

“Sustainable Hospitality: Exploring CSR Practices Among Leading Hotel Chains in India”

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Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has evolved from a voluntary philanthropic activity to a strategic imperative within the global business landscape, including the hospitality sector. In India, CSR has gained additional traction following the mandatory CSR provisions introduced under the Companies Act, 2013, wherein as per Section 135 of the act every company meeting the specified eligibility criteria must spend at least 2% of the average net profits made during the three immediately preceding financial years on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities. In the hospitality industry, hotels serve as economic drivers, employment generators, and community anchors; therefore, their CSR engagements can profoundly influence environmental sustainability, social welfare, and community development.

This paper examines how select hotels integrate CSR into their business ethos—focusing on environment, community engagement, employee welfare, and sustainable operations—and assesses the prominence of their initiatives as well as their broader socio-economic impact as reported by them on their websites.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has become more prominent in India since the Companies Act, 2013 made it mandatory for eligible companies to spend at least 2% of their average net profits from the previous three financial years on CSR activities. In the hospitality sector, hotels play a crucial role as sources of economic growth, job creation, and support for local communities. As a result, their CSR initiatives can significantly impact environmental sustainability, social welfare, and community development.

Literature Review

CSR has developed under the influence of various theories, including agency theory, institutional theory, the resource-based view of the firm, stakeholder theory, stewardship theory, and the theory of the firm, which results in numerous conceptualizations of CSR (Pinkston and Carroll, 1996). While there are various forms of CSR practiced by organizations, there have been concerns about what are the CSR practices to be followed by organizations. Lindgreen, Swaen and Johnston (2009), attempted and identified the CSR activities of 450 organizations to understand the form of CSR that organizations engage in.

CSR in the Hospitality Sector – Conceptual Underpinnings

The financial crisis of 2008 – 2009 resulted in an increased emphasis on cost control measures, which has prompted hoteliers to reevaluate their plant equipment and operational practices to reduce utility costs (Goldstein & Primlani, 2012). In addition, the role of CSR in the tourism sector is especially

important as businesses are reliant on the nature of the surrounding natural environment and cultural heritage as well as the relations with the community (Achmad and Yulianah, 2022). In the case of hotels, airlines, and tour operators, the survival of their business is directly associated with the conservation of the destinations and satisfaction of the host communities. This renders CSR not only a moral obligation, but a long-term sustainability and competitiveness requirement (Hye et al., 2023).

Indian Context: CSR Adoption in Hotels

A review of the extant literature on CSR in hotels is not merely charitable giving but structured activities that influence business performance, sustainability reporting, and stakeholder relations. It identifies key thematic areas including employee involvement, customer perceptions, CSR and business outcomes, and sustainability integration into operational practices.

Empirical research within India has similarly explored CSR adoption across hospitality businesses and revealed hotels engaged in CSR mostly through health provisioning, and community support. CSR in India's tourism industry is currently limited to corporate self-reporting on indicators of the companies' choice or, in some cases, the minimum required by regulatory bodies (Ferus-Comelo, 2014). However, customer's perception of CSR contributions of organizations can enhance both qualitative green image perceptions of the luxury hotel and also entice willingness to pay a higher price for luxury services (Thomas, 2022).

Gap in Existing Literature

While the previous studies establish foundational knowledge about CSR practices and their perceived impacts within Indian hotels, there remains a gap in comparative and up-to-date assessments of CSR strategy commitments among specific hotel brands—particularly linking CSR outcomes to environmental sustainability, community development, and corporate governance frameworks.

Methodology

The methodology involved analysis of the content given on the websites. Codes were allocated based on the SDG framework and brief explanations were provided to independent coders.

Data analysis

Major international hotel groups, including Marriott, Hyatt, Accor, IHG, and Hilton, are implementing comprehensive corporate social responsibility frameworks to foster a more sustainable future. These organizations prioritize environmental stewardship by aggressively reducing greenhouse gas emissions, minimizing water consumption, and eliminating single-use plastics across their global portfolios. Beyond ecological efforts, these companies focus on social equity through initiatives that provide career training for disadvantaged youth and promote human rights. By aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, these hospitality leaders aim to integrate ethical business practices into their core operations. Their collective strategies demonstrate a commitment to inclusive growth, community support, and the preservation of global travel destinations.

The following analysis classifies the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives of leading hospitality chains based on the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as outlined in the sources.

Classification of Hospitality CSR Initiatives by SDG

SDG Goal	Hospitality CSR Initiatives
Goal 1: No Poverty	Radisson partners with SOS Children's Villages to support at-risk youth and children without parental care. Oberoi Hotels launched Project SAKSHAM, supporting family homes and higher education for parentless children.
Goal 2: Zero Hunger	Radisson provides food and water during community crises and natural disasters. Taj Hotels procure items like organic fruits and vegetables from local Self Help Groups and NGOs to support livelihoods.
Goal 3: Good Health & Well-being	Hyatt celebrated a Global Day of Gratitude to expand its focus on colleague wellbeing. Shangri-La maintains high standards for food safety, hygiene, and sanitation for all stakeholders.
Goal 4: Quality Education	IHG Academy provides local people with skill development and employment prospects. Taj Hotels offer vocational training to rural and underprivileged youth. Oberoi's Project SAKSHAM ensures quality education for 210 children.
Goal 5: Gender Equality	Accor has a specific initiative to fight gender-based violence. Radisson and Shangri-La maintain non-discrimination policies to ensure an inclusive workplace for all.
Goal 6: Clean Water & Sanitation	Hilton prioritizes water stewardship in areas facing water risks. Radisson partners with "Just a Drop" to fund wells and sanitation tools through guest towel-reuse programs.
Goal 7: Affordable & Clean Energy	Hilton and Radisson focus on energy efficiency and increasing the use of renewable energy sources. The Leela utilizes renewable energy solutions to reach net zero targets.
Goal 8: Decent Work & Economic Growth	Hyatt's RiseHY program aims to hire 10,000 "Opportunity Youth" by 2025. Radisson focus on increasing youth employability with an 85% success rate for program graduates.
Goal 9: Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure	Hilton developed Sustainable Design Checklists for hotel owners and & developers. Accor is "leading the way" in eco-design for its properties.
Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities	Hyatt joined the CEO ACT!ON for Diversity & Inclusion initiative. Wyndham and Marriott emphasize a culture of inclusion as a core business advantage.
Goal 11: Sustainable Cities & Communities	Accor partners with world monument funds for cultural heritage conservation. Taj Hotels preserve indigenous heritage and support the "Clean India Campaign" for public spaces.

Goal 12: Responsible Consumption & Production Hyatt, Hilton, and Radisson have initiatives to remove single-use plastic & straws and reduce food waste. IHG Green Engage helps hotels minimize their local environmental impact.

Goal 13: Climate Action Hilton and The Leela have committed to science-based targets and achieving net zero emissions by 2050. Radisson offers "Carbon Compensated Meetings" at no cost to guests.

Goal 15: Life on Land Four Seasons partners with the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to support conservation efforts. Taj Hotels support the maintenance of beaches and gardens around their properties.

Goal 16: Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions Marriott, Hyatt, and Radisson have formal Human Rights policies. Wyndham works with ECPAT and the Polaris Project to combat human trafficking.

Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals Four Seasons collaborates through the World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance. Marriott and Hyatt explicitly align their Serve 360 and corporate strategies with the UN SDGs.

Summary of Analysis

The content analysis reveals that the global hospitality industry has moved beyond simple philanthropy toward integrated sustainability frameworks. Key trends include:

- **Environmental Stewardship:** Most chains focus heavily on Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption) and Goal 13 (Climate Action), with aggressive "Net Zero" targets and the elimination of single-use plastics.
- **Youth & Employability:** There is a significant industry-wide effort toward Goal 8 (Decent Work), specifically targeting youth unemployment through programs like Hyatt's RiseHY and the IHG Academy.
- **Human Rights & Inclusion:** Chains like Marriott and Wyndham have formalized protections for human rights and active programs to combat human trafficking, addressing Goal 16.
- **Global Framework Alignment:** Many organizations, including Marriott, Hyatt, and Radisson, now explicitly use the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as the guiding architecture for their reporting and initiatives.

Based on the provided sources, the findings regarding the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) landscape in the hospitality industry reveal a shift from basic philanthropy to sophisticated, framework-driven sustainability strategies. Below are the key findings and suggested areas for further research.

Key Findings

- **Explicit Alignment with UN SDGs:** Leading hospitality chains, including Marriott, Hyatt, and Radisson, have formally integrated the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals into their corporate strategies. This provides a common language for reporting and allows for a more structured approach to global challenges.

- **Emphasis on Youth Employability:** A dominant theme across the industry is the focus on SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) through youth-targeted programs. Examples include Hyatt's RiseHY initiative aiming to hire 10,000 "Opportunity Youth" and the IHG Academy, which provides local residents with vocational skills. Radisson reports an 85% success rate for graduates of their youth employment programs.
- **Aggressive Environmental Targets:** There is a widespread commitment to Climate Action (SDG 13), with many chains like Hilton and The Leela setting Science-Based Targets to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. These efforts are supported by technical tools like IHG's Green Engage system and Hilton's Sustainable Design Checklists for hotel owners.
- **Social Safeguarding and Human Rights:** Major players (Wyndham, Marriott, Four Seasons) are increasingly focusing on SDG 16, specifically regarding the protection of human rights and the combatting of human trafficking through partnerships with organizations like ECPAT and the Polaris Project.
- **Resource Stewardship:** Addressing SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption) has led to the industry-wide removal of single-use plastics (Hyatt, Hilton, Radisson) and the implementation of water stewardship programs in high-risk areas.

Suggestions for Further Research

- **Quantifying Long-term Impact:** While the sources list many active initiatives, further research could focus on the long-term quantitative impact of these programs. For example, tracking the career progression of IHG Academy or RiseHY graduates over five to ten years would validate the sustainability of these employability models.
- **Guest Engagement and Behavior:** Sources indicate that guests are increasingly "purpose-driven". Further research could investigate the correlation between CSR transparency and guest loyalty, or how specific initiatives (like Radisson's carbon-compensated meetings) influence corporate booking decisions.

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