

Sustainability as a collective mission in tourism and hospitality

Sustainability is not just a buzzword; it's a way of life that demands urgent attention. For me, this realisation became deeply personal on the banks of the River Ganga in Varanasi. Watching this sacred river-a symbol of purity and life-struggle under the weight of pollution was a sobering moment. The irony was unmistakable: a river we revere for its life-giving properties now requires urgent action for its survival.

This experience opened my eyes to the deeper responsibility we all share-not just for our immediate environment but for the world we will leave behind for future generations. It cemented my commitment to sustainability, both personally and professionally, and set me on a journey to integrate environmental stewardship, both personally and professionally, and set me on a journey to integrate environmental stewardship into the core of the hospitality industry.

Hospitality and the challenge of sustainability

Tourism and hospitality are at the crossroads of growth and responsibility. While the sector contributes significantly to economic development, it also exerts immense pressure on natural resources. Over-tourism, in particular, is a pressing issue. Globally, destinations like Venice, Amsterdam, and Mount Fuji are grappling with the effects of excessive tourism, leading to overcrowding, pollution, and resource depletion. In India, popular destinations like Mussoorie and Shimla face similar challenges.

As India becomes the world's most populous country, striking a balance between economic growth and environmental preservation is more critical than ever. The Hospitality industry has a pivotal role to play in this equation-not just as an economic driver but as a steward of sustainable practices that ensure long-term ecological resilience.

Collaborative efforts towards sustainability

The Indian government has shown remarkable leadership in addressing environmental challenges, Programs like the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) and the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) focus on mitigating climate risks and reducing pollution. Initiatives like Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and Travel for LIFE emphasise individual responsibility, urging businesses and citizens alike to adopt eco-friendly practices.

Campaigns such as Dekho Apna Desh encourage sustainable travel by promoting Lesser-known destinations, helping to alleviate the burden on over-touristed hotspots. These efforts demonstrate how policy and awareness can create a foundation for change. However, business must take the lead in translating these policies into actionable practices.

Redefining hospitality with green practices

The hospitality industry's environmental impact-accounts for 1-2 percent of global carbon emissions highlighting the need for transformational actions. Recognising this, the industry has committed to ambitious targets, such as reducing emissions per room by 66% by 2030 and 90 percent by 2050.

At my company, and across the sector, sustainability is no longer a choice but a mandate, the transformation is visible in:

—**Energy efficiency:** Solar panels, wind turbines, smart thermostats, and energy efficient lighting systems are becoming a standard.

—**Water conservation:** Rainwater harvesting, wastewater treatment, and optimized water usage are key initiatives.

—**Waste management:** Recycling, composting, and zero-waste practices are reshaping operations.

—**Sustainable sourcing:** Hotels are prioritizing locally sourced, organic ingredients, reducing carbon footprints and supporting local communities.

These efforts align with the expectations for today's eco-conscious travellers, who prioritise experiences that reflect their environmental values. Guests are increasingly demanding that hotels operate responsibly, pushing the industry to innovate and adopt greener practices.

Sustainability: A shared responsibility

Sustainability is akin to a marathon—it required persistence, strategic pacing, and collective commitment. Drawing inspiration from grassroots environmental movements like Chipko and meaningfully with the world or mere tourists who consume without regard?

The answer lies in our collective efforts. Governments must craft policies that encourage eco-friendly practices. Businesses must adopt strategies that prioritize sustainability. Travellers must make conscious choices to respect and preserve the destinations they visit.

A legacy of environmental stewardship

Sustainability is not a fleeting trend, it is a transformative shift in how we live, travel and lead. It is about creating a legacy of clean air, pure water, and thriving ecosystems for generations to come. The hospitality sector, with its ability to influence behaviour and set standards, holds immense potential to lead this change.

At its core, sustainability is a shared mission. Each action—whether it is a business adopting green operations, a government implementing forward-thinking policies, or an individual making mindful travel choices—contributing to a healthier, more liveable planet.

The time for action is now. Together, we can ensure that our decisions today create a world where progress and preservation coexist. Sustainability is not just a responsibility—it is our greatest opportunity to lead meaningful, lasting change. Let's seize it.