

# Hotels have a role to play in bettering their environment and society

By [Anton Gillis](#)

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Environmental impact is - or should be - at the centre of everything we do as human beings today. One simply needs to look at the latest global headlines and see the heatwaves and fire alerts in Europe to see that the environment is in distress.



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Businesses today cannot operate without attempting to understand the impact that they have on the environment and the ecosystem. No industry is excused in this regard. And, for the hospitality industry, this is becoming increasingly important. From food and beverage to attractions, accommodation and community upliftment, guests today are conscious about where they spend their time and money, and how these places impact their environment.

When the United Nations announced the [Decade on Ecosystem Restoration](#), the organisation declared the following statements as priority for the hospitality industry:

- Hotel properties located in urban areas need to identify nature-based solutions that result in value-adds for guests, staff, owners, and communities.

- Hotels located in natural settings, such as conservation parks, must focus on actions that can be undertaken to maintain or restore the ecosystems
- Hoteliers must acquire the necessary support to help achieve the important objectives of restoration.

## What this means for hotels in national parks, nature reserves

**Firstly, it means giving more than we take.** Often what people may see is hotels using their surrounding areas - their location - as a marketing tool to sell more rooms and entice potential visitors to book. But what we at Kruger Gate Hotel are trying to do is to use the land around us and the natural environment to find potential solutions to environmental issues that we may face. Not only because this is what guests want to see more of, but because it's our responsibility to do so. We can't just keep taking from the land and the community around us. We need to ensure that, in everything we do, we are protecting biodiversity and supporting community upliftment at the same time.

**Secondly, it means we need to adopt [measures](#) that not only improve guest experience but also mitigate waste** across the supply chain and procurement, and this includes reducing wasteful expenditure.

Our industry colleague, Martin Wiest, CEO of Tourvest Destination Management, echoed these sentiments when he spoke about the importance of ensuring that the tourism products we create have a direct benefit on the environment, communities, and stakeholders. He also noted that "it is important that we - in cooperation with our partners - support suppliers who have deliberate processes that foster community development in their strategy, especially in rural areas."

This idea also meant that from our hotel's point of view, we needed to implement strategic activities that not only put our people - both staff and guests - at the centre of our operations. This is rooted in the lessons learnt during the height of the pandemic when we were forced to shut our doors due to the lockdowns. We decided to keep 100% of our staff on, ensuring that, while they were unable to work, their livelihoods were not drastically affected.

When we reopened, having spent over R100 million pre-Covid in refurbishments, we announced our 'deflagging' plans of the four-star Kruger Gate Hotel from the international hotel group, Marriott, and from operating under the brand. This decision will enable the hotel to better respond to guests' changing expectations and putting management and staff at the heart of operations, while also being more socially and environmentally responsible.

## Making hotels more agile

Re-establishing the hotel as an independent property will make it more agile, giving it full control over spending and budget priorities, including allowing for greater levels of local procurement, which will ultimately benefit the surrounding communities and the local economy.

We are agile today in responding to the needs of both local and international travellers, who are, for instance, already accustomed to planning on mobile devices. As hoteliers, we must simplify their experience through mobile-enabled processes that eliminate the unnecessary use of paper. It also means we need to print less at the hotels, including our menus, on-site advertisements, and other marketing materials. The next level is to eliminate key cards and allow guests to access our facilities through digital keys that could be built into mobile apps.

This process forms part of a hotel's property management system. It streamlines operations, reduces labour costs, and drives staff efficiencies because it enables us to have fewer people on-site at a time, resulting in less need for staff transportation. This, in turn, lessens the carbon footprint and use of resources. The acceleration of contactless mobile technology is good for a hotel's eco-bottom line, and it helps hoteliers to implement more environmentally conscious practices across operations.

Guests are placing greater expectations on hotels than ever before. They are demanding sustainable practices and holding us accountable for broader social responsibilities. This new paradigm presents challenges for the industry as a whole but,

for those that rise to the occasion, there are ongoing benefits to being a good global citizen.

By responding to this call, hotels can better serve their guests, while also making a positive impact on our surrounding communities and the people that work for us. This responsibility goes beyond the pandemic, and it charts a new and positive course regarding the impact we must have on our environment.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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