



Review Article

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IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRACTICES BY HOTELS: AN OVERVIEW OF SHILLONG'S HOTELS

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Abstract: A significant source of air pollution, hotels have gradually reduced their carbon footprint by implementing cutting-edge environmental practices. As a result, sustainability is a factor that must be considered by all parties involved in the tourist and hospitality industries. The nickname "Scotland of the East" has been attached to Shillong for quite some time, and the city sees over eight lakhs of visitors yearly. Therefore, eco-friendly actions at hotels are essential for combating climate change. This study aims to learn more about how hotels in Shillong, India, implement the triple bottom line (TBL) idea while considering the city's environmental impacts. The article adopts a qualitative approach, considering both the present state of tourism and environmental rules and the current situation of sustainable standards and indicators relevant to India's lodging industry. Following the World Travel and Tourism Council's Hotel Sustainability Basics, the researchers used Nvivo to evaluate the collected data (WTTC). The findings suggest that, in Shillong, hotels make only token efforts to reduce their environmental impact. Therefore, it is crucial to be knowledgeable about sustainable methods.

Keywords: Sustainability, Triple Bottom Line, Tourism, Hospitality, Sustainable Tourism Practice, WTTC, UNWTO

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INTRODUCTION

The word "sustainability" is among the most divisive regarding ideology today. There is no agreed-upon definition of sustainability, but many global organizations, politicians, and academics regard it as the key to solving pressing societal, economic, and environmental problems. While older definitions of sustainability focus primarily on ecological principles to reasonably meet human needs, more recent ones include social and economic goals and environmental ones, providing a more holistic picture^[1]. The tourism industry accounts for ten per cent of the global GDP^[2] and involves other sectors and resources, including land, water, and air. A growing focus on the impacts of tourism and related developments on the destination environment resulted in the need for sustainable consumption as a guiding principle in destination management^[3]. One sustainability model is the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) model, which studies the three P's; planet, people, and profit; A sustainable business model that operates by keeping in mind; the 'planet' for future generations, 'people' through employment, and 'profit' by ensuring the improvement of the livelihood of the local population through tourism^[3].

This research aims to analyze and measure the adoption of Sustainable Tourism Practices (STP) among accommodation units in Shillong, India, as an emerging destination. Utilizing the requirements set out in the World Travel and Tourism Council's (WTTC) 'Hotel

Sustainability Basics'^[4] as a base, this study investigates how successful these practices are in ensuring the longevity of the industry and the conservation of the destination's resources. With Meghalaya having recorded 15 lakh tourists in 2021^[5], and in light of being awarded 'The Most Promising New Destination' at the Travel and Tourism Fair, Hyderabad 2022, the success and implementation of STP are essential to this new promising destination. The findings from this research will be necessary for informing the long-term sustainable development of hospitality businesses in the Shillong area by providing a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of STP measures. With this knowledge, practitioners, policymakers and researchers can review and assess practices at the local level and discuss sustainability strategies at a higher level of planning.

Furthermore, it may be used to develop further initiatives and resources to promote sustainable development in the Shillong area. Additionally, this research will examine the effectiveness of STP practices in creating the local socioeconomic environment of the destination. With the insight gained from this study, the impact of STP in mobilizing and empowering the local economy, culture, and environment can be discussed. It will help to assess whether the STP is being effectively implemented and if it can lead to positive social, environmental, and economic results. Ultimately, this research will identify STP's potential to contribute to Meghalaya's sustainable tourism development significantly. By synthesizing theoretical and empirical

evidence, this research hopes to provide valuable insights into how future developments in Sustainable Tourism Practices can benefit the region's longer-term economic prosperity and social wellbeing. This research will be of utmost importance, as until now, there has been little research assessing the success of STP in Meghalaya. Therefore, this research may pave the way for future studies regarding the long-term effectiveness and application of STP in the region. The study will serve as a benchmark for analysis, helping stakeholders decide how successful STP initiatives have been. By thoroughly reviewing existing STP practices and discussing their potential for future development, recommendations will be made for improving policies, management strategies, and access to resources that will enable accommodations in the Shillong area to become more sustainable.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainability considerations are becoming more evident when evaluating ethical business practices related to responsible management and corporate social responsibility. In tourism, however, the three Ps (people, planet, and profit)^[6] emphasize modern sustainable development practices and regeneration rather than private and public commercial practices^{[7], [8]}.

Sustainable Tourism has emerged as a critical alarm that must be addressed in any development strategy, especially in the tourism sector. Many hotels have embraced more environmentally friendly techniques due to the rising interest in sustainable development principles and pressure from the media, government, and consumer sources^[9].

The tourism sector is increasingly recognized as a major economic force, with evidence of its significant contributions to socioeconomic growth across all nations, accounting for more than 10% of gross domestic product. Moreover, the sector is increasingly seen as essential in achieving the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 associated targets^[10]. Tourism has been instrumental in creating job opportunities, reducing poverty, promoting gender equality, protecting and developing natural resources, and forging international linkages^[11]. Sustainable tourism is *"that fully considers its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities"*^[10]. The United Nations (UN) has recognized tourism as one of the ten sectors with the potential to move communities toward a green economy, and the Rio + 20 Outcome Document has identified it as a critical sector that can significantly contribute to the social, economic, and environmental pillars of sustainable development^{[10], [11]}. STP (Sustainable Tourism Practice) actively engages in environmental conservation and protection to ensure the future sustainability of the tourism industry^[12].

The increasing desire for the hotel industry to adopt more socially and environmentally responsible practices has prompted many hotels to acknowledge their stakeholders, which include customers, shareholders, and the local community^[13]. Several variables contribute to this expanding interest. Environmental and social responsibility gives hotels a competitive and economic advantage^[14]. While in accommodation units, Sustainable Tourism Practices are of the highest importance worldwide^[15]. Erdogan and Baris (2007) argue that the hotel industry, as a crucial component of the tourism industry, has a vital role in protecting and preserving the environment, given that hotels utilize enormous amounts of energy, water, and other sources. The study of Cavagnaro and Gehrels, (2009) stated that the hospitality industry is generally unaware of sustainability. Very few hospitality businesses implement sustainable practices daily^[18].

Further, accommodation businesses commonly use non-renewable and valuable resources. Some resorts utilize more water per person than the local community, competing for this vital resource^[10]. Hotels demonstrate their commitment to environmental sustainability by implementing various practices, such as recycling, water and energy conservation, environmental education, waste management, and afforestation^[19]. Also, hotels have begun to implement various STP, of which the major ones include: 1) energy management, 2) waste management and 3) water conservation^{[12], [13], [15], [19], [20]}.

Sustainable hotel practices aid in reducing the negative impact on the environment if the hotels units were to:

- Install energy-efficient appliances and implement renewable energy programs.
- Reduce water consumption and adoption of rainwater harvesting.
- Install water-efficient devices and equipment and implement a linen and towel reuse program.
- Implement waste management and recycling programs.
- Use resilient items rather than disposable ones^{[17], [21], [22]}.

Hotel managers must ensure that their organizations become more financially, environmentally, and socially responsible by sharing their actions' environmental and social repercussions more transparently and responsibly. A reporting and monitoring system must be established to organize efforts and optimize performance related to sustainability effectively. Ecological reporting is becoming increasingly relevant, as managing and conserving natural capital requires implementing waste management, recycling, and pollution control measures^{[14], [23]}.

Within the hospitality industry, sustainable practices have come to encompass the social responsibility of hotels to the local community in which

they are embedded, economic justice for employees, and quantifiable measures for environmental preservation. Triple Bottom Line (TBL) provides a comprehensive framework for assessing hospitality businesses' sustainability, encompassing three primary pillars: social, economic, and environmental. Through this approach, hospitality businesses can consider the impacts of their practices on local communities, employees, and the environment. Elkington (1998) coined the phrase "triple bottom line" (TBL) to describe the concept of sustainability. The TBL is a financial accounting model with three performance dimensions: social, environmental, and economic. The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach deviates from traditional reporting frameworks by incorporating environmental and social aspects to which conventional metrics may be difficult to apply. This method encompasses three dimensions: people, planet, and profits (Slaper and Hall, 2011). With a greater focus on sustainable development, tourism's environmental, social, and economic impacts on communities have become more significant. The tourism sector provides a unique opportunity to promote and advance TBL through its various businesses and activities that enhance community quality of life, conservation, and stakeholder interests [26].

Study Area:

Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, is a picturesque city located in the East Khasi Hills district and home to the Khasi tribe as well as many outsiders from surrounding states and mainland India. Notably, much of the city's hospitality-related businesses are jointly owned by locals and outsiders, owing to the state's government's regulations and standards set out by the Department of Tourism, Government of Meghalaya. This paper explores the various accommodation options available for tourists, primarily aiming to determine their locations and level of acceptance among visitors. The chosen study area consists of hotels situated within Shillong City and is categorized as under based on their location (Table 1);

Table 1: Distribution of hotels in the study area
(Source: Authors)

Locality name	No. of hotels
Thana Road	6
Quinton Road	6
Jail road	4
Police bazaar	13
Laitumkhrah	4
Polo	3
Keating road	2

METHODOLOGY

The hotel industry has demonstrated its commitment to sustainability by displaying eco-labels, implementing sustainable behaviour standards, and adopting environmental management systems. Sustainability and conservation of resources must be incorporated into the core of the industry's business culture to ensure its ability to progress into the future, lest pollution disrupts its continued development^{[11], [16], [27]}.

The study aims to understand the sustainability practices of accommodation units in Shillong City, specifically hotels recognized by the tourism department of Meghalaya. A region case study helps shed light on the sustainability scenario of the accommodation units in Shillong City. Thirty-eight hotels have been selected based on the data available on the Meghalaya tourism website. The survey was conducted based on the criteria set by the WTTC (World Travel and Tourism Council), 'Hotels Sustainability Basics,' which was set up to measure sustainability practices by entrepreneurs in the accommodation sector^[4], the tourism and environmental regulations and, at the same time, the current scenario of sustainable criteria and indicators applicable to the accommodation sector in India.

The survey used questions framed considering the 12 essential criteria for sustainability under the 'Hotels Sustainability Basics,' categorized into three main areas: management and efficiency, planet, and people.

Criteria (Table 2) to study the hotels were from the WTTC's 'Hotels Sustainability Basics,' edited and formulated to suit the size of the hotels evaluated.

Table 2: Criteria for measurement of sustainability
(Source: [4])

Management	Planet	People
Measure and reduce energy	No single-use plastic	Community benefit
Identify and reduce waste	No single-use water bottle	-
Measure and reduce water	-	-

Interviews were conducted with the management team of the hotels in Table 3 to understand the sustainable practices used by the hotel;

Table 3: An overview of accommodation units (Source: Authors)

Hotels	Year of establishment	No. of rooms
H2	2006	14
H3	2018	15
H4	2018	15
H5	2011	15
H6	2006	8
H7	2008	15
H8	2002	50
H9	1999	19
H10	2015	21
H11	1962	23
H12	1985	22
H13	1972	7
H14	1962	23
H15	2008	17
H16	1989	39
H17	2003	10
H18	2010	12
H19	2011	22
H20	2015	30
H26	1973	40
H30	1950	30
H31	2000	13
H32	1998	35
H35	1991	51
H36	1965	16

The interviews were to achieve the following objective:

- To evaluate the basic sustainability practices of hotels in Shillong city.

The study was conducted in two stages; the first included the evaluation of existing measurement of sustainability practices by the hotel. The criteria established by the UNWTO and WTTC were in contention, and upon further deliberation, the WTTC 'Hotel Sustainability Basics' stood most suitable for this study^[4]. The current research explored the sustainability practices of Twenty-five hotels based in Shillong city. The study adopted the WTTC's 'Hotel Sustainability Basics', which consists of twelve criteria, to measure the sustainability performance of the hotels. In addition, the Triple Bottom Line sustainability principles were considered^[4]. Based on this framework, a questionnaire was developed to assess the hotels' practices and collect relevant data from hotel managers. The analysis results will provide valuable insights and recommendations for improving hotels' sustainability practices.

The evaluation used both qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantitative aspect used Excel to categorize the data set, while the qualitative analysis used NVivo to analyze the discussions by the researchers and the hotel owners/managers.

DISCUSSION

Studies have demonstrated that green hotel practices can reduce operational costs, increase hotel profits, enhance guest satisfaction and loyalty, sustain the environment, and gain a competitive advantage in developing countries. However, empirical research on the role of green hotel practices in achieving sustainable development goals has been relatively limited^{[1], [11], [28]}. This study seeks to investigate how environmental management representatives evaluate the extent to which green hotel practices contribute to the attainment of three environment-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production)^[10]. The hotel industry accounts for a large amount of waste that requires sufficient filtering before reusing. Ensuring the responsible usage of these resources is a step toward reaching the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) goals^[10]. Data-logging resources at a small scale is another step toward achieving these goals. The study was evaluated based on the availability and use of the following criteria, as shown in Figure 1;

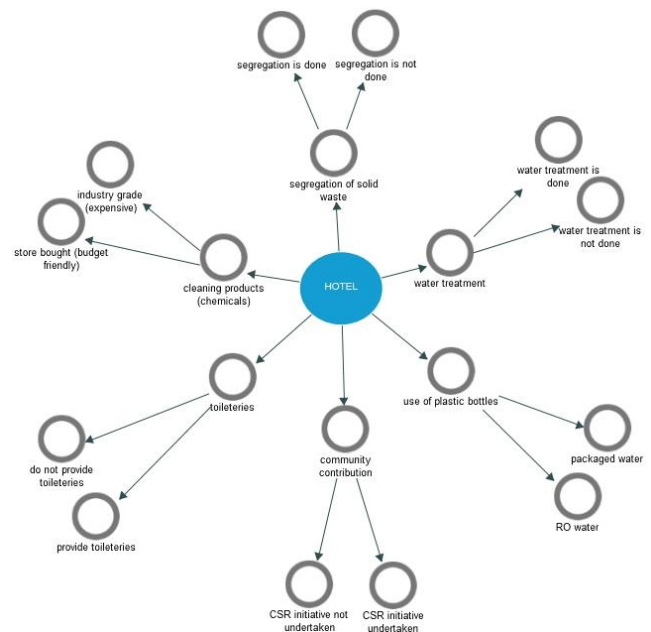


Figure 1: STP by accommodation units (Source: Authors)

Energy Conservation Measures:

Energy consumption by the tourism industry, specifically the hotels for everyday functionality, is significant, setting the need for sustainable energy use. Energy conservation is crucial to hotel environmental management. Hotels often run on fossil fuels and electricity. The studied literature shows that hotels have energy-saving methods. This study proposes that hotels adopt strategies from previous research to reduce energy consumption, such as utilizing energy star-qualified products, installing motion sensors to turn off lights in low-traffic areas, installing reflective glass or triple-

glazed windows, employing LED light bulbs, and taking advantage of natural light, as well as controlling guestroom energy consumption with digital thermostats^[11]. The authors carried out the study on the hotels' energy usage, considering two concerns; the primary energy source and the installation of renewable energy sources such as Solar energy—only two accommodations units employed renewable energy with solar panels installed for outdoor use. In contrast, the rest had no such provision. All the units entirely depend on hydropower plants, where Meghalaya alone demands 400 megawatts (MW)^[29] and fuel-powered generators for emergencies.

Water Conservation Measures:

The study analyzed the sustainable use of water in the hospitality industry in Shillong city concerning the water source, practices of sustainable measures to conserve water, and the availability of water treatment plants. Water, an easily-contaminated natural resource, requires proper filtration for reuse and discharge. The PHE department of the Government of Meghalaya implemented a strategy for installing grey water treatment plants available for residents and businesses in the state at an initial installation cost of two lakh Indian rupees. However, due to a lack of awareness, the impacts were sizable. Additionally, rainwater harvesting is another water conservation method, but despite Meghalaya receiving higher average rainfall, none of the hotel units in Shillong City frequently use it. Hotels require plenty of water daily, depending on size, occupancy, amenities, and quality. To reduce water consumption, hotels employ low-flow toilets and showerheads, infrared-activated faucets, towel/bed linen reuse programmes, regular leak repairs, early morning and late night watering to reduce evaporation, and grey water (water from washing vegetables and fruits) for grass irrigation and mowing^[11].

Segregation of Waste:

The study evaluated the practices related to waste segregation into bio-degradable and non-biodegradable products and the use of single-use plastic bottles and straws in hotels to reduce landfill methane gas emissions^[11]. Results showed that hotels had implemented various measures to reduce garbage generated by their operations, including the use of clearly labelled containers and coloured bins for recycling collection, the donation of leftover food and linens to charity, and the purchase of products made from recycled materials. Additionally, the municipal department of the state of Meghalaya promotes waste segregation. However, it is still unclear what happens to the segregated waste.

Sustainability Efforts Towards The Community:

Sustainability study includes sustainability towards the community; one of the triple bottom line dimensions is 'people'^[3]. The people in the triple bottom line concept refers to all potential stakeholders, including

employees, company shareholders, customers, affected communities and people at every stage of the supply chain. It also includes future generations affected by the company's actions. The employment of locals and meaningful contribution to the community proved vital in analyzing societal contributions by the accommodation units.

Findings:

Sustainable practices by accommodation units are essential to conserving resources as it is one of the sectors that can considerably help protect the environment^[17]. Unfortunately, STP in hotels, in this case, is still at the initial stage, where the only source of renewable energy is solar energy in the form of solar panels set up for only outdoor use. In contrast, most energy consumed is non-renewable^[18].

In the case of sustainable use and control of water pollution, the accommodation sector's average consumption is more than the households', which poses a need for proper filtering and disposal of water through treatment plants. The 1974 Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act^[30] provides guidelines for restoring and filtering water for safe disposal (Ministry of Environment, Forest, and climate change). Meghalaya, known for receiving a high amount of rainfall, has the potential to harvest and use rainwater, but such a system is absent in the study area. Though twelve accommodation units have a water filtering system, the remaining are oblivious to such a system. The sewage water flows into the nearby streams, leading to contamination. Furthermore, hotels practising segregation and proper disposal of waste are almost non-existent.

"We have a water treatment plant installed per the government's regulations."

"Yes, we treat the wastewater that comes from the hotel. The treatment plant is in the basement of the property."

Just seven of the accommodation units practice the segregation of waste into bio-degradable and non-biodegradable, and the municipal department staff collects the segregated waste.

Where one hotel manager says,

"Yes, it is segregated and collected by people from the municipal department staff, while collectors buy the bottles."

While the rest of the hotel owners stated,

"Yes, it is segregated and collected by the municipal department staff."

The same goes for hotels that do not segregate waste, stating that,

"No, there is no waste segregation, but the municipal department staff collects the unsegregated waste."

Here a question arises: How are these waste products disposed of if one segregates waste and the other does not?

The use of single-use plastics in water bottles, straws, and packaging is seen in a few properties where twenty-one hotels use single-use plastics in the form of water bottles and straws. At the same time, the rest have switched to environmentally safer practices;

(1) replacing plastic bottles with steel/glass jugs with water collected from installed RO (Reverse osmosis) plants; (2) substituting plastic straws with paper straws and (3) plastic food packaging replaced with biodegradable food packaging.

Where one hotel manager states,

"No, we do not use single-use plastics; we have replaced all plastic products with biodegradable products, such as straws and food packaging, and packaged bottles with water jugs in the room."

The consensus among the various stakeholders is that community contribution through the employment of locals positively impacts the hotels in the study area, with 237 locals employed compared to 129 migrants. While community contribution in terms of charity and local upliftment is minimal, only six hotels lend some donations through cash or kind. Examples of community contributions are as follows;

"Charity effort during the covid-19 pandemic"

"We do participate in cleaning drive twice a year."

"Yes, we do contribute to old age homes."

"We contribute to the local orphanage and provide training programs for the staff."

"Contribute to the local orphanage, and we have solar panels installed as a sustainable energy source."

"We contribute equipment to the local children's hospital in the state; we provide training modules to the management staff keeping in line with the sustainable models."

The analysis of the hotels in Shillong city shows that the selected units make minimal effort concerning sustainable efforts, i.e., water, waste segregation and community contribution (Table 4).

Table 4: Findings concerning sustainable efforts

Criteria	No.
No. of hotels with segregated solid waste disposal	7
No. of hotels with Water treatment facilities	12
No. of hotels with single-use plastic	21
No. of locals employed	237
No. of Migrants employed	129
Total no. of employed	366
Total no. of rooms	562

Policy implication

Tourism has significantly contributed to the global environmental problem and its socioeconomic consequences. In general, and particularly in the accommodation/hotel business, sustainable tourism practice has become an essential component of the worldwide policy spectrum^[31]. The 1974 water act^[30] reflects a system in place for the safe disposal of contaminated water. Still, the level of implementation poses a question. The lack of guidelines and norms to check STPs regarding energy, waste, and water makes it a requirement for local governments and non-profits to set up procedures. Policies on the following should prove vital:

- Energy: promote and create awareness of the use of renewable energy. Provision of schemes for setting up renewable energy sources, such as solar panels.
- Water: promote and create awareness of rainwater harvesting. Ensuring a water filtering system is in place before setting up accommodation units and constant regulations and checks by respective departments should be in place.
- Segregation of waste: there is a need to establish proper guidelines for waste segregation and disposal system.
- The present study recommends designing and executing policies to address skill development programmes for hotel employees, providing a significant impact of hotel employees on the reputation of the hotel and the need to provide them with promotion opportunities, skill and career development, as well as flexible policies for a positive working environment and improved work-life balance^{[32], [33]}.

CONCLUSION

The current capitalist business structures, prioritizing economic development, render the global hotel sector's sustainability commitments insufficient. Consequently, the hospitality industry has adopted a "weak" stance on sustainability. Without external certification, the reliability and transparency of the reporting process are questionable, thus making the impact of hotels on their surrounding environments an

increasingly pressing concern^[34]. Hotels do not produce as much waste as the metallurgical or chemical industries. Due to the industry's size and continuous growth, hotel management must implement environmentally friendly policies. In addition, analysts claim that "becoming green" is an intelligent financial decision, particularly in competitive industries like the hospitality business. When other sectors and organizations start demanding greener practices from their suppliers and partners, the hotel industry will have no choice but to follow suit^[33].

The findings of this study contribute to understanding the current situations of accommodation units related to sustainable practices. The study reflects that despite the presence of laws for the sustainable use of resources, the lack of implementation of these practices poses a threat to natural resources, contaminating land, water, and air. The hotels in the study have minimal STP, which will have substantial implications for the resources in the long run, as the accommodation unit accounts for many non-renewable resources. Taking a step towards sustainability in the tourism sector will contribute to all three significant resources, people, planet, and profit. Nevertheless, profit is the most pertinent of the triple bottom lines to the accommodation owners. Even though a few accommodation units exist that practise sustainability, this needs to be done globally to better future generations and tourism businesses. Environmental education should be included in the regular training programme at every hotel. The department leaders should be held responsible for implementing the new processes. Employees willing to participate actively in environmental initiatives benefit not just the environment but also the company's financial line^[33]. Therefore, by implementing sustainable practices, Shillong accommodation facilities could attract tourists more concerned with sustainability, resulting in higher revenues and profits.

The restriction of hotels in only Shillong city makes this study minor. There is potential for researchers and government and non-government agencies to study STP further using the triple bottom line theory and framing solutions to monitor STP practised at the ground level.

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