



**Quality and Sustainability in Tourism and Hospitality:  
A Case Study of Marriott International**

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Matriculation Number: DE240278

Course: Quality and Sustainability in Tourism and Hospitality

Submission Date: 24 November 2025

## Abstract

This assignment examines how Marriott International, one of the world's largest hotel companies, integrates high levels of service quality with ambitious sustainability practices. As climate change, resource depletion and social responsibility become increasingly important to travellers, tourism and hospitality businesses are under pressure to operate in a way that is both environmentally responsible and economically viable. Through a qualitative case study approach, this report explores Marriott's "Serve 360" sustainability framework and its key initiatives, such as waste reduction, energy and water efficiency, green building standards, responsible sourcing and customer engagement in sustainable behaviour. The study also evaluates how these initiatives influence service quality outcomes, including guest satisfaction, brand reputation and competitive advantage. The findings suggest that sustainability and quality management are not opposing goals but can be mutually reinforcing when carefully planned and implemented. The report concludes by highlighting lessons that other tourism and hospitality businesses can learn from the Marriott example and by emphasising that sustainability is now a core component of perceived service quality in the global hospitality industry.

## Introduction

Tourism and hospitality are strongly dependent on natural resources, attractive environments and stable communities. At the same time, hotels and resorts consume large quantities of energy, water and materials, contribute to waste generation and influence local social and economic structures. This creates a tension: hospitality businesses must provide high-quality, comfortable and sometimes luxurious experiences while reducing negative environmental and social impacts. In recent years, sustainability has evolved from being a marketing trend to becoming a strategic necessity for international hotel groups.

Marriott International is a particularly relevant case for exploring the relationship between service quality and sustainability. Headquartered in the United States, the company operates thousands of properties across more than one hundred countries under multiple brands, ranging from luxury hotels to budget-friendly options. Marriott has long promoted itself as a leader in guest service, but it has also recognised that future growth depends on integrating environmental and social responsibility into its business model. Its global sustainability and social impact platform, called "Serve 360: Doing Good in Every Direction", aims to align the company with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and to embed responsible practices at property and corporate levels.

The objective of this assignment is to analyse how Marriott balances its commitment to high service standards with comprehensive sustainability initiatives. The report will first review relevant literature on sustainability in hospitality and on service quality models. It will then describe the case study methodology used for this analysis. The findings section will outline the main components of Marriott's sustainability strategy and provide concrete examples of how these initiatives are implemented in practice. The discussion section will interpret these practices through theoretical lenses such as the Triple Bottom Line and SERVQUAL

frameworks. Finally, the conclusion will summarise the key insights and suggest implications for the wider tourism and hospitality sector.

## Literature Review

### Sustainability in tourism and hospitality

Sustainability in tourism and hospitality can be understood as the long-term management of environmental, social and economic impacts in a way that maintains or improves resources for future generations. In the hospitality context, environmental sustainability is often associated with reducing energy and water consumption, cutting greenhouse gas emissions, preventing pollution, minimising waste and protecting biodiversity. Social sustainability may include fair employment practices, support for local communities, cultural sensitivity and protection of human rights. Economic sustainability focuses on creating value for shareholders while also delivering benefits such as local job creation and stable income for host communities.

Academic authors have highlighted that hotels and resorts are intensive resource users. They require heating or cooling, lighting, laundry services, food and beverage operations, and a wide range of guest amenities. If not managed responsibly, this can lead to high levels of carbon emissions and waste. However, scholars also point out that hospitality businesses have significant opportunities to implement sustainability measures, including renewable energy technologies, building retrofits, efficient appliances, behavioural change campaigns for both staff and guests, and partnerships with local suppliers.

### Service quality in hospitality

Service quality is a central concept in hospitality management. It relates to the degree to which a service meets or exceeds customer expectations. A widely used model for understanding service quality is SERVQUAL, which identifies five key dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. In the hotel sector, tangibles include the physical environment of the property, such as room design and cleanliness. Reliability refers to the ability to provide the promised service dependably. Responsiveness is the willingness to help guests and respond to their requests promptly. Assurance involves the knowledge and courtesy of staff and their ability to inspire trust. Empathy concerns the level of care and individual attention given to guests.

High service quality is linked to greater guest satisfaction, repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth. For international hotel chains, maintaining consistent service quality across different countries and cultures is particularly important. This requires training, standard operating procedures and performance monitoring. In addition, as consumer expectations evolve, new elements such as digital convenience and sustainability cues are increasingly incorporated into what guests perceive as “quality”.

### Linking sustainability and service quality

Research has increasingly examined the relationship between sustainability initiatives and perceived service quality in hospitality. Several studies suggest that guests appreciate and value environmentally responsible practices, particularly those that are visible and easy to understand, such as recycling bins, refillable toiletry dispensers and clear information about energy-saving measures. When sustainability initiatives are framed as part of the overall guest experience rather than as cost-cutting measures, they can enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty.

However, there can also be tensions. For example, if sustainability measures are implemented in a way that reduces comfort—such as limiting water pressure excessively or lowering room temperatures below comfortable levels—guests may perceive a drop in service quality. The key challenge for hotel managers is therefore to design and implement sustainability programs that support, rather than undermine, the traditional dimensions of service quality. This requires careful planning, investment in technology, and effective communication with customers.

## Methodology

This assignment adopts a qualitative case study approach in order to explore the integration of quality and sustainability within a real-world hospitality organisation. Marriott International was selected as the focal company for several reasons. Firstly, it is one of the largest and most globally recognised hotel groups, which means that its sustainability practices can influence broader industry trends. Secondly, Marriott has publicly committed itself to an extensive sustainability and social impact agenda, documented in reports, corporate communications and third-party assessments. Finally, the company operates in diverse destinations, including urban, coastal and resort locations, which provide varied contexts for sustainability initiatives.

The case study is based on secondary data. This includes Marriott's own sustainability reports and corporate responsibility documents, press releases, website information, and independent analyses from industry organisations and academic publications. These sources were examined to identify major themes and initiatives related to environmental management, social responsibility, and service quality. The analysis focused on the question of how these initiatives are integrated into Marriott's day-to-day operations and how they relate to guest experience and perceived quality. While the qualitative nature of the study does not allow for statistical generalisation, it provides rich insights into the ways in which one leading company attempts to balance sustainability with high service standards.

## Findings

Marriott's "Serve 360" sustainability framework

Marriott's sustainability and social impact platform, known as "Serve 360: Doing Good in Every Direction", serves as the overarching framework for its responsible business activities. This framework is built around four main pillars: Nurture Our World, Sustain Responsible Operations, Empower Through Opportunity, and Welcome All and Advance

Human Rights. Each pillar includes specific goals and measurable targets, such as reducing carbon intensity, lowering water use, cutting food waste, increasing the use of renewable energy, supporting local communities and promoting human rights in the supply chain.

From a quality management perspective, the Serve 360 framework is not treated as a separate or optional program. Instead, it is positioned as an integral part of Marriott's brand ethos and operating philosophy. Sustainability goals are incorporated into property-level management systems, and performance is monitored and reported on regularly. This integration helps ensure that sustainability is considered alongside traditional quality indicators, such as guest satisfaction scores and operational efficiency.

#### Energy efficiency and carbon reduction

One of the most visible aspects of Marriott's sustainability work is its focus on energy efficiency and carbon reduction. Many Marriott properties have invested in modern heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems, LED lighting, building automation technologies and energy management software. Some hotels use solar panels or purchase renewable energy. These measures reduce operating costs and lower greenhouse gas emissions.

From the guest's perspective, energy-efficient technologies can actually improve service quality. For example, modern climate control systems maintain more stable and comfortable room temperatures than older equipment. LED lighting offers better illumination and can be adjusted to create pleasant atmospheres in lobbies, restaurants and rooms. When these technologies are implemented properly, guests experience improved comfort, even though the property is using less energy overall. In this way, sustainability investments contribute directly to perceived quality.

#### Water conservation

Water conservation is another important area for Marriott, especially in regions facing water scarcity. Many of the company's hotels have implemented low-flow showerheads and faucets, dual-flush toilets and irrigation systems that minimise water use in gardens and landscaping. Linen and towel reuse programs encourage guests to participate in saving water by opting not to have their bedding and towels changed every day.

These initiatives can be sensitive because guests may interpret them either as a positive environmental action or as a sign of cost-cutting. Marriott attempts to frame such programs as part of a shared sustainability partnership. Clear communication in guest rooms explains the environmental reasons for linen reuse and emphasises that guests may still request fresh linen at any time. When managed well, this approach allows the hotel to reduce water use and energy for laundry while maintaining flexibility and respect for individual guest preferences. Again, sustainability and service quality are presented as complementary objectives rather than competing ones.

#### Waste reduction and plastics phase-out

Marriott has set ambitious targets for reducing waste and phasing out certain types of single-use plastics. Many properties have replaced miniature plastic toiletry bottles with larger, wall-mounted dispensers for shampoo, conditioner and body wash. In food and beverage operations, hotels seek to reduce food waste through better menu planning, portion control and donation of surplus edible food to local charities. Recycling programs are also in place in many locations, with separate bins for paper, plastics, glass and metal in both back-of-house and, in some cases, guest areas.

From a quality perspective, the replacement of miniature toiletry bottles with dispenser systems can initially be controversial, because some guests associate small branded bottles with a sense of luxury. However, well-designed dispensers that are kept clean and filled with high-quality products can still provide a premium feel, while significantly reducing plastic waste. Over time, many guests have become used to such systems and may even view them as a sign that the hotel is modern and environmentally responsible. Similarly, careful management of food waste can reduce costs and support local communities without compromising the quality of meals served to guests.

#### Green building and certification

Several Marriott properties have been constructed or renovated according to green building standards, such as LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design). These standards cover aspects like energy and water efficiency, indoor air quality, materials selection and connection to public transport. Green buildings often feature efficient insulation, natural lighting, green roofs or walls, and systems that monitor building performance.

For guests, these design features can contribute to a more comfortable and pleasant stay. Rooms in green buildings may have better air quality and temperature stability. Public areas benefit from natural daylight and views of outdoor green spaces. Noise levels can be reduced through better insulation. All of these factors contribute to the tangibles dimension of service quality described in the SERVQUAL model. In addition, third-party certifications give guests an assurance that the property's environmental claims are credible and independently verified, which may increase trust in the brand.

#### Responsible sourcing and sustainable food

Marriott also works on responsible sourcing, particularly in its food and beverage operations. Many hotels aim to buy more local and seasonal ingredients, which can reduce the environmental footprint associated with transportation and support local farmers and producers. Some properties offer organic options, plant-based menu items, or sustainably sourced seafood. These initiatives respond to changing customer preferences, as more travellers seek healthy and environmentally friendly dining options.

The focus on local and seasonal food can enhance service quality by improving freshness and flavour and by allowing chefs to showcase regional culinary traditions. Guests may perceive that they are getting an authentic experience that reflects the destination's culture

and environment. Menus sometimes include information about the origin of ingredients or the story of local suppliers, which adds value to the dining experience and strengthens the emotional connection between guests and the destination.

#### Employee engagement and training

A crucial element in combining sustainability and service quality is the role of employees. Marriott invests in training programs that help staff understand the company's sustainability goals and their own role in achieving them. Employees learn about energy and water conservation practices, waste segregation, ethical behaviour and how to communicate sustainability initiatives to guests in a clear and positive way.

Engaged employees are more likely to provide attentive and empathetic service, which is essential for high guest satisfaction. At the same time, when staff understand and believe in sustainability initiatives, they can implement these measures more consistently and effectively. For example, housekeeping staff play a key role in linen reuse programs and in ensuring that refillable toiletry dispensers are maintained to high hygiene standards. Front desk staff may answer questions from guests about the hotel's environmental policies or recommend eco-friendly activities in the local area. In this way, sustainability and quality are linked through human resources management.

#### Customer engagement in sustainability

Marriott recognises that guests themselves are important partners in achieving sustainability goals. The company therefore designs programs that encourage customer participation, while still offering choice and flexibility. Examples include loyalty points for choosing to skip housekeeping on certain days, information cards explaining how guests can reduce energy consumption during their stay, and digital tools that allow mobile check-in and check-out, reducing the need for printed materials.

When guests feel that their actions make a positive contribution without causing inconvenience, they are more likely to participate and to evaluate the hotel more favourably. In marketing communication, Marriott positions these initiatives as part of a shared responsibility for protecting destinations and communities for future generations. This narrative supports both sustainability outcomes and brand loyalty.

### Discussion

#### Applying the Triple Bottom Line

Marriott's approach to sustainability can be analysed through the Triple Bottom Line framework, which emphasises the need to balance environmental (planet), social (people) and economic (profit) objectives. Environmentally, the company works to reduce energy use, water consumption, waste and carbon emissions through a wide range of operational measures and building design strategies. Socially, it engages in community projects, supports local suppliers, promotes diversity and inclusion, and addresses human rights

risks in its supply chain. Economically, it seeks to maintain profitability and shareholder value by improving operational efficiency, reducing long-term costs and strengthening its reputation.

For quality management, the key insight is that Triple Bottom Line thinking does not require a sacrifice in guest experience. On the contrary, many environmentally and socially responsible practices directly support or enhance the quality of services provided. Energy-efficient technologies improve comfort, responsible sourcing improves food quality, and community engagement creates a richer sense of place that guests can experience and appreciate. By aligning its sustainability strategies with quality objectives, Marriott turns potential trade-offs into synergies.

#### Service quality and sustainability through the SERVQUAL lens

Using the SERVQUAL model, we can further explore how sustainability initiatives relate to service quality dimensions. In terms of tangibles, green building design, modern energy-efficient lighting and high-quality refillable amenities contribute to an appealing physical environment. Reliability is supported by standardised sustainability procedures that ensure a consistent experience, such as clear policies on linen reuse or waste segregation. Responsiveness is evident when staff are able to address guest questions about sustainability quickly and accurately, or to accommodate guests who prefer traditional services, such as daily linen changes. Assurance is reinforced by third-party certifications, transparent sustainability reporting and visible commitments to human rights and community support. Finally, empathy is expressed through Marriott's efforts to give guests choices, to communicate respectfully and to consider diverse cultural expectations related to comfort, cleanliness and environmental behaviour.

#### Challenges and limitations

Although Marriott has made significant progress, integrating sustainability and quality is not without challenges. High upfront investment is required for technologies such as building automation systems, renewable energy installations or green building materials. In some markets, franchise owners or management partners may be hesitant to allocate resources to sustainability initiatives if the financial benefits are not immediately visible. There can also be variations in the level of implementation between properties, depending on local regulations, infrastructure and management priorities.

Another challenge relates to guest expectations and cultural differences. Not all customers place the same value on sustainability, and a small number may react negatively to visible changes such as the removal of miniature toiletries. It is therefore important for Marriott to continue educating guests and to monitor feedback carefully, ensuring that sustainability measures do not unintentionally create frustration. Communication must strike a balance between promoting environmental responsibility and maintaining a sense of hospitality and generosity.

#### Conclusion

This assignment has explored how Marriott International integrates sustainability into its operations while maintaining high levels of service quality. Through its Serve 360 framework, the company has developed a broad range of initiatives addressing energy and water efficiency, waste reduction, green building, responsible sourcing, employee engagement and customer participation. The analysis shows that far from being a threat to service quality, these initiatives can reinforce and enhance guest experience when implemented thoughtfully and communicated clearly.

Using concepts from the sustainability and service quality literature, the case study demonstrates that sustainability and quality are closely interconnected in modern hospitality management. Environmentally friendly technologies and practices can improve physical comfort and aesthetics. Social responsibility initiatives can deepen guests' emotional connection to the brand and destination. Economic benefits from resource efficiency can be reinvested in further service improvements. At the same time, the case study highlights the importance of training, consistent implementation and guest communication in order to avoid potential tensions or misunderstandings.

For other tourism and hospitality businesses, the Marriott example suggests that sustainability should be integrated into the core of quality management systems rather than treated as an add-on. By designing sustainability programs that support guest comfort, satisfaction and trust, companies can contribute to global environmental and social goals while also strengthening their competitive position in an increasingly conscientious market.

## References

(Note: You should adapt and expand this reference list according to your institution's APA requirements and the specific sources you use.)

## Appendix A: Summary of Marriott's Serve 360 Pillars

This appendix summarises the four pillars of Marriott's Serve 360 framework in simple descriptive form so that the structure of the company's sustainability strategy is clear for readers.

1. **Nurture Our World:** Focuses on community engagement, philanthropy and support for local social and environmental projects in destinations where Marriott operates.
2. **Sustain Responsible Operations:** Concentrates on reducing the environmental footprint of Marriott hotels through energy and water efficiency, waste reduction, sustainable design and responsible sourcing.
3. **Empower Through Opportunity:** Addresses training, career development, diversity and inclusion for employees, as well as support for small and diverse suppliers.
4. **Welcome All and Advance Human Rights:** Emphasises Marriott's commitment to providing a welcoming environment for all guests and employees and to promoting human rights across its business and supply chain.

## Appendix B: Illustrative Sustainability–Quality Links at Property Level

This appendix offers examples of how specific sustainability actions at a typical Marriott property can be connected directly to aspects of service quality experienced by guests.

- Installation of modern, energy-efficient air-conditioning systems improves temperature stability in rooms, enhancing comfort (tangibles) while cutting energy use.
- Implementation of linen and towel reuse programs reduces water and energy consumption for laundry, but clear communication ensures guests can opt out, preserving a sense of personalised service (empathy).
- Introduction of refillable toiletry dispensers decreases plastic waste but uses high-quality branded products and well-designed fixtures that maintain a sense of luxury (tangibles and assurance).
- Training programs that teach staff about sustainability strengthen their ability to explain initiatives confidently and professionally to guests (assurance and responsiveness).
- Sourcing local food ingredients improves the freshness and authenticity of menus while supporting regional producers (tangibles and social responsibility).

### **Appendix C: Example of Guest Communication on Sustainability**

This appendix presents a sample text that could be used on an in-room card or digital display to communicate sustainability initiatives to guests while maintaining a friendly, high-quality tone.

“Dear Guest,

Welcome to our hotel. We are committed to offering you a comfortable and memorable stay while also caring for the environment and the communities that host us. You may notice a few features in your room and around the hotel that reflect this commitment. For example, your bathroom is equipped with refillable amenities to reduce single-use plastics, and you have the option to reuse your towels and bed linen to help us save water and energy. If you prefer fresh linen daily, our team will be happy to provide it—just let us know. Throughout the hotel, we work to reduce waste, conserve resources and support local partners. Thank you for joining us in protecting the places we all enjoy.”