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Guests on Earth: An introduction to sustainability in hospitality

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This book is titled *Sustainable Value Creation in Hospitality, Guests on Earth*, and you are probably wondering what exactly these words imply. In this introduction we briefly explain what we mean by hospitality and by sustainability. We also clarify why we believe that sustainability matters to hospitality, and why all those who work in this fascinating sector should behave like ‘guests on Earth’.

Hospitality is generally understood to be the art of making people feel welcome. Hospitality is demonstrated in private settings, as when we invite a friend to dine with us; in social settings; when we relate to foreigners; and in commercial settings. Restaurants, cafes, caterers, hotels and other forms of accommodation such as those offered by Airbnb, are all part of commercial hospitality. This book focuses specifically on commercial hospitality and, within this setting, on hotels and other forms of accommodation, even though several of its chapters will also prove useful to the food and beverage sector, including restaurants, cafes and caterers. Before addressing why it is important for hospitality to engage in sustainability and why therefore this book is useful for people wishing to join or already working in the hospitality industry, I would add that I hope this book will also be interesting for professionals working in the broader tourism industry for at least three reasons. First, because it discusses themes such as tourism transportation that are of immediate interest to the tourism industry in general. Second, because hotels and accommodations are essential components in any tourism package, and thus getting to know their operations better may be useful for all tourism professionals. And third, because of the so-called multiplier effect of hotels, or in other words the capacity of this industry to generate returns for a broader area and not only for the hotel premises itself. Take, for example, the labour and all goods, such as food and furniture, needed in a hotel. If labour and goods are sourced locally, this will have a positive socio-economic effect on the community surrounding the hotel. A vibrant community, in its turn, is attractive from a tourism perspective. Therefore, also in this respect, hotels are of interest to tourism developers and professionals.

The core activity of hotels is to provide lodgings, food and drink to their guests. Many hotels also provide leisure, conference and banqueting facilities and business services. Obviously, the mix of services and facilities provided depends on the market they serve and on new developments. One of the most exciting developments the hospitality industry is facing is the increasing attention that several social actors are paying to sustainability.

Sustainability requires that organisations create value not only in the economic but also in the social and environmental dimensions. Consider, for example, a hotel that makes a profit but at the same time pollutes the environment with its waste and sets the health of its employees at risk by regularly putting them on overtime. That hotel does not contribute to a better, more sustainable world because it does not create value along all three economic, social and environmental dimensions. On the contrary, in the process of creating economic value for itself, it takes value from society because it generates costs that have to be met by the community in which the hotel is located, such as costs involved in handling the waste and in restoring the health of overworked staff. Conversely, hotels can contribute to a more sustainable world by investing, for example, in renewable energy and employee development, as we will see more in depth in Chapter 2, *The Sustainable Hospitality Value Chain*.

Between the 1970s and the 1990s sustainability advocates focused mainly on the role that national and regional governments can play in bringing about sustainability. The necessity of involving businesses in achieving a more equitable and environmentally friendly world started to be recognised in the mid-1990s. The first targets were large corporations in the oil and chemical industries, such as Shell and ExxonMobil, because they are highly visible and have a largely negative impact on the natural environment. Companies whose products are closely linked with people's health, such as the food giant Unilever, were targeted next. Industries that comprise a few major chains and a large number of smaller independent chains or establishments, such as hospitality and tourism, are less visible and escaped attention for a while. However, since the start of the new millennium those industries have also been under increasing scrutiny.

In this context, 2016 and 2017 were two especially intense years. In 2016, the Paris climate agreement called upon all industries, and particularly the tourism and hospitality industry, to take responsibility for climate change. Tourism currently accounts for almost 5% of worldwide carbon emissions, while accommodations account for approximately 20% of the emissions from tourism (UNWTO and UNEP, 2008). The tourism and hospitality industry's contribution to global warming is therefore significant, and the Paris climate agreement rightly requested that it take measures to reduce its negative impact on the natural environment. Moreover, the United Nations designated 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. The aim of the UN is to utilise the transformative force of tourism, not only as an ally in lowering carbon emissions, but also as an opportunity to celebrate cultural diversity, foster social inclusive-