks of a hotel stay. Today, with a rising awareness of plastic pollution, tiny toiletries are experiencing something of a backlash. The move to larger, **refillable bottles** is one of the easiest things you can do to eliminate plastic turnover, alongside other easy actions like getting rid of plastic straws.

It's possible to eliminate single use plastics entirely. The Opéra Liège hotel in Paris was the first hotel in France – and one of the first in the world – to do exactly that. In a normal year, the hotel threw away around 55,000 miniature bottles of shampoo and body wash. That's an awful lot. To combat this waste, their bottles are being replaced with innovatively designed soap bars that can be used to wash hair, hands and body. Other moves include replacing plastic water bottles with refillable jugs and fountains, providing bamboo toothbrushes, and using biodegradable bin liners made of starch.





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Of course, switching to environmentally friendly products typically means an increase in costs. For the Opéra Liège, the rise was 20%. However, this could be covered by only a 2% rise in room price, which, given that so many are willing to pay more for sustainable stays, is more than a fair trade off.

Although our priority should be to eliminate or reduce consumption, it isn't always possible. For any waste you do generate, whether it's plastic, paper, textiles or anything else, recycle whenever you can. Check with your local authorities what recycling services are available and make sure you have a clear system for guests and staff to follow

# GAIA Hotel



As residents of this planet, it is our duty to treat it with respect and to live in harmony with nature. At the GAIA Hotel, one of our goals is to convey this state of mind to our team members, our suppliers and our guests.”

**Selinda Geyer, Board Member,**  
GAIA Hotel

**GAIA Hotel** is a 4-star hotel in Basel, Switzerland, that aims to become a zero-waste hotel in the very near future. In 2021 they received an ibex fairstay gold label for sustainability, and their activities include:

- + Running on 100% renewable energy (wind, solar and biomass)
- + Using only organic products
- + Feeding elephants at the local zoo with stale bread
- + Planting over 2,000 trees in partnership with sustainable search engine Ecosia
- + Membership with Bio Hotels and United Against Waste



# 4

## Rethink your food and beverage

When it comes to F&B, these two areas should give you food for thought: **waste and provenance**. Let's start with waste. Almost half of all food served at hotels is wasted, and on average, food waste makes up 28% of a hotel's total waste. These are not small figures.

Breakfast buffets are one of the biggest culprits. In Germany, a study found that 45% of food waste in hospitality is generated by buffets. Switching to an order-based system will reduce waste, but if you're intent on keeping the buffet, studies have shown that actively measuring and monitoring food waste is a vital first step into detecting bad habits and devising prevention measures. Purely by understanding how and where waste happens, staff will begin to naturally change certain behaviors. Of course, measuring waste also tells you if you're ordering too much. If 30% of your buffet food is thrown away, could you reduce your order by a similar amount?





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The next question to ask yourself is: where is your food coming from? Are your suppliers local and sustainable, and do they provide organic produce? Not only does this help your community, it means that ingredients are fresher, with less carbon spent transporting them. And it's also a great selling point. Guests are increasingly interested in sampling local cuisine, so you're likely to see greater uptake in your restaurant and bar.

When it comes to food efficiency, companies like Oddbox have become popular in offices, providing fruit that would otherwise have been discarded, thus helping to reduce water and carbon waste. Could you do something similar for your staff?

Regardless of your own food tastes, make sure you provide varied vegetarian and vegan options. Meat-free diets are increasing in popularity, particularly across the western world. It's estimated that 13 million Brits will be meat-free by the end of 2021 – that's almost 20% of the UK population. If you want to be taken seriously as an eco hotel, your menu needs to reflect sustainable dining choices.

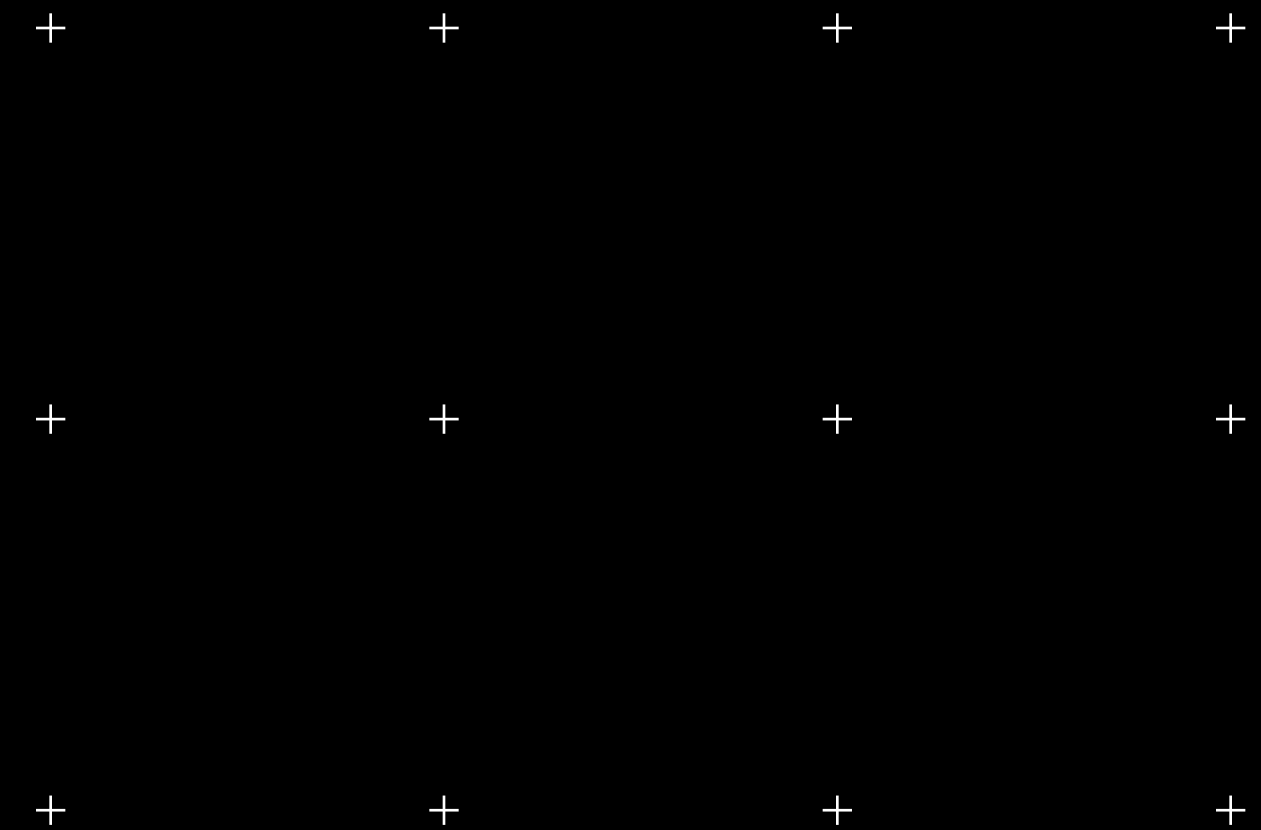
# 5

## Use eco-friendly products

There's a misconception that **cleaning products** need to be loaded with powerful chemicals in order for them to work. In the vast majority of cases, natural cleaning products will perform just as effectively, and the market of eco-friendly options is growing every year. Why are they important? Firstly, they're less harmful for the environment. Toxic chemicals from cleaning products frequently make their way into the ocean and eventually our water supplies, and can also harm local insect populations, most notably our humble friend the bee.

Don't only think about disinfectants. Products such as laundry detergents and even air fresheners are sources of toxins. It isn't only for the good of the environment either: many of these chemicals can be harmful to people, especially those in your housekeeping team who are exposed to them daily. It's also good for guests too, as natural products are typically less irritable.

We've already seen some good examples of sustainable toiletries such as bamboo brushes and toothpaste pellets, but you can go even further. For instance, do you know whether your toilet roll supplier uses virgin trees to manufacture their rolls? It's possible they're even made with unnecessary plastic. By asking these unglamorous questions, you'll make positive steps to operating a more environmentally friendly property.







**Upcycling** is another form of sustainability. Rather than buy all your furniture new, it's better for the environment to repurpose existing furniture. Whether or not this is practical depends on your brand. A large chain might demand consistency which makes this difficult, whereas upcycled furniture could be a strong selling point for boutique hotels, in terms of design as well as sustainability. Hotel Magdas in Vienna, for example, have 78 rooms, each of which is unique thanks to its commitment to upcycling. This encourages guests to return, as each time they can experience a different style room. As an added bonus, upcycling usually supports local tradesman, which leads us neatly on to the next chapter.

# 6

## Support good causes

Change is more powerful when we work together, not alone. Be aware of how your property fits in with your surrounding **community and environment**, and think about what you can actively do to make a difference locally. In booking.com's [Future of Travel Report 2020](#), 55% of people surveyed said they want to see how their money is going back into the local community. 67% wanted their travel choices to support the destination's post-Covid recovery efforts.

Ecomama are a trendy hostel in Amsterdam who offer 'green and conscious hospitality'. In practical terms, that means cradle-to-cradle furniture, fair trade materials, an environmentally friendly water system and a proper recycling program – as well as donations to charity for every night a guest stays with them. Work together with your local businesses and charities to create a sustainable hospitality ecosystem.



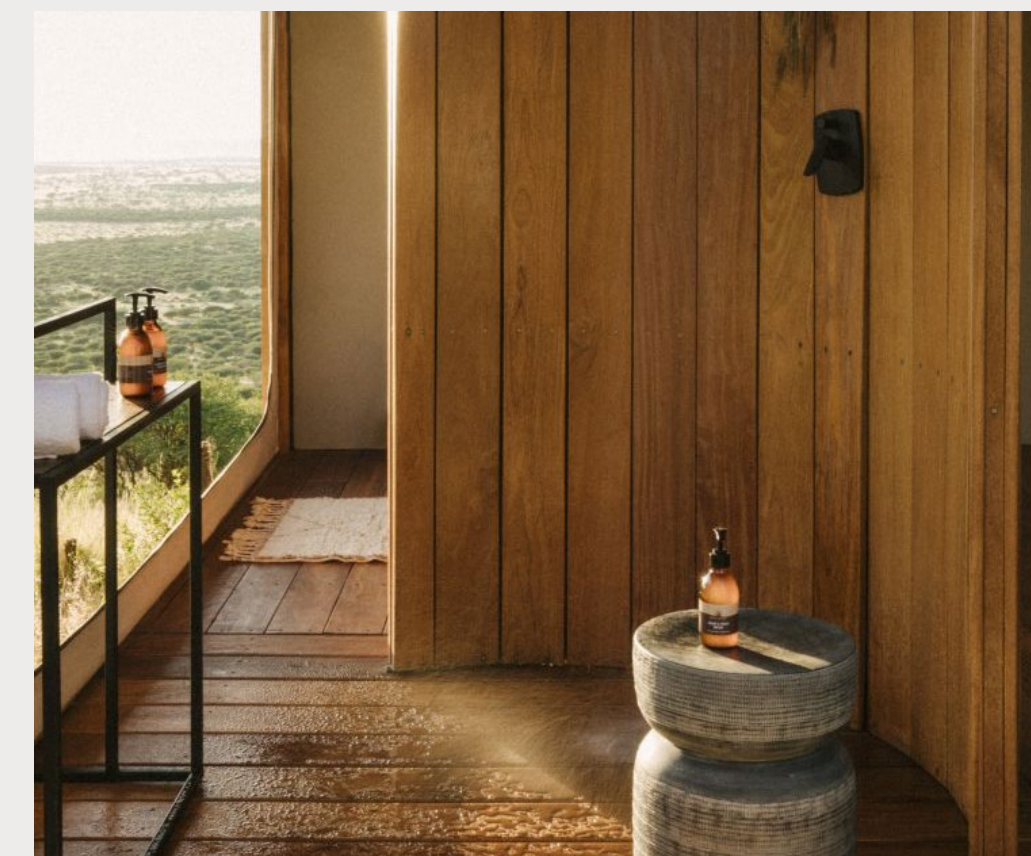
# Habitas Namibia

“We’ve seen our community-minded focus on sustainability and reciprocal learning inspire and bring people together time and again. We’re excited to bring that vision to life to create an enduring positive impact on both our guests and the community that welcomes us.”

**Oliver Ripley, Co-Founder & CEO,**  
Habitas

**Habitas Namibia** is a trendy, luxury hotel set in 50,000 hectares of wildlife reserve. They’re a great example of providing unforgettable experiences for guests, while contributing to the local community. Their sustainable activities include:

- + Providing a safe haven for endangered animals, including giraffes, rhinos and elephants
- + Providing jobs for locals, recruiting 70 people for hospitality training and hiring 14 full time workers
- + Educating guests with films, documentaries and lectures about conservation efforts
- + Serving locally sourced, organic food
- + Building with natural, sustainable materials and decorating with local crafts



# 7

## Get certified

As being green becomes more and more desirable, businesses across all industries are looking to cash in. Cynical businesses market themselves as eco-friendly without any justification, simply because it will attract more customers. As the practice of greenwashing becomes more widespread, so too does the public's awareness of it. The solution? Get **green certification** for your hotel.

The interest among guests is clear: another booking.com survey found that 62% of travelers said they would feel better about staying in an accommodation if they knew it had an eco label. So what are your options? There are dozens of certification programs out there, most of which are broadly the same but may focus more on specific areas or regions. All you need to do is a little research into which is the best fit for your property. A key thing to look out for is whether their standards are recognized by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), whose criteria serve as the global baseline standards for sustainability in travel and tourism. Some of the most popular green certifications are:

### Green Key



To become Green Key certified, you must meet criteria in 13 different areas of sustainability, from energy to F&B to staff involvement, making it a very holistic certification. Next to environmental management, environmental education is in the focus. They've been around for over 25 years and are represented by over 3,000 properties across 60 countries.

### Travelife



A winner at the 2020 Responsible Tourism Awards, Travelife champion the benefits of sustainable business, lowering operating costs, increasing guest satisfaction, and building better community relations. 92% of their members said that certification improved their business.

### Green Globe



Safety, security and sustainability are the focus of Green Globe, who have members in 90 countries worldwide. Once you're a member you'll get access to help and tips about how to meet their certification, and you'll also make cost savings, improve staff satisfaction and attract more guests along the way.

### EarthCheck



Using scientific benchmarking, EarthCheck provide certification across the travel and tourism industry. It's among the most data-driven options, with a focus on transforming a property's operations to become more efficient.



## ”

Now more than ever, the tourism sector has realized how important it is to focus on sustainable operations to become more resilient in our ever-changing world. Certifications like Green Key provide a roadmap to sustainability and will only gain in popularity in the tourism industry – not only among businesses but also among travelers.”

Isabel Lissner, International Coordinator  
Green Key

There are also schemes that don't meet GSTC's standards but may still be worth looking into for your property. A couple of examples are:

**TripAdvisor**  
**GreenLeaders**



The benefit of being a GreenLeader is that you get a special callout on your property profile on TripAdvisor. There are four levels of badges – bronze, silver, gold and platinum – and certification is free.

**Sustainable**  
**Hospitality Alliance**



13 worldwide hotel companies totaling over 30,000 properties are part of the alliance. Their work touches human rights and youth employment as well as climate change and sustainability. One of their big projects is the Hotel Carbon Measurement Initiative, a free tool to benchmark a hotel's carbon footprint and energy usage.

# Get your guests involved

If your business is making efforts to be more sustainable, don't be coy about it. Yes, being **eco-friendly** is beneficial in its own right, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't use it to your advantage. Putting in the effort to go green means you earn the right to talk about it – and the rewards that come with it.

Sustainability sells, particularly among younger generations. If you get certified by a sustainability program, make sure your badge is on show on your website and other marketing materials. Segment your customer database to send targeted emails and ads that promote your green credentials and local community work to the demographics that are most receptive, specifically Millennials and Gen Z.

The more engaged guests are with your green practices, the more effective they'll be. You'll also see knock on effects when it comes to recommendations and publicity, whether it's through social media or word of mouth. Whenever you can, include data. If you're running a recycling scheme, for example, tell guests exactly how they've helped. A sign saying, 'You helped us recycle 84 tons of waste last year – that's enough to fill this hotel 20 times over!' will ensure your guests feel like active participants in your program.





Promoting green activities can also provide other boosts for your business. Cut out OTA commissions by helping to offset a guest's carbon footprint when they book direct with you. This can easily be done by adding a stay-product to each booking that supports a local tree-planting program (for example), with a €1 contribution for every night at your hotel. Or why not offer bikes and biking routes from your property? You'll encourage guests to explore your local area in an eco-friendly fashion while increasing your upsell options.

This is a great way to ensure that 'eco' doesn't just become a virtue signaling exercise for your brand. By engaging guests and staff in the positive impact you're making, and by putting your green successes front and center in your communications, you're reminding everyone – including yourself – that you're actually making a difference.

## Sustainability Champion

# The Student Hotel



Sustainability is about future proofing the world, making sure that we treat our planet in such a way that the next generation can also live great lives.

Our goal is to lead by example, and to show our students, Collab members, guests, and our own staff how everyone can do something to become more sustainable. But also, how creative and innovative you can become by rethinking and reshaping how you live, work and play.”

**Amber Westerborg, Director of Sustainability & Impact,**  
The Student Hotel

**The Student Hotel** is an innovative hospitality brand combining student accommodation, co-working, events and more. Sustainability is at their core, from building design and construction to the minutia of day-to-day operations.

Every year they produce an impact report about their environmental and social performance, and you can see the latest one here. Here’s a snapshot of what they achieved over the last year:

- + Saved up to 3,760 liters of water per room with water saving shower devices
- + Planted 10,000 trees through a partnership with WeForest
- + Saved 820 meals from going to waste by partnering with Too Good to Go
- + Committed to a zero waste timeline for 2030
- + Handed out 3,000 breakfast boxes to those in need, in collaboration with the Salvation Army





# Eco-friendly integrations

You don't have to go it alone. There's a smorgasbord of smart, eco-friendly hotel technology that can help you in your mission to become sustainable. This selection is just to give you a small idea of how **integrations** can help:

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## ALICE

There are a few good housekeeping solutions out there, and ALICE is one of the best. It lets your housekeeping team go fully digital, cutting out paper waste while boosting efficiency and communication. It's part of suite of hotel operations tools that also include maintenance and guest services.

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## Oaky

Remember Teleport Hotel from earlier, who were offering free pizza to guests who skip laundry? They did it through Oaky, a leading upselling tool. You can use it in really imaginative ways to help with sustainability; like Van der Valk Brussels Airport, who let guests rent Fons the goldfish in their room for a €3 fee that goes to charity.

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## MyHotelBike

MyHotelBike is bike rental via a web app. For guests it's simple to rent out a bicycle from the hotel, and for hotel staff it's easy to track occupancy and repair status. Invoicing is all automated, which again means no paper trail. A green way for guests to explore the area without the need for public transport, plus an extra source of revenue for your property.

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## Operto

Operto provide a digital, contact-free guest journey, from smart locks to check-in to room monitoring. As well as removing any physical waste, the automation of HVAC systems helps hotels save up to 30% on utility costs.

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## OptiWatti

A smart energy management solution that can save up to 40% on heating and cooling without the need for any major renovation. OptiWatti can optimize energy usage based on user preferences, weather forecast and electricity prices, and is easily controlled via an app. Radiators, underfloor heating, ceiling panels, air-source heat pumps and boilers can all be easily controlled so that when rooms aren't being used, you're not using unnecessary energy.

# Your hospitality system is key

Technology has a huge part to play in enabling many of the changes necessary to become an eco-friendly hotel. The biggest component in all of this is your **hospitality system**. Moving to a cloud-based solution like Mews is vital, because it connects you to hundreds of digital tech solutions that can help to reduce physical waste, and help your property operate more efficiently.

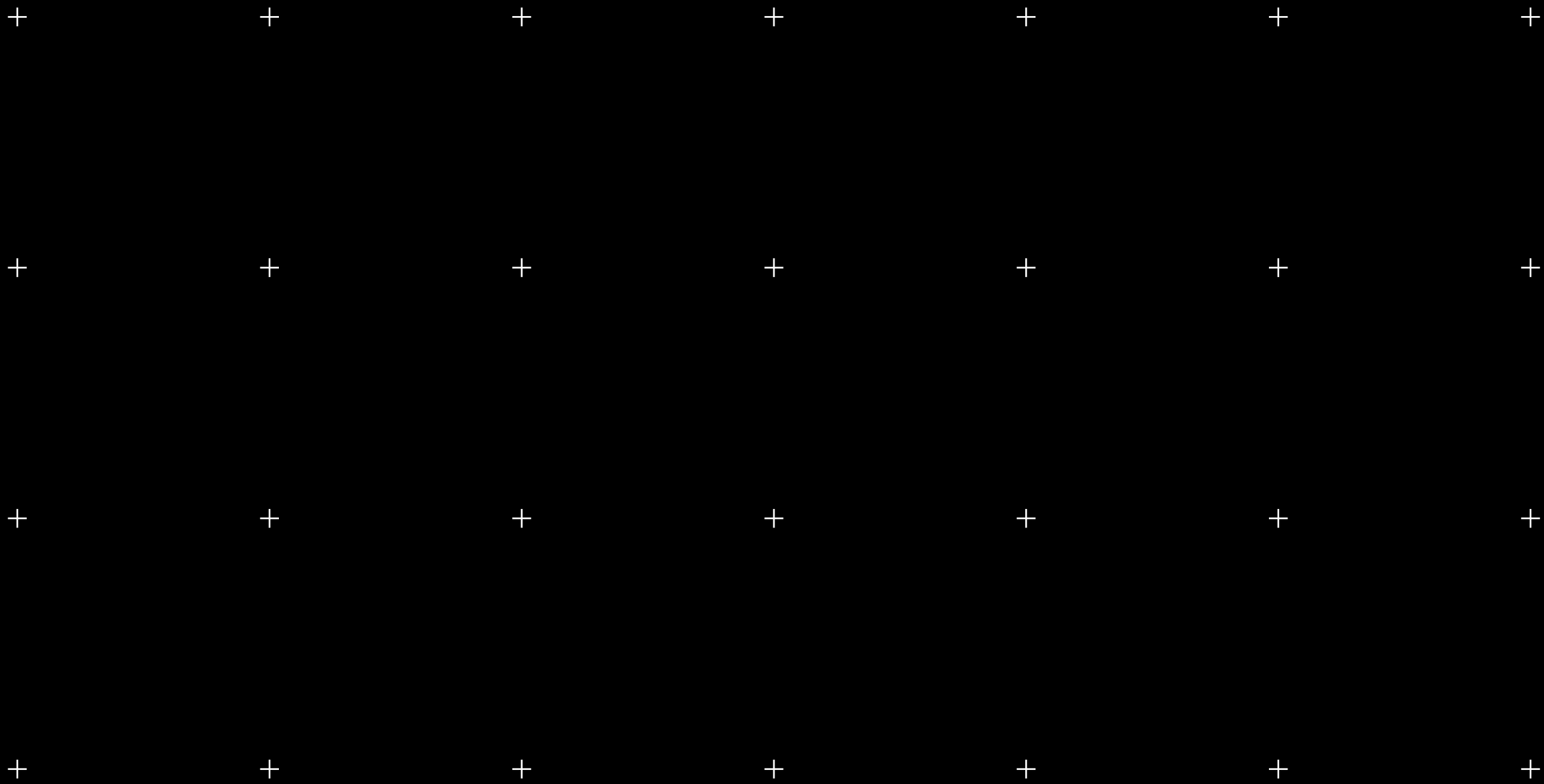


An aerial photograph of a small, modern wooden cabin with a gabled roof and a small porch, situated in a dense forest of tall, thin evergreen trees. The cabin is the central focus, surrounded by a thick canopy of green foliage. The lighting is soft, suggesting a late afternoon or early morning setting.

With an agile, flexible platform, hoteliers can more **easily go green** and champion sustainable processes and experiences. Cabiner are a perfect example. This unique Dutch wilderness brand offers a number of cabins located in National Parks, only accessible by foot. It didn't make sense to build an extra building with a traditional front desk, lobby and other communal areas, as it would be wasteful and detract from a unique guest experience. Mews lets them manage everything online, from payments to check-in to maintenance. No paper. No needless energy waste. No disrupting nature.

The demand for sustainable hospitality is certain to keep rising. Even if you're cynical, the arguments to act are still there: reducing your environmental and energy footprints goes hand in hand with reducing costs, while championing green practices make you more appealing to a growing eco-conscious demographic. Search for 'latest hotel trends' and in every article you'll find something about sustainability.

As the world returns to something like normality in the wake of the pandemic, travelers will be more conscious than ever when it comes to choosing accommodation. Follow the advice in this guide and you'll put yourself in the best position to welcome them sustainably. The greener your property, the better your chances of attracting guests. The time to act is now.



MEWS

Make it remarkable.

Mews.com