

Sustainability Certifications for Tourism, Travel and Hospitality (TTH) and the Indian industry response

Freeda Maria Swarna M¹, Shaheed Khan², Rajesh Nambiar³, S. Praveen Kumar⁴

¹Member, India Working Group, Global Sustainable Tourism Council, Bangalore

²Head, Research, Advocacy and Training, Dharthi NGO, Bangalore

³Chief Executive Officer, Provork, Mumbai, Maharashtra

⁴Assistant Professor, Centre for Tourism and Hotel Management (CTHM), Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai, Tamil Nadu

Shaheed Khan: (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5920-6703>),

Freeda Maria Swarna M., (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9649-090X>)

ABSTRACT

With an intent to raise awareness about the contribution of Sustainable Tourism to Development among the Tourism, Travel and Hospitality stakeholders, the general public, the Governments across levels, the 70 General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) designated 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. The year received another boost in the context of the 2030, Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), wherein the tourism system would usher in a change in business practices, public policies and even consumer behaviour which would make the Tourism sector Sustainable.

The following objectives were framed to conduct the study i) to assess the pulse of the Indian Tourism Travel and Hospitality (TTH) with regard to Sustainability certifications, ii) to collate and assess inputs and data available in the public domain with regard to Sustainability certification, and iii) to find out the opinion of experts who work in the domain of sustainability and certifications.

To make the traveller more conscious and make tourism regenerative; the facet of ‘eco-label’ is one of the indicators that helps to quantify sustainable production, sustainable consumption and therefore, sustainable development. Herein, we can say that, “Eco-labelling,” “Eco-Certification” in the Tourism Business would lead to Sustainable Practices which ultimately would become a follow up for good practices, that not only will solve the Environmental issues, but will address the socio-economic and cultural facets. This is true for the simple reason, one in ten jobs globally is in the tourism sector and tourism accounts for ten percent of Global GDP; clearly bringing in concerns for social, economic and environmental sustainability, which will ensure a demand for products and services in the tourism sector which focus on Sustainability. The Indian Tourism Scenario with its multiple players, the large hotel sector with multiple chains, the resorts spread across the country, the Airlines, the Travel Agents, the Tour Operators, the Communities involved in Tourism directly and indirectly at the operational level and the Government at the Federal Level and the State Governments who actually implement the Tourism programs. The Study is part of an ongoing research, which invokes the readiness, or the acceptance, the doubts the Tourism Stakeholders have in India, which would lead to International and National Level Organizations to play a dynamic role to ensure, Sustainability Certifications leading to Sustainable Practices which in turn will ensure the achievement of SDGs, leading to the promise the Nation makes towards Global well-being.

Keywords— Sustainable Tourism, Eco-labelling, SDGs, Policy, Certifications.

Introduction

Booking.com is making it easier for travellers to search for sustainable accommodation with the launch of its Travel Sustainable badge, which recognises any kind of properties that has implemented a combination of sustainable practices that meet the requisite impact threshold for their destination. The goal of the badge is to make credible recognition of impactful sustainability efforts attainable for more properties worldwide and to provide travellers with a transparent, consistent and easy-to-

understand way to identify a wider range of more sustainable stays. (TTG Asia, 2021). The Sustainability paradigm, as stated by Fox (2021) has three sets of accommodation players, with three mindsets viz.,

1. Spectators, about 32% of the market, don't pursue sustainability goals and have only taken steps that help reduce costs.
2. Partakers, about 61% of room coverage, are happy to take steps, but sustainability comes secondary to core business goals.
3. Frontrunners, the remaining 7%, are those that are proactively driving sustainability action. It is “deeply engrained in their operations and part of the guest offering.”

But one question that would come up in the mind of the practitioner, the academic, the traveller, is who should be held responsible for the Sustainability paradigm getting proliferated into the various sectors of the tourism eco-system. The Skyscanner Report (2021) has thrown up pertinent facts, that brings in a system of belief, wherein, 59% of all respondents believe sustainability is the travel industry's responsibility; 53% say it's down to citizens, the visitors, the travellers; 49% say it's the airlines and aviation industry's responsibility and 49% believe governments need to take responsibility. Whatever, the argument, it is up to all of us to ensure the nuances of sustainability get juxtaposed into the elements of business. As Holmes (2021) in his post has simply stated, “Sustainability must be more visible to travellers to help increase awareness and satisfy their increasing demands. Examples include - using renewable energy, LED lighting, reduce water usage to eliminating single use plastics..... We need to start prioritizing sustainability in all lodging, hotels and resorts. Sustainability must be the standard for doing business in hospitality. The entire sector (supply chain too!) must challenge themselves to do better, set high goals and share their sustainable accomplishments...and then go out and set higher goals.” If on one side the visitors, the travellers, the citizens who are the consumers are slowly, but steadily and consciously looking out for sustainable products and services and as Haertel (2021) specifies, “Some hotels have had sustainability as part of their business model for years, because it's just good tourism business. In fact, there's a massive case for implementing sustainable practices into business, particularly hotels, lodging, and hospitality. It saves money, attracts new visitors while holding onto loyal return customers, and helps in employee retention. It may also showcase environmental and social nuances of the local region that often bring visitors to the area, such as protected wildlife or cultural heritage.....For sustainability-minded travellers, whose numbers are growing by the day, accommodations can be a frustrating part of their planning process. It is not as easy as typing into a search engine “sustainable hotels in New Delhi or Singapore or Sydney or Chicago or even Madrid, and finding the most environmentally-friendly option for that location. Greenwashing certainly is an issue. But so is the complete opposite — not enough information for hotels that are actually doing spectacular things for the environment and the communities they serve.” It is still surprising to see how and why the industry is not scaling up, despite the fact in a research report by the Urban Land Institute (2021) it categorically mentions that 33% of the guests of a Global Hotel chain surveyed preferred hotels with environmental programs, but the meatier output of the research was, 44% of the guest's preferred hotels with environmental programs came from an age category of under 25. This data clearly throws up a Global opportunity on the domain of sustainability and its options. The Indian travellers startled the tourism eco-system when 94% of the Indian travellers surveyed by booking.com mentioned that ‘sustainable travel’ is a priority for them in the future (ETTravelWorld, 2021). Not only was the demand for sustainable travel on the high, but the finer aspects of ensuring what is spent by the visitor, the traveller; 68% of the Indian respondents believed and wanted the ‘spend’ to reach the local community. Booking.com (2021) has in its research dissected many aspects which will be an eye-opener for the Indian industry, for the discerning Indian Traveller, has stated in no unequivocal terms to that 77% of the travellers expect the industry to offer more sustainable options, through Travel Sustainable badges and not surprisingly 88% of the travellers indicating that they would be more likely to choose a specific accommodation if they knew it was implementing

sustainable practices. Booking.com (2021a) provides more food for thought in its research, wherein the Indian traveller categorically states, 42% mentioning they could not find any sustainable options; 26% did not even know that sustainable accommodations existed. Clearly, a vision for the sustainable badge, certification, ecolabel, was in the horizon not as a mirage, but as something in reality. Thus, then the world over, if in some geographies, the sustainability strides have been launched and moving fast; India has arrived. Is the travel, tourism and hospitality (TTH) eco-system be able to take on the sustainability bandwagon, is it at the cusp of something bigger for the trade and stakeholders, or will it remain on paper a dream considering that the TTH sector contributes in a grand fashion to the economy of the country and the world. Booking.com (2022) report further ushers in the increasing desire to make more mindful and conscious choices across the travel sphere. A peek into the 2022 report will help one to ascertain the thought of the global traveller and create opportunities for a way forward:

- ❖ 81% of the 30000 travellers questioned confirm that sustainable travel is important to them.
- ❖ 59% of travellers want to leave the places they visit better than when they arrived.
- ❖ In order to reduce the carbon footprint, nearly 23% of the respondents would choose a destination closer home.

Which clearly means, the world of the traveller is changing and they are becoming more of the responsible type.

If all the Research Group, think tanks are moving towards a regime of ensuring sustainable tourism eco-system through ecolabelling, the reality of decarbonising the tourism segment is bound to be a humongous task considering the now accepted structural changes towards CO₂ emission being net zero by 2050. The issues of understanding and implementation of net zero has been moving on a focussed critical pathway towards meeting the Paris Climate commitments; it is how the pathway needs to move forward is questionable. As observed by Scott and Gossling (2021), climate emergency has hastened the evolution of net zero from technical concept to a central objective of climate policy, while warning of the “perils of declaring climate ambitions without credible strategies to achieve them.” The net zero by 2050 and its roadmap are set to become a central focus for tourism policy and planning across all scales of the tourism system-global, national and regional (clearly indicating a change in attitude and implementation of sustainability regimes). The most urgent priorities for advancing the net zero tourism agenda centres almost in its entirety on high carbon transportation. Transportation has been described as a roadblock to climate change mitigation (Creutzig et al., 2015); and we are all aware that without air transportation whether it is for global travel or domestic, it will be tourism which will pay a price.

The vision and mission of the research paper is to assess the role that certification and ecolabels play in bringing about and accelerating the adoption of practices that support in conservation and preservation and impact the local settings vis-à-vis with the production and consumption of services in the domain of TTH. The research takes on deeper into the India TTH eco-system which is slowly but securely understanding the issues of sustainability certifications and ecolabeling; which will help in ushering a much needed change.

The COP26 promise

As mentioned by James Higham (2021), Governments need to take a leading responsibility, but we cannot currently expect this to come from national tourism administrations. The baseline report on the integration of sustainable consumption and production patterns into tourism policies, conducted by the UNWTO and UN ENVIRONMENT (2019), showed that 100% of tourism strategies mention sustainable tourism nowadays. However, only 55% go beyond making a cursory reference to it, and very few cite real data on the (un)sustainable use of current resources. While 56% of the policies foresee the development of mechanisms to monitor the sustainable development of tourism, currently only 4% of them include information on the progress made in the implementation of areas related to environmental sustainability. Tourism administrations are guided by two key performance indicators:

(i) volume of (international) tourists, and (ii) volume of expenditure. Until their mandate changes, and they are required to develop metrics of success aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement, any change will only happen as a result of other government departments that have a sustainability remit, particularly from those in charge of transport, energy and climate. A first scan of the Nationally Determined Contributions declared at COP26 shows numerous mentions of tourism as an industry of economic value, but hardly any commitments on the tourism front to mitigate and adapt as a result of climate change.

During the COP26, we witnessed the launch of the Glasgow Declaration on climate action in tourism, an initiative to catalyse increased urgency about the need to accelerate climate action in tourism and to secure strong actions and commitment to cut tourism emissions in half over the next decade and reach Net Zero emissions as soon as possible before 2050. By the end of COP26, over 300 organisations (but no countries) have signed the declaration, committing to deliver climate action plans within 12 months of signing and implementing them accordingly, updating plans if they already have them, and publicly reporting progress against the targets set in the Declaration, at least annually (One Planet Network, 2021).

Immediately after COP26, Booking.com announced its Travel Sustainable badge for accommodation providers and in its 2022 report stated that more than 100,000 properties globally were being recognized for the sustainability efforts and being provided the badge (Booking.com, 2022). It will take time to assess how effective each one of these actions is to reduce carbon emissions, and how much closer it gets us to a net zero target. The Sustainable Hospitality Alliance (Alliance) (<https://sustainablehospitalityalliance.org>) has set a target for hotels to reduce 90% carbon emissions by 2050. Established in 1992, Alliance, uses the collective power of the industry to deliver impact locally and on a global scale. Their members make up 25% of the global hotel industry by rooms and include 14 world-leading hotel companies with a combined reach of over 30,000 properties and 4.5 million rooms (UNWTO, 2020). With a vision to be a responsible hospitality business for a better world and a mission to drive collaborative action to enable the hospitality industry to have a lasting positive impact on our planet and its people; Sustainability Hospitality Alliance, has shown a path to the tourism and travel eco-system and a way to be part of sustainability and ensure action on all aspects. The actions of Alliance are worth emulating for each one of the stakeholders in the tourism eco-system. For the Alliance uniquely represents how the hospitality industry is taking collective responsibility to ensure that destinations and communities are being supported and protected now and for future generations (Sustainable Hospitality Alliance, 2020).

Ecolabeling

Woodford (2021), whilst clarifying the ecolabel nuances for the consumers, eloquently brings out three major benefits that Ecolabels have to offer.

First, Ecolabels for consumers, they're a shortcut to doing good: they're an easy-to-use, trustworthy guide to products that help the environment in some way. If you're racing up and down your supermarket, quickly trying to decide what to buy, looking out for products that carry authoritative, recognizable symbols will help in making a decision to buy the product or service that is on offer. Second, for manufacturers (and should be read for service providers as well), ecolabels offer a potential point of difference and a competitive advantage. Many consumers take environmental performance into account so if a product looks eco-friendly and doesn't cost much more, it's more likely to be lifted off the shelf. For manufacturers, if by making eco-friendly products there is commercial sense; then the service sector too gets to augment the best of consumer bets before making a decision to buy the service offering or move to a better service provider. It is the third aspect, that provides for the best of argument for those who would like to support the facet of conservation and preservation. ecolabels encourage a general raising of environmental performance, even among products that aren't labelled.

According to the International Standards Organization (ISO), the body that guarantees worldwide uniformity in the way we measure things, the objective of ecolabels is (Woodford, 2021): "...through communication of verifiable and accurate information, that is not misleading, on environmental aspects of products and services, to encourage the demand for and supply of those products and services that cause less stress on the environment, thereby stimulating the potential for market-driven continuous environmental improvement."

Simply put, if environmentally friendly products sell better, all manufacturers have an incentive to produce them—and standards rise overall. Thence, for the system to work, eco-labels need to be trustworthy, trusted, simple to understand, and easy-to-recognize. No doubt Booking.com (2021) provided the eye-opening research for the Indian tourism ecosystem, wherein the travellers are looking forward for the industry to offer sustainable options, and also sustainable badges, a la, ecolabelling mechanism that will help in identifying businesses and establishments that are honouring sustainability.

Manvendra Pratap Singh (Singh, 2022), of the School of Management, National Institute of Technology Rourkela (<https://www.nitrkl.ac.in/>) who is engaged in teaching and researching in the domain of Organizational Sustainability and Sustainable Business, the challenges and the opportunities, mentions that, "ecolabelling or sustainability certifications are much hyped at times, and in a world of comparison, if I were to walk into a Hotel which is having specific ecolabel, and do not maintain the quality standards promised and neither delivered, vis-à-vis an accommodation facility that does not have an ecolabel but is providing quality and happy accommodation facility; then it can be said, that ecolabels become a disguise for business opportunities." Prof. Singh, goes on to mention, "...that on one hand, ecolabelling and sustainability certification may appear as a 'compulsion', but in actual fact, provide a provision for a 'face value' which the customer and the service provider would be able to appreciate." Prof. Singh is of the firm belief that, "multiplicity of ecolabels, adds lot of confusion, and the business are in a quandary as to which to follow? GRI is good by itself and has made pioneering efforts to bring in the best towards sustainable business solutions, options, challenges and opportunities." When queried about India and the sustainability options, Prof. Singh, considers that, "BRSR of SEBI as a good platform, that has been initiated and one is confident that the businesses will not only fall in the line of compliance, but genuinely appreciate the need of such platforms, and adhere." Commenting about the multiplicity of labels, Prof. Singh, was confident, that, ".....considering sustainability and the issues of labelling will evolve constantly and one needs to exercise patience and work along, till after a time, there will be one framework, which will be operational globally. He also emphasised upon the base line "business value system" it is very important otherwise all standards, frameworks and labels will become just logos."

India and Sustainability

India and the world have a long and challenging way to go in dealing with environmental problems, and learning to live together in sustainable communities. We need to realize that development is more than economic, and sustainable development is a collective responsibility (Pandey, 2017). Very clear thoughts that augurs well for the scenario of Sustainable Development and Growth across businesses. If Tourism, Travel and Hospitality (TTH) are to be considered, then the magnitude of Sustainable Development, Sustainability goes beyond the imagination of business. The NITI Aayog (2020) in its India Voluntary National Review (VNR) on Sustainable India, has categorically made a mention that the Nation have been moving forward in nationally determined contributions under the UNFCCC, India's climate action strategies emphasise clean and efficient energy systems, resilient urban infrastructure and planned eco-restoration among others. With all its 6,03,175 villages electrified; clean cooking fuel reaching 80 million additional households since 2015; renewable energy installed capacity growing by 75 per cent since 2014, to 132 Giga Watts; energy saving appliances reducing carbon dioxide emission annually by 38 million tonnes, India is well-placed on fulfilling its climate

action agenda. Clearly the VNR has provided for a peep into what we as a Nation are capable of ensuring global goals provided in the form of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

Considering that the research team had a total of about 80 years of experience between them in the TTH line of business; the dearth of India-centric literature was felt. However, the global focus on sustainability and certification was heart-warming, which ensured the collation of data points.

Objectives

- i) To assess the pulse of the Indian Tourism, Travel and Hospitality (TTH) with regard to Sustainability certification,
- ii) To collate and assess inputs and data available in the public domain with regard to Sustainability certification,
- iii) To find out the opinion of experts who work in the domain of Sustainability and certifications.

The study was based on a survey considering the research area to be the domain of sustainability and certifications in India, the research team ventured out to answer the three major objectives raised in this study.

Sample

A total of 185 respondents from the Hotels, Eco Resorts, Travel Agents, Tour Operators and Online Travel Agents (OTA) were identified to whom digital questionnaires were sent with at least three follow up reminders. The questionnaire was kept open for a period of 25 days, and a total of 110 responses were received. Of the 75 prospective respondents, who did not respond, 31 informed that they were interested in the subject being researched, but would not like to respond as their organizations had a long way to go and the rest, i.e., 45 wanted to attempt the questionnaire a year later, once their organizations were prepared to face the domain of sustainability and certifications.

Secondary data and information

The research team worked on collating information and inputs for a period of five-months prior to writing down the postulates of the paper. From a Global perspective, there was plentiful of information that was available; however, from an India centric aspect, not much was available. However, there were research papers on the nuances of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and Tourism, which helped the research team to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Analytical Discussion

Tourism, Travel and Hospitality (TTH), Sustainability and Certifications in India

Then the primary question is, how will the TTH scenario stand up to maintaining the opportunity provided by Sustainability that would go a long way in not only recognizing the ideals of SDGs but ensuring a compliance in all its completeness and complexities. The primary question that comes about is should TTH show the way to ensure a more Sustainable Business by adopting to the Global norms, or should the eco-system usher in a policy that would be in the form of “regulation” and/or creating a “mandatory approach” that would usher in the dreaded ‘licence Raj’ or as aptly put a SP Singh (Singh, 2021), a retired Deputy Director General (DDG) of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (MoT, GoI), “have a ‘mix in approach’ and bring in the elements of ‘volunteering’ which will help in the factors of acceptability, thereby leading to Sustainable Options and opportunities.” The debate of how to usher in Sustainability Certifications goes on, some favouring a voluntary approach, whilst others a stringent approach considering that deadlines of the SDGs are looming on all of us as citizens of the earth.

Yogesh Dubey, Professor of Ecosystem and Environment Management at the Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM) (<https://iifm.ac.in>) mentions that, “Certification in the tourism sector can play a pivotal role in standardizing the practices at national and regional levels. It acts as a guarantee of tourism done well encompassing all the elements of sustainability and acts as an

assurance for all the stakeholders that all attendant issues related to environment, ecology and society have been addressed efficiently. It shall also help in setting the common conservation goals and established mechanism to timely monitor them to assess the effectiveness and its overall achievement. It will, over a period of time bring in tangible benefits in terms of conservation of ecosystems on which it is based, along with benefits to the local communities, preservation of natural and cultural environment and most importantly the much-needed recognition from the consumers (Dubey, 2021).” This is in a way is an optimistic view of Certifications and Ecolabeling in the TTH domain. Then an approach that is worth listening and endearing to, is the one that Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) and Responsible Tourism Society of India (RTSOI) have been speaking about.

Karthik Davey a promoter of an Ecotourism Destination: Dholes Den (<https://dholesden.com>), near the Bandipur Tiger Reserve (BTR) in Karnataka, simply mentioned, “the adoption of TOFTiger (www.toftiger.org) certification (approved by GSTC) (TOFTigers, 2014) is his biggest advantage.” He added that “travellers with a bent of sustainability are coming as repeat guests to the resort (Davey, 2021).” Dholes Den as a property is 95% energy efficient with alternative energy-saving measures in place. Karthik says, “Sustainability is something that we believe should be a lifestyle not an act for a purpose.” Dhole’s Den through its biodigester generates bio-gas, which meets 5% of the cooking fuel requirement, which means a beginning has been done. He further adds, “...visitors have gone green, there are many who prefer to travel to a destination, which is not only green but practices qualitative ‘green tourism’, what can be termed as sustainable tourism,” Sustainable tourism promoters like Karthik will ensure a purposeful accreditation, assessment and certification framework which will do well for the tourism system in the long run.

Tourism and India, the march towards sustainability and ecolabelling

Tourism accounted for 6.8 per cent of India’s GDP in 2019 contributing to 8.1 per cent of all employment. Over the decade, the sector’s direct contribution to GDP is likely to grow by 7.1 per cent per annum. Trends of growth are found in relation to geo-physical and natural attractions, cultural/spiritual heritage, adventure as well as wellness and medical tourism, which are conducive to growth in sustainable tourism. India has operationalised the Comprehensive Sustainable Tourism Criteria for three major industry segments, namely, tour operators, accommodation and beaches, backwaters, lakes and rivers sectors, which promote various eco-friendly measures like installation of Sewage Treatment Plant (STP), rain water harvesting system, waste management system, pollution control, introduction of non-Chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) equipment for refrigeration and air conditioning, measures for energy, and water conservation among others. In addition, the Government is taking enduring measures for integrating tourism with local culture and economic development, promoting community participation, and improving governance and security.

As Pandey (2017) cites, “sustainability has always been a core component of Indian culture. Its philosophy and values have underscored a sustainable way of life. For example, the yogic principle of *aparigraha*, which is a virtue of being non-attached to materialistic possessions, keeping only what is necessary at a certain stage of life. Humans and nature share a harmonious relationship, which goes as far as a reverence for various flora and fauna. This has aided biodiversity conservation efforts.” Clearly, we as a Nation have it in us to ensure for ourselves, our communities and its people, the businesses, and the country at large.

The Role of the Government in India

Speaking of a draft National Strategy and road map for sustainable tourism with focus on adventure, sustainable and ecotourism, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (<https://tourism.gov.in>), Mr. Arvind Singh, focussed on the, “need to revisit and redevelop the tourism strategies of sustainability for the future...with more travellers, globally and locally are becoming conscious of the adverse environmental, social, economic and cultural impacts of tourism on local communities and hence are seeking more sustainable options in the mode of travel, accommodation

and experiences.” (GSTC, 2021). The Secretary emphasised the fact in the live event that had a good number of stakeholders participating, wherein, he emphasised, “...the need for tourism being a vehicle for conservation and employment generation and mentioned that the aspects of Sustainable tourism apply to all forms of tourism and all kinds of destinations....” Commenting further, the Secretary added, “the Government is finalizing a scheme for certification for sustainable tourism as per the Sustainable Tourism Criteria of India (STCI) and indicators for the destinations, accommodation sector and tour operators in consultation with the Indian industry. The STCI was launched in 2010 provided coverage for the accommodation and tour operators and destinations were brought within its ambit by 2014, and the STCI principles were modelled on the GSTC framework and criterion.” (GSTC, 2021). The facet of ‘Destination Stewardship’ too has been considered to be important and unique to the travel industry in regards to sustainability and the options that are provided. By following the framework of Destination Stewardship, the stakeholders of the Indian tourism industry will be in a position to usher in sustainable development management, maximize social and economic benefits for the host community, minimize the environmental impact on the destination and protect the cultural heritage of the local destination. These aspects would clearly bring about the necessary norms for certifications to be adopted by the stakeholders, which will go a long way to promote tourism, the sustainable way.

It is a clear direction of the understanding that certification/ecolabeling would become an important aspect in the tourism scenario of India. True the States in India have played an important role in tourism and its promotion; the central/federal Government has provided for tourism promotion and inputs that have supported the states in their tourism and related endeavours. It is clear that the role played by RTSOI, GSTC and its accredited organizations, and off course the principles of STCI that the Indian Government has been working on will play a dominant role in bringing about the movement towards Certification and Ecolabeling, which will augur well on the canvas of Sustainable Tourism. “Indian schemes can be ‘Indian’ and international simultaneously,” mentioned Mr. Randy Durband, who even highlighted the aspect and said, “...harmonize for India, what is being done Internationally....” (GSTC, 2021). Read the ‘self-certification’ opportunities that RTSOI has created in India, it is clear, that the Indian Tourism businesses are moving towards sustainable certification and ecolabelling, which will further catapult all the participants to the global scenarios and networks thereby providing an opportunity for improved business.

With India signing the pledge to set a net zero target by 2070, the COP26 summit; though in more specific terms, this was already highlighted during the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) framework (2003) of REDD+ for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest degradation, along with the sustainable management of forests for the conservation and enhancement of forest carbon stocks’ (Pargaien, 2021) it is clear that the stakeholders of tourism need to adopt to measures of sustainability immediately, rather than later and move towards certifications and ecolabeling or simply start putting sustainable practices in place in their businesses.

Responsible Tourism Society of India (RTSOI), the self-certification perspective

Rakesh Mathur (Mathur, 2022) a doyen of Indian Tourism and Hospitality Industry for five decades and a founder member of the Responsible Tourism Society of India (RTSOI) (<https://rtsoi.org>) (earlier Ecotourism Society of India), speaks of, “Self-certification, as a pertinent measure to ensure sustainable practices and a motivation for the Tourism players to imbibe quality practices in the tourism eco-system, where sustainability and its practices will be the rule.” He did not see the need for a ‘mandatory approach,’ which otherwise would become a ‘whitewash’, and in the words of Mr. Mathur, “the stakeholders would try to hide all the negativities of the business, all for the need of a coveted certification.....rightly ‘a Motivated individual, a tourism system’ is the key to any sustainability certifications.” Mr. Mathur, has brought forth the finer aspects and mentions, “any Sustainability certification or eco-labelling should be ‘practical’ for the local environment; which will ensure for the stakeholders of tourism.....in fact, it will become a collective responsibility to

proceed towards sustainability with the Tourism and Hospitality service providers and most importantly the tourists playing a dynamic role in ushering in sustainability.” For a person who practices what he preaches (Indian Express, 2011), Mr. Mathur sees sustainability in the eyes of the customer, who would like to focus on, “the positivity of Environment, the community, the weaker sections, women, the issues of waste and its management..... thereby creating a responsible citizen and of course a Tourism organization that approaches Tourism and Hospitality with utmost sensitivity.” Mr. Mathur is of the firm belief that Sustainability and its Certification in the Tourism system should not, “lead to ‘whitewashing’ by the tourism operators, but should be a movement towards a motivated business, an industry that will focus on the good of the world through Sustainable Tourism.”

Mr. Mathur, speaking at the Expo 2020 Dubai, India Pavilion, mainstreaming sustainability for future of tourism (India at Expo 2020, 2022), mentioned that 70% of India Tourism is in the informal sector and bringing them under the umbrella of sustainability and sustainability certifications is important for all the stakeholders. The aspects expressed by Mr. Mathur are real, and organizations like RTSOI will play a dynamic role now and in the future to usher in the changes in certification and ecolabeling. RTSOIs game changer is the initiative of the ‘responsible traveller,’ which will create a major buzz in the domain of sustainability, leading to the stakeholders to opt for ecolabeling and certifications.

Global Sustainable Tourism Council and the India spec

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) (<https://www.gstccouncil.org>) India Working Group (IWG) (<https://www.gstccouncil.org/india/>) (GSTC, n.d.), came together in 2021 to augment the functions of GSTC’s globally agreed on principles of sustainability in the Indian subcontinent. With a specific objective to align the “India Standards” i.e., STCI with the GSTC Criteria and to advocate with the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) for its recognition and adoption. Besides, suggesting to the state Governments to have robust policy where the GSTC and revised STCI Criteria are to be adopted. If that was at the end objective with the Government, another objective would be to motivate and consult with Tourism accommodation providers, tour operators and destinations to adopt the criteria, ultimately leading to GSTC certification. The IWG has been working towards Increasing knowledge on the GSTC criterion, through impactful channels and methods for better understanding and reach of the standards to one and all. The GSTC - IWG will thus focus on Sustainable Tourism opportunities and interventions and proliferate the global dialogue to the Ecotourism scenario in India. Initiated by the Rainforest Alliance, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Foundation (UN Foundation), and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in 2007, GSTC has its presence across the world and has worked closely with Governments, private sector, and destinations and its community to ensure the finer aspects of sustainability in tourism.

The Survey to understand the Indian tourism ecosystem feel for ecolabelling

The research team to understand the Indian stakeholder’s response conducted a study with the support of a questionnaire that was administered to 185 respondents from the Hotels, Eco Resorts, Travel Agents, Tour Operators and Online Travel Agents (OTA). A total of 110 responses were received and the following is the split between the stakeholders of TTH, this will help in assuaging the way in which the Indian stakeholders appreciate sustainability certifications and ecolabelling practices.

A: Variety of Respondents

The research team made its best of efforts over a period of three months to get the stakeholders to provide for responses for the study. 59.45% of the stakeholders provided their responses. The research team wanted more hotels and eco resorts to provide their responses, but a total of 16 (14%) and 21 (19%) of the 110 provided for the same. It is in this segment, i.e., the Hotels and Eco Resorts

the traction for sustainability options that can be best understood; considering even the GSTC criteria are arranged in four pillars: (A) Sustainable management; (B) Socioeconomic impacts; (C) Cultural impacts; and (D) Environmental impacts (GSTC, 2021). The OTAs too were touched upon, the respondents were not forthcoming however. All the efforts would have brought about a facet of proliferating the thought process of Sustainability Certifications/Ecolabeling to the stakeholders in much robust way and ensuring baseline data generation as well.

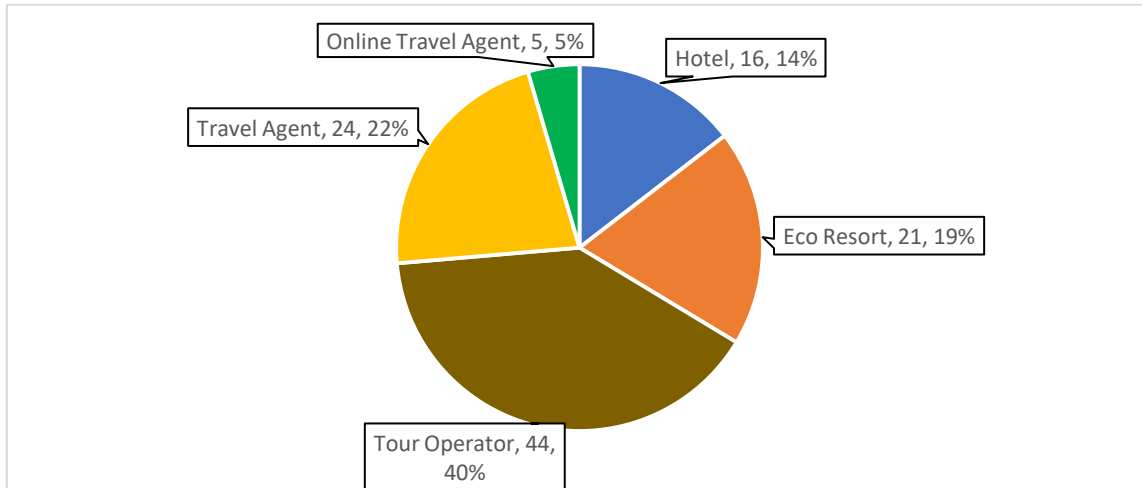


Illustration 1: Respondents to the Research Study

B: Organizational Operational Status

The organizations that were connected with to provide for responses were connected at various levels viz., Manager/General Manager, Director of Operations and the Corporate Leadership; which helped the team to derive a good amount of data that would help to assuage the ecolabeling construct amongst the Indian tourism stakeholders. Tables (2) and (3) clearly help in the understanding of the Indian stakeholders of the facet of ecolabelling. Nearly 71.8% of the respondents in total came under the Senior Management category with more than eleven years of experience and they have truly seen the evolution of their functions in particular and the tourism aspects in general, which meant the statement being made will have an impact for the future. When the research team was discussing with each of the respondents in the Senior Management category it was a clear element of seriousness that could be found. Those respondents with below ten years of experience, had education and knowledge on their side; which they were willing to implement in practice. This is one area of hope that we can come across on the long run wherein qualified and trained human capital will assuage the finer aspects of sustainability and adopt and even adhere to the initiatives of certifications and ecolabelling.

Designation	Hotel	Eco resort	Tour Operator	Travel Agent	Online Travel Agent	Total
Manager/General Manager	2	4	18	12	4	40
Director of Operations	6	3	20	6	0	35
Corporate Leadership	7	14	6	5	0	32
Consultant	1	0	0	1	1	3
Total	16	21	44	24	5	110

Table 2: Designation of Respondents

Years of operation	Hotel	Eco resort	Tour Operator	Travel Agent	Online Travel Agent	Total	% of respondents
>1<5 years	2	4	7	2	2	17	15.45%
>6<10 years	1	2	7	2	2	14	12.72%
>11<15 years	6	4	12	1	0	23	20.90%
>16<20 years	2	4	8	10	1	25	22.72%
>More than 21 Years	5	7	10	9	0	31	28.18%
Total	16	21	44	24	5	110	100%

Table 3: Organization Operational Status, years of Operation amongst the Stakeholders

C: Understanding of Sustainable Tourism and Sustainability Measures

All the frameworks, instruments and tools that talk of sustainable tourism and the measures of sustainability that one needs to adopt have focussed on the people (community), the economics and the environmental facets. True, cumulative impact assessments (CIA), which incorporates within itself Environmental, Socio-cultural and Economic have a true bearing on the nuances of sustainability and the impacts that they can produce. World Tourism Organization and United Nations Development Programme (2017), in their seminal work of analysis of 64 countries’ VNRs on SDGs submitted to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2016 and 2017, as well as eight Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support (MAPS) country road maps, tourism was mentioned in 41 VNRs and most of them related to SDGs 8 (decent work and economic growth), 12 (responsible consumption) and 17 (partnerships for the goals). The MAPS reports highlight that developing countries often perceive sustainable tourism as an SDG accelerator. Some of the VNRs also highlight tourism’s challenges and threats. Challenges such as unsustainable consumption and production, as well as poor management of natural resources and waste impact mostly on SDGs 11, 12, and 14 on ‘Sustainable Cities and Communities’, ‘Responsible Production and Consumption’ and ‘Life below Water’, respectively. In addition, various countries report that tourism’s potential to advance sustainable development is undermined by external threats such as global economic instability, natural disasters, climate change, the loss of biodiversity and regional and international security. This clearly signifies that at the country spec there has been an understanding of sustainability and thereby the encouragement of the Governments to the businesses to adopt and adhere to sustainable norms that come their way. A provincial/state Government of Gujarat in India, in its Tourism Policy 2021-25 (Gujarat Tourism, 2021), has categorically laid out the benefits of accreditation with policy directives as follows:

- a) Reimbursement of 50% of the certification fees paid, up to INR 10 Lakhs to hotel/wellness resort obtaining Green Building Certification under IGBC/GRIHA/LEED or any such international accreditation/certification as identified by the State Level Expert Committee (SLEC) from time to time,
- b) Reimbursement of 50% of the certification fees paid, up to INR 5 Lakhs to Tour Operators for Obtaining GSTC certification through GSTC accredited agencies.

The above two have been expressed by the Government through its Strategies for Sustainability and also recognizing the fact that the tourism sector accounts for 8% of the world carbon emission, with the carbon footprint of the tourism sector in India being the fourth largest globally. This is a clear indication that, with the Federal Government in India pushing for sustainable tourism, sustainability certifications and ecolabelling; more states are bound to follow suit, thereby ensuring a compliance.

D: Stakeholders view about compliance

The stakeholders (79 respondents/Illustration 2) believed that by adopting to sustainability certifications and ecolabelling, they will be complying with the norms of Environment, Socio-economic and Cultural; which will usher in the best for the tourism system. Of the 79 respondents

(Table 4), 34 respondents were from hotels; 36 from resorts; 5 from Tour Operators and 4 from Travel Agents categories. It is important to observe that 13 respondents respectively provided for the environment and socio-economic compliance respectively and 5 only mentioned the cultural compliance, would have its impact. But needless to say, with the push that has been seen in the TTH industry, more will follow and comply.

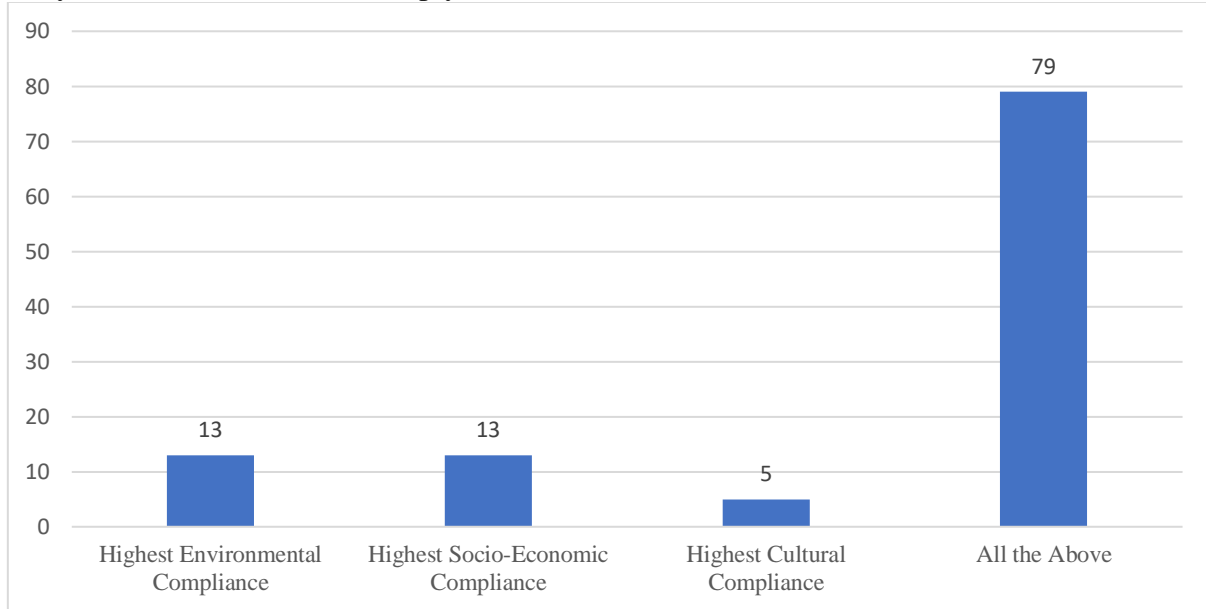


Illustration 2: Understanding of Sustainable Tourism and Sustainability Measures

Designation	Hotel	Eco resort	Tour Operator	Travel Agent	Online Travel Agent	Total
Highest Environmental Compliance	9	3	0	0	1	13
Highest Socio-economic Compliance	7	4	1	0	1	13
Highest Cultural Compliance	3	2	0	0	0	05
All the Above	34	36	5	4	0	79
Total						110

Table 4: Understanding of Sustainable Tourism and Sustainability Measures (the split between stakeholders)

E: Accreditation Agency/Organization

Organizations in the present times have been providing information and inputs to various statutory/non-statutory and even providing for voluntary disclosures on the Sustainability front and thereby making efforts to create a Sustainable Business ecosystem. Though sustainability reporting started on the first earth day on 22nd April 1970; many milestones abound on the front of sustainability reporting which will help the academic and the practitioner to get to understand sustainability, sustainability certifications and ecolabelling better; in fact, it would be right to say, ‘sustainability is no longer a ‘to do’ list; it is becoming a mandate (Mintz, 2018).

Evolution of Sustainability Reporting (Knowledge beyond books, 2022):

Sl. No.	Year	Sustainability Reporting initiatives
1	1970	Sustainability reporting started on first earth day (April 22, 1970)
2	1970-80’s	Environmental catastrophes

3	1985	'Responsible care' by global chemical industries
4	1986	EPCRA Act, USA
5	1987	Brundtland Commission report, "Our common future" coined Sustainable Development
6	1997	Triple Bottom Line by John Elkington in book, "Cannibals with Forks: The Triple Bottom Line of 21 st Century Business"
7	1997	Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) started
8	1999	United Nation Environment Program (UNEP) joined GRI
9	2000	First GRI guidelines and UNPRI created
10	2000	Millennium Development Goals (MDG) (8 principles) UNGC
11	2002	70% of top 250 companies practice Sustainability Reporting
12	2007	Climate disclosures standards boards (CDSB)
13	2010	Securities Exchange Commission, USA: required listed companies to disclose financial, material and risks associated with climate change
14	2011	Singapore Exchange (SGX) Guidelines
15	2011	Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) (IIRC)
16	2013	Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) Compliance in India, Business Responsibility Report (BRR) of Securities Exchange Board of India (SEBI)
17	2015	92% of top 250 companies practice sustainability reporting
18	2015	UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)
19	2021	BRR (India) renamed as Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report (BRSR). Aims to establish links between the financial results of a business with its ESG performance. SEBI has mandated that the BRSR will be applicable to the top 1,000 listed entities (by market capitalisation) for reporting on a voluntary basis (Deloitte, 2022).
20	2021	Merger of SASB and International Integrated Reporting Council (IIRC) as Value Reporting Foundation (VRF) (Bouvier, 2021)
21	2022	Crisil Ratings and ESG in India (Business Standard, 2022)

With much happening on the Sustainability reporting front, it is pertinent that the tourism system ensures a reporting mechanism that will help in aligning with the global, national and corporate requirements, considering that the stakeholders and shareholders would like to know what is the tourism ecosystem doing to ensure sustainability compliance. It is in this regard, that the paper makes an effort to understand the system that are available in India, which opens up a large number of service providers who will become part of the sustainability ecosystem.

A brief about the organizations that are providing for sustainability and certifications will help the reader to understand the efficacy of the understanding by the TTH business.

National Program for Organic Production (NPOP)

The Ministry of Industries and Commerce, Government of India had initiated the National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) in 2001 to assist the organic producers to tap the market which is growing steadily in the both in domestic and export segments. The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) functions as the Secretariat for the implementation of the National Programme for Organic Production. The programme involves the accreditation of Certification Bodies, standards for organic production, promotion of organic farming and marketing etc.

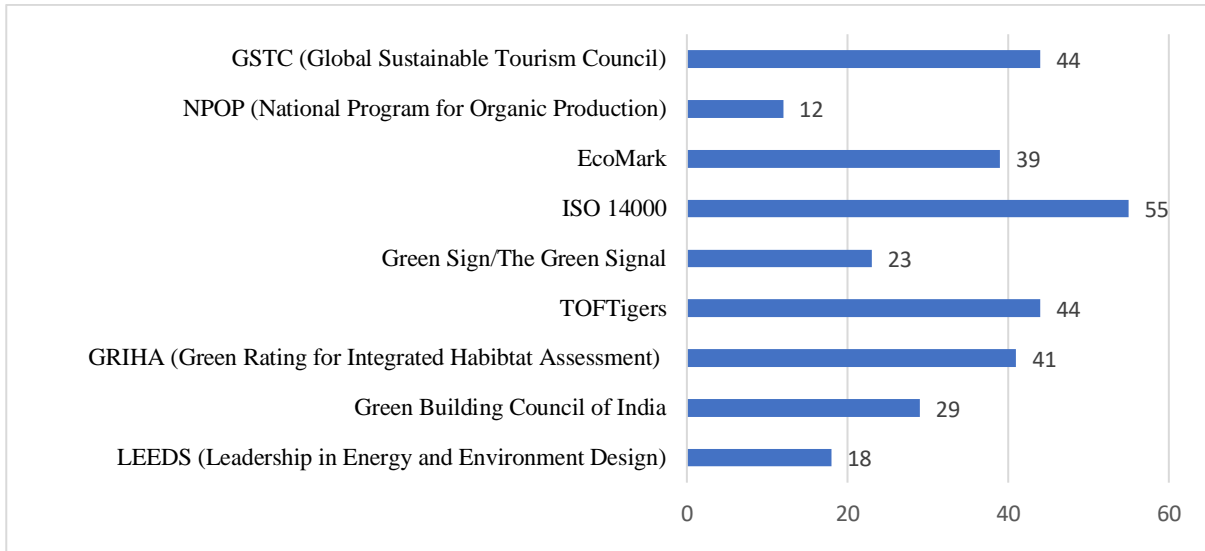


Illustration 3: Organizations about Sustainability and Certifications known to the Respondents

LEEDS	Green Building	GRIHA	TOFTigers	Green Sign	ISO 14000	EcoMark	NPOP	GSTC	Respondents Total
18	29	41	44	23	55	39	12	44	110
16.36%	26.36%	37.27%	40%	20.9%	50%	35.45%	10.9%	40%	

Table 5: Organizations about Sustainability and Certifications known to the Respondents

ECO Mark (BIS n.d.)

ECO Mark Scheme was instituted by the Government of India for labelling of environment friendly products. The Scheme is being administered by the Bureau of Indian Standards. The Scheme covers various product categories like Soaps and Detergents, Paints, Food Items, Lubricating Oils, Packing/Packaging Materials, Architectural Paints and Powder Coatings, Batteries, Electrical and Electronic Goods, Food Additives, Wood Substitutes, Cosmetics, Aerosols and Propellants, Plastic Products, Textiles, Fire-extinguisher, Leather and Coir & Coir Products. The presence of ECO Logo along with ISI Mark on a product indicates that the product meets certain Environmental criteria along with the Quality requirements as specified in the relevant Indian Standard.

ISO 14000

ISO 14000 itself is an international standard that discusses environmental management systems in general (Said, 2021). Usually, there are some common elements that are always related to the discussion of ISO 14000 such as air pollution, management of the resulting waste, disturbances that can be caused by the production process such as noise, vibrations and radiation, as well as the safety and health of employees (Rothery, 1995). In implementing ISO 14000, there are several steps that must be taken. These steps include identifying environmental issues and their trends in public expectations, evaluating the impact of the issue, conducting research and analysis, developing positions, developing strategies to be implemented, implementing, and finally evaluating (Buchholz, 1982).

Green Sign/The Green Signal

Green Sign (<https://www.greensign.de>) is a credible certification helps to strengthen a positive green image and thus offers a valuable competitive advantage. A conscious, sustainable positioning supports hotels, restaurants, event organizers and destinations in acquiring new groups of guests and

keeping long-standing regular guests. In addition, an environmental management system helps to effectively conserve resources, save costs and optimize internal processes (Green Sign, n.d.).

The Green Signal (TGS) was launched as the India's first ecolabel, to certify environmental preferences adopted during the manufacturing of a product or service delivery. The ecolabel was incubated at the Centre for Innovation Incubation and Entrepreneurship, Indian Institute of Management Ahmedabad (IIMA). The Green Signal ecolabel is an opportunity for triple bottom-line business and to take action every day to do 'business responsibly' (Sustainability Outlook, 2012). Besides, disclosures in materials management, water management practices, energy conservation and efficiency, TGS focusses on excellence in socio-economic-environmental sustainability initiatives for positive social impact on local communities and equitable growth (Cbalance, n.d.)

TOFTigers

TOFTigers (www.toftigers.org) has the PUG eco-rating system that has been approved by GSTC. The PUG Mark encompasses not only the core operational aspects of running a business such as its legal requirements, health and safety issues, purchasing, fair wages, staff training and employment, but also its environmental, economic and social implications.

Green Rating for Integrated Habitat Assessment (GRIHA) (<https://www.grihaindia.org>)

GRIHA is a Sanskrit word meaning – 'Abode'. Human Habitats (buildings) interact with the environment in various ways. Throughout their life cycles, from construction to operation and then demolition, they consume resources in the form of energy, water, materials, etc. and emit wastes either directly in the form of municipal wastes or indirectly as emissions from electricity generation. GRIHA attempts to minimize a building's resource consumption, waste generation, and overall ecological impact to within certain nationally acceptable limits/benchmarks. GRIHA is a rating tool that helps people assess the performance of their building against certain nationally acceptable benchmarks. It evaluates the environmental performance of a building holistically over its entire life cycle, thereby providing a definitive standard for what constitutes a 'green building'. The rating system, based on accepted energy and environmental principles, will seek to strike a balance between the established practices and emerging concepts, both national and international (Griha n.d.).

Green Building Council of India (GBCI) (<https://www/gbci.org>)

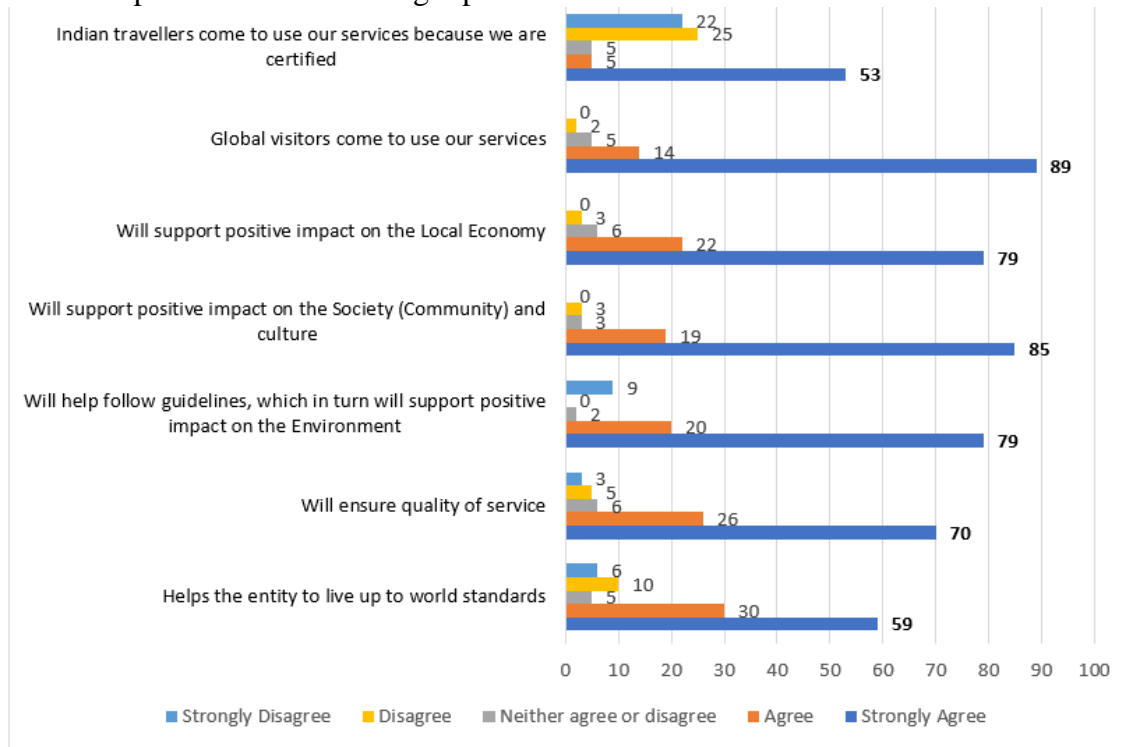
By adopting LEED, and promoting the issues that most affect the communities: waste, equity, resilience, health and wellness and with an intent to create a world that is resilient, sustainable, regenerative; and providing an opportunity for every individual to have a high standard of living; GBCI has manoeuvred to the forefront of ecolabeling and demonstrated a high level of proficiency in green building and sustainability (GBCI, n.d.).

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)

LEED is a green building certification program used worldwide (Horst, 2016). Developed by the non-profit U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), it includes a set of rating systems for the design, construction, operation, and maintenance of green buildings, homes, and neighbourhoods, which aims to help building owners and operators be environmentally responsible and use resources efficiently. LEED has accredited professionals all over the world. LEED is a design tool rather than a performance-measurement tool and focuses on energy modelling rather than actual energy consumption. It lacks climate specificity, and has been criticized for a point system that can encourage inappropriate design choices and make energy conservation the weakest part of the evaluation. It has also been criticized for the phenomenon of "LEED brain" in which the public relations value of LEED certification drives the development of buildings.

The Overall view:

The researchers whilst speaking with the respondents and the Leaders who have been responsible for bringing in a change in the domain of certifications, made the best of efforts to get to the inputs that would help in to usher in a thought process of the TTH businesses.



	Helps the entity to live up to world standards	Will ensure quality of service	Will help follow guidelines, which in turn will support positive impact on the Environment	Will support positive impact on the Society (Community) and culture	Will support positive impact on the Local Economy	Global visitors come to use our services	Indian travellers come to use our services because we are certified
Strongly Disagree	6	3	9	0	0	0	22
Disagree	10	5	0	3	3	2	25
Neither agree or disagree	5	6	2	3	6	5	5
Agree	30	26	20	19	22	14	5
Strongly Agree	59	70	79	85	79	89	53

Illustration 4: The overall view of the TTH business

Without getting into the immediate comparison to the research done by Booking.com in 2021 and 2022, we found that the Indian TTH business were close to the global research that catapulted many new aspects to the tourism business. When we dissect the detailing further, it is clear that of the 110 respondents 89 agree with the international visitors visiting destinations with an intent of visiting Sustainable destinations in comparison 53 for the domestic visitors. One of the respondents, whilst recording the questionnaire made a mention and said, “...we do get many enquiries about the resort practicing sustainable options...before the final bookings are received...”

Greenwashing avoidance and the opportunity for quality Ecolabeling and Certification

A Manager who wanted anonymity mentioned that, “...the Sustainability Badge will ensure a move forward for quality and sustainability conscious visitors to make bookings and visit the destinations...” It is much clear that, the way forward to get to the sustainability certifications in all its ramifications is to get to an alignment with the global standard setters, failing which the business will be at a loss. “Sustainability and the Certifications are no more a fad, but they are a mandate,” as remarked by one of the respondents.

But then a thought that borders on the symptom of pessimism, as expressed by Willis et al., (2023) in a well-researched report *Greenwashing Hydra*, “greenwashing has proved to be one of the greatest mis-selling scandals of modern times?” The report further adds, greenwashing is misleading but not always illegal; regulatory loopholes are sometimes used. What’s surprising is that it remains so prevalent despite being called out by NGOs, the media and, increasingly, regulators. Investors should remain vigilant – after all, they are being misled (Willis et al., 2023). The International Monetary Fund (2023) Global Financial Stability Report of October 2021, spoke of the fact that greenwashing needs to stop, and stated, “the sustainable investment fund sector can be an important driver of the transition to a green economy, supporting pro-transition corporate behaviour through stewardship and potentially boosting investment expenditures of firms that could foster the transition.” The report further states that there should be proper regulatory oversight and verification mechanisms which would be essential to avoid greenwashing.

Willis (et al., 2023) in their Planet Tracker report, finds it disturbing and mentions that green washing appears to be becoming increasingly sophisticated. The report mentions that the best of communications and marketing minds are put to use by the corporates and highlight the fact that greenwashing has now branched into and the definitions hitherto are alarming:

i	Green Crowding	Green crowding is built on the belief that you can hide in a crowd to avoid discovery; it relies on safety in numbers. If sustainability policies are being developed, it is likely that the group will move at the speed of the slowest.
ii	Green Lighting	Green lighting occurs when company communications (including advertisements) spotlight a particularly green feature of its operations or products, however small, in order to draw attention away from environmentally damaging activities being conducted elsewhere.
iii	Green Shifting	Green shifting is when companies imply that the consumer is at fault and shift the blame on to them.
iv	Green Labelling	Green labelling is a practice where marketers call something green or sustainable, but a closer examination reveals that their words are misleading.
v	Green Rinsing	Green rinsing refers to when a company regularly changes its ESG targets before they are achieved.
vi	Green Hushing	Green hushing refers to the act of corporate management teams under-reporting or hiding their sustainability credentials in order to evade investor scrutiny.

Table 6: The various branches out facets of Greenwashing (Willis et al., 2023)

Sunil Varghese (Varghese, 2021), Director, Operations with Dune Wellness Group (<https://dunewellnessgroup.com>), when questioned about Ecolabeling, mentioned, “ecolabeling will lead to a rat race between tourism and hospitality players. There will be a fixing of sorts with the auditors who visit for audits and ecolabel certificates will literally be subscribed.” “Sustainable Tourism and Hospitality is a matter of philosophy that one needs to follow and ensure truly on the long-term sustainable mechanism which will enable the tourism product to be genuinely sustainable.” He further goes to mention, “all our resorts, hotels and hospitality products are Sustainable and all facets of sustainability are being followed; if ecolabeling is made mandatory, the group will surely apply for the same and ensure as per parameters; there will be no green washing; we will follow every norm assigned, and bring about changes, even if it means a cost to the organization.”

Davey (2021) who has been Certified with a GSTC certificate given by ToftTigers, stated in the light of green washing; “when the auditors arrived for inspection, we had for over the years, done our best in ensuring environmental sustainability and created a sustainable tourism product. We believed in the philosophy of tourism products that practice sustainability initiatives, for which dividends have

been received in the form of quality tourists. The Auditors, found, areas wherein the resort could improve further. We realised that in order to improve, we had to invest, which we did over three quarters and ensured that we bettered ourselves in the genre of creating sustainable tourism resort with a globally renowned Certificate, which gave us much visibility.” He goes ahead to mention, “in no terms there was green washing; everything was genuinely done and proof in the pudding is more new visitors and repeat visitors, who themselves practice sustainability and sustainable initiatives.”

Whatever may be the controversy of Sustainability Certifications, it is pertinent that; it is a significant way to provide transparency in order to show consistency in environmental practices and generate confidence in the consumer (Ban et al., 2015). It is better that we do not get to the controversies of ecolabeling and as mentioned by Lupu et al., (2014) make use of eco-labels and accreditations as tools that will help customers recognize products and/or services that do not harm the environment. Clearly a 2022 ‘Sustainable Travel Consumer’ report enabled by World Tourism and Travel Council (WTTC), Trip.com Group and Deloitte (Hotel Business, 2023) mentions that 69% of travellers are actively seeking sustainable travel options, augurs well for those who are following the norms of sustainability and willing to get themselves accredited and certified and provide for the opportunities to the travellers who seek a sustainable option. Julia Simpson, CEO, WTTC articulates the fact that “Sustainability is top of travellers agenda, and consumers highlight the value they put on protecting nature and traveling responsibly” (Hotel Business, 2023). Clearly the way to go is for travel and hospitality business to adopt to Sustainability Certifications and contribute their one cent in ensure a better world. Whilst avoiding any controversy on greenwashing, and making effort to move towards sustainability, the words of Higgins-Desbiolles (2023) are a positive testament to what can be done; “there is a lot of money and effort spent now on greenwashing so that the public doesn't catch on to how serious our situation is and how much we need to transform our over consuming "lifestyles" into more sustainable and fair "lifeways". Just know that if the solutions they offer say we do not need to change too much, just make small convenient changes in our consumerism, then they are looking to save their profits.”

Credit authorship contribution statement

All the authors have contributed to the research paper as a team. The authors have discussed thread bare all the aspects that were collated and have been placed for the readers. The facets of curating the data collated, the aspects of analysis, presentation, have been discussed in its totality, which has ensured a paper of this nature.

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The researchers have no competing interest with any of the entities mentioned in the research paper, neither does anyone have any shares or other instruments in the entities.

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