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Sustainable Hotels: Could Google's New Search Feature Turn the Industry Green?

Oct 17, 2021 by **Nell McPherson**

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Nearly two-thirds of Americans are willing to pay more for sustainable products, but most are unsure how to find them. That's one of the key findings of a survey conducted by environmental technology company GreenPrint this past spring.

But how does that translate to travel? Well, according to a global survey conducted this summer by Booking.com, 83% of respondents feel sustainable travel is vital.

And it makes sense. "Green," "sustainable," and "environmentally conscious" are terms we hear quite a bit these days. But where do you go to find out how a company measures up to these standards? You could probably dig around on their websites or in their quarterly earnings transcripts for clues, which can take some doing.

But when it comes to hotels, **Google** (NASDAQ: GOOG) has just made selecting a sustainable hotel as easy as looking for a green leaf. Let's check out the sustainability feature Google has added to its hotel search and explore the potential impact on the hospitality industry.

What turns a hotel green?

While perusing Google hotel search results, travelers will now see a green leaf icon next to hotels deemed "Eco-certified." If they see an eco-friendly hotel they're interested in, they can click through to a "Sustainability" tab

and learn the details of what makes that hotel sustainable. There, they can find details such as:

- What makes it energy efficient
- How it saves water
- What sustainable sourcing practices it engages in
- How it reduces waste
- What eco certifications it has obtained

To earn a green leaf, a hotel must reach out to a recognized auditing agency for an on-site evaluation of its sustainability practices. Reviewing agencies Google has partnered with for the initiative include Green Key and EarthCheck.

This is part of a broader global initiative on Google's part. Last year, the company announced plans to operate solely on carbon-free energy by 2030. Google also has plans to develop carbon-emission calculators geared toward determining the environmental impact of travel.

The Millionacres bottom line

Sometimes companies drag their feet on implementing sustainability practices, not because it won't ultimately be cost-effective, but because change is hard. It's much easier to keep doing things the same way you always have, even if it's not the best way.

Exploring all the areas where a hotel could be more sustainable, training employees in the new practices, and seeking out and switching to more sustainably minded vendors all sounds like a lot of work and considerable expense. But many sustainable practices, including using less water and energy, could actually save hotels a good chunk of change over time.

And of course, the increasing interest in sustainable travel that this new Google search feature represents suggests that more travelers are voting on this issue with their wallets. That's why investors are likely to see more hotels embracing sustainable practices going forward, and the payoff could be green in more ways than one.

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