Greetings!

**What value do you find in Green Certification?**

Initiating responsible business practices is not only a good idea, but when implemented properly, it enhances a company’s public image. Particularly in the hospitality sector which is an industry defined by extravagance and luxury, various customer surveys done disclose an expectation that hotels will implement environmental management and conservation initiatives in the background, which will reduce a guest’s impact, without necessarily compromising on the guest experience.

There is heightened awareness on responsible business practices, and it is important for hotel investors/players to recognize consumer demand to the increased public awareness on environmental concerns. According to International Ecotourism Society (TIES), more than two-thirds of travelers consider active protection of the environment to be part of the hotel’s obligation. Progressively, guests are beginning to view environmental initiatives as a basic feature of hotel operations. There are a few establishments that have taken a step and implemented the most basic of green initiatives such as reusing towels and linen. However, today’s guests are very enlightened and are aware that hotels mostly implement measures that seem green on the surface but are actually only cutting costs.

While we can agree that going green is good for your business, recent statistics show that there is reluctance among hotel investors/managers towards committing to green certifications. Some commonly cited reasons include cost hurdles, perceived difficulty in implementation, lack of
manpower, the process is too demanding, while some do not see the need or value. When the process is viewed as part of a sustainability budget, the costs of obtaining a certification have the least-backed scientific ROI (return on investment). Calculating a scientific or analytical return on certification is quite challenging if not impossible, because associating risk management, cost savings and revenue directly to certification is difficult. While measuring the ROI of certification may not be as easy to calculate as other green initiatives, this week’s Eco-byte highlights several benefits of certification that directly relate to economic benefits.

1. **Green certification standards provide a blueprint for sustainability**

You do not need to have a training background in environmental science to know which hospitality operating practices are the most impactful to the environment. To manage these challenges and impacts, you can rely on a science-based certification standard such as Travelife or the Eco-rating Scheme designed for hotel properties, which take a life-cycle approach to ensure the most relevant impacts are addressed. Using a certification standard provides a foundation to develop action plans towards continuous improvements.

2. **Green certification reduces the risk of ‘green washing’ accusations**

“Green washing” usually refers to the effect of misleading a consumer regarding an environmental aspect of a product or service. By obtaining a green certification, a hotel establishment provides assurance to its guests. This is mainly because the process involves an independent, third-party verification that business practices have been analyzed using industry standards therefore increasing consumer confidence.

3. **Green certification positions a hotel ahead of its competition**

Apart from the specific markets of committed environmentally conscious clients, the majority of clients just want to find a great value and feel good about their choice. If all factors were held constant, most consumers would choose the most sustainable option. Who knows, a green certification may be the deciding factor between a hotel and its competition.

4. **Green certification can help improve customer satisfaction**

According to TIES 2009 Guest Satisfaction Index Survey, awareness of green initiatives has a strong impact on overall hotel guest satisfaction. Compliance with a standard established by a reputable organization allows a hotel to clearly describe/define its green initiatives to guests, which then translates to improved overall guest satisfaction.

The question on ROI…

When reviewing the business case for adopting green certification, the question of ROI narrows down to how well the hotel’s leadership team invests itself into each area of value. In order to realize a certification’s value, the certification must be viewed as a working program and a
system that when followed will lead to more opportunities for revenue and cost savings. A certified hotel must utilize this value system to realize the financial benefits of certification. For those who are keen on making green certification as part of their company culture, the returns are significant and ongoing. Therefore in conclusion;

- Improve productivity by using the certification as a blueprint for ongoing sustainable improvement
- Reduce risks and improve reputation by relying on certification to verify environmental claims
- Expand your customer base by marketing your certification to the sustainability conscious clients market segment
- Gain market share by using the certification to position your hotel ahead of competitors
- Increase exposure by telling your certification story to gain public relations opportunities
- Communicate your certification achievements to your clients and employees to improve satisfaction

What’s latest on EK Eco-rating Certification?

Ecotourism Kenya wishes to congratulate Severin Sea Lodge for progressing to Gold Eco-rating Certification in the recent October re-assessment. The facility demonstrated outstanding efforts in environmental management through its Green Building Program and community engagement through its “Craftsmen Training Center” aimed at building skills for underprivileged young people within the local community.

Congratulations to the latest new entry The Sands at Nomad for scooping Silver Eco-rating certification in their first attempt.

Congratulations to Severin Safari Camp and Afro Chic Diani for retaining Silver and Bronze Eco-rating Certification respectively.

Finally, we wish to thank everyone for your continued feedback and making this forum an interactive platform!