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SUSTAINABILITY IN PRACTICE: INSIGHTS FROM MELAKA'S MEDIUM HOTELS

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Abstract:

The hospitality industry plays a vital role in Malaysia's tourism economy but also contributes significantly to environmental challenges through energy consumption, water use, and waste generation. This study aims to examine the motivational factors driving the adoption of sustainable practices among medium-sized hotels (SMSHs) in Melaka, a UNESCO World Heritage City. A qualitative research design was employed, using purposive sampling to select eight medium-sized hotels with evidence of green initiatives. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with managers and department heads, supported by on-site observations, and analysed thematically using NVivo software. The findings reveal seven key motivators: corporate social responsibility, enhancing guest experience, heritage conservation and environmental stewardship, leadership commitment, operational cost savings, compliance with regulations, and responsiveness to customer demand. These insights highlight that SMSHs, despite resource limitations, play a crucial role in extending sustainability practices beyond large hotel chains. The study contributes to advancing sustainable hospitality in developing economies and provides policy and managerial implications aligned with Smart Melaka 2035's sustainability agenda.

Keywords:

Conservation, Environment, Hospitality, Malaysia, Sustainability

Introduction

Tourism is a major contributor to Malaysia's economy, generating foreign exchange, employment opportunities, and business growth (WTTC, 2024). However, the rapid expansion of the hospitality industry has also intensified environmental challenges, including high energy consumption, water use, and waste generation. Globally, the hotel sector contributes nearly 1% of carbon emissions, with accommodation facilities among the largest consumers of resources in tourism (International Tourism Partnership, 2024). Consequently, hospitality businesses face growing pressure from consumers, regulators, and investors to adopt sustainable practices that balance ecological responsibility, visitor satisfaction, and profitability (Karuppiah, Sankaranarayanan, & Lo, 2024; Rassiah, Nasir, Subramaniam, & Saleeth, 2024).

While large hotel chains often lead sustainability initiatives due to greater financial and organisational capacity. They implement measures such as renewable energy, waste recycling, and eco-certification, using sustainability as a competitive advantage (Thomas & Albishri, 2024). In contrast, small- and medium-sized hotels (SMSHs) face resource and operational constraints that limit the adoption of green practices. Despite representing the majority of hospitality businesses in Malaysia, their motivations and challenges remain underexplored (Hamzah, Karim, Aziz, & Kasim, 2020; Scholz, Linderová, & Vrabcová, 2024).

Melaka provides a particularly relevant case for such investigation. Designated as a UNESCO World Heritage City, the state welcomed nearly 10 million visitors in 2024, ranking it among Malaysia's leading tourism destinations (Travel and Tour World, 2024). The Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture (MOTAC, 2024) reports that Melaka has 394 registered accommodation providers, yet only 23 are classified as 4- or 5-star hotels. The overwhelming majority are SMSHs, such as budget hotels, boutique inns, and smaller-scale accommodations, many of which operate without green certification or structured sustainability frameworks (Nazari, Abd Rahman, Ab Aziz, & Hashim, 2020). At the national level, sustainability adoption also remains limited; for instance, as of 2018, only 24 out of 4,750 hotels in Malaysia achieved ASEAN Green Hotel Standard certification, reflecting a considerable industry-wide gap (Fauzi, Hanafiah, & Kunjuraman, 2024).

To mitigate these shortcomings, Melaka has strengthened its long-term agenda through *Smart Melaka 2035*, which envisions positioning Melaka strategically in the era of globalisation and digitalisation while reflecting its significance as a world heritage city. This vision underscores the integration of technology, ICT advancement, and green practices to address urbanisation challenges, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and promote higher quality of life, economic growth, environmental preservation, and efficient urban management by 2035 (Perbadanan Teknologi Hijau Melaka, 2025). However, despite these initiatives, the sustainability motivations of small- and medium-sized hotels (SMSHs) defined as establishments with 50 to 200 rooms (Medlik & Ingram, 2000) remain inadequately documented. This omission is particularly critical, as SMSHs constitute the backbone of Melaka's hospitality industry and play an important role in extending sustainability practices beyond large hotel chains.

Accordingly, this study seeks to address this research gap by investigating the motivational factors that influence the adoption of sustainable practices among medium-sized hotels in Melaka. By examining cultural, operational, and strategic drivers, the study contributes to advancing sustainable hospitality practices in developing economies and provides practical

insights for hoteliers, policymakers, and tourism stakeholders (Buffa, Franch, & Rizio, 2018; Lau & Wong, 2023).

Literature Review

The hospitality sector has increasingly prioritised sustainability in response to global environmental challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion (Han, 2021). Hotels worldwide have adopted initiatives such as waste reduction, renewable energy, and eco-certifications to mitigate ecological footprints while simultaneously enhancing competitiveness and long-term resilience (Duarte, Dias, Sousa, & Pereira, 2023; Sarkodie, Dery, Gyimah, Gyeduah, & Acquah, 2024). These practices generate benefits beyond environmental outcomes, contributing to operational efficiency, guest satisfaction, and brand positioning (Sharma, 2023).

In Malaysia, sustainability frameworks such as the ASEAN Green Hotel Standard AGHS and the Green Building Index (GBI) were introduced to institutionalise green practices (Abdulaali, Usman & Alqawzai, 2025). However, adoption remains limited, with evidence showing only a small fraction of hotels achieving formal certification (Fauzi et al., 2024). Although state initiatives Green Technology Blueprint aim to integrate eco-friendly growth and heritage conservation (Zen et al., 2019), many small- and medium-sized hotels (SMSHs) continue to face barriers including financial constraints, inadequate training, and lack of technical expertise (Hamzah et al., 2020; Rassiah et al., 2024).

Existing studies have identified both motivators and barriers in hotel sustainability adoption. Motivators include cost savings, regulatory compliance, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and increasing customer demand for green services (Krause et al., 2021). Conversely, barriers such as weak enforcement, low stakeholder pressure, and limited resources persist (Seroka-Stolka & Fijorek, 2020). Despite representing over 70% of Malaysia's accommodation providers, SMSHs remain underrepresented in sustainability research, as most studies focus on larger hotel chains or advanced economies (Ahmad & Rahman, 2020).

From a theoretical perspective, Stakeholder Theory highlights how customer expectations and market demand drive sustainability adoption (Kizanlikli et al., 2023), while Institutional Theory stresses the influence of government policies and regulations (Rassiah et al., 2024). Complementing these, Elkington's (1998) Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework underscores the need to balance economic, environmental, and social dimensions. However, these perspectives primarily emphasise external drivers and may overlook how SMSHs leverage their own internal resources.

To address this gap, the Resource-Based View (RBV) provides a more nuanced perspective, arguing that competitive advantage arises from effective utilisation of unique internal resources and capabilities (Barney & Arikan, 2005). For SMSHs, these may include managerial expertise, staff engagement, and locally embedded knowledge of heritage conservation. Recent studies demonstrate that hotels with stronger internal capacities achieve more successful sustainability implementation, even under financial or regulatory constraints (Salem, Elbaz, Al-Alawy, Alkathiri, & Elkhwesky, 2022; Sharma, 2023). By integrating RBV with TBL, this study provides a holistic lens to examine how SMSHs in Melaka balance resource limitations with sustainability imperatives, contributing to both business competitiveness and the broader goals of Smart Melaka 2035.

Table 1: Summary of Past Findings

Author(s)	Context	Theory/Framework	Key Findings (Summary)
Rassiah et al. (2024)	Malaysia Hotels	Institutional Theory + RBV	Hotels adopt basic sustainability mainly for cost savings; large/urban hotels more proactive; waste management weakest.
Scholz et al. (2024)	Czechia Hotels	TBL	Sustainability practices (energy, water, waste) improve efficiency and competitiveness; star rating not determinant.
Fauzi et al. (2024)	Malaysia Tourists	TPB + VBN	Tourist intention driven by attitudes, norms, and environmental values; integrated model predictive.
Kizanlikli et al. (2023)	Kyrgyzstan Hotels	Stakeholder Theory + RBV	Eco-labelling boosts competitiveness and attracts eco-conscious guests.
Sharma (2023)	Global	RBV	Internal capabilities (leadership, staff engagement) drive adoption
Nelson et al. (2021)	Indonesia Tourists	Stakeholder + Contingent Valuation	>50% tourists willing to pay extra for eco-certification; influenced by awareness and attitudes.

Despite increasing research on hotel sustainability, most studies focus on large chains and advanced economies, leaving SMSHs in developing contexts underexplored. Existing work emphasises external pressures such as regulations and customer demand but overlooks how internal capabilities shape adoption. This gap is critical for Melaka, where SMSHs dominate the hospitality sector and are central to achieving Smart Melaka 2035 goals. Without their participation, sustainability targets may be compromised, underscoring the need to investigate the motivations driving SMSHs toward green practices.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the motivational factors influencing sustainability adoption among medium-sized hotels in Melaka. Qualitative inquiry provides a robust framework for understanding complex social phenomena by capturing lived experiences, perceptions, and contextual realities (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Given the exploratory nature of this study, qualitative methods were deemed appropriate to examine the socio-cultural and managerial dynamics shaping green practice implementation in the hospitality sector.

Melaka was purposefully selected as the research site due to its prominence in Malaysia's tourism industry and alignment with national and state-level sustainability agendas. Recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage City, Melaka attracts nearly 10 million visitors annually, supported by its rich cultural heritage and tourism campaigns (Travel and Tour World, 2024). The hotel landscape in Melaka is predominantly made up of small- and medium-sized establishments. According to the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture (MOTAC, 2024), only 23 hotels are rated 4- or 5-stars, while over 371 falls within the 3-star or below categories. This distribution highlights the relevance of medium-sized hotels to the state's

tourism economy. This study sought to investigate how these hotels construct, perceive, and operationalise sustainability at the managerial level. Qualitative methods enabled a contextual exploration of the meanings and decisions underpinning green practices, consistent with Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) assertion that qualitative inquiry reveals how individuals interpret experiences within specific organisational and social frameworks.

Purposive sampling was employed to select hotel managers and departmental heads directly involved in the implementation of sustainability practices. Participants were required to have a minimum of three years of professional experience in the hospitality sector and hold operational or environmental management responsibilities. Only medium-sized hotels with 50 to 200 rooms and clear evidence of green initiatives such as energy efficiency, waste reduction, or rainwater harvesting were considered. A total of eight hotels meeting these criteria were selected. Informants included general managers, housekeeping manager, and departmental leaders responsible for sustainability initiatives. Their diverse roles provided multiple perspectives on the motivations of adopting green practices in medium-sized hotels.

Data Collection Process

Data collection involved face-to-face, semi-structured interviews and onsite observations conducted between November 5, 2024, and January 9, 2025. The semi-structured format allowed for probing emerging themes while maintaining focus on key research objectives. Interviews were conducted at the hotel premises, each lasting 30 to 45 minutes, and were audio-recorded with participant consent to ensure data accuracy.
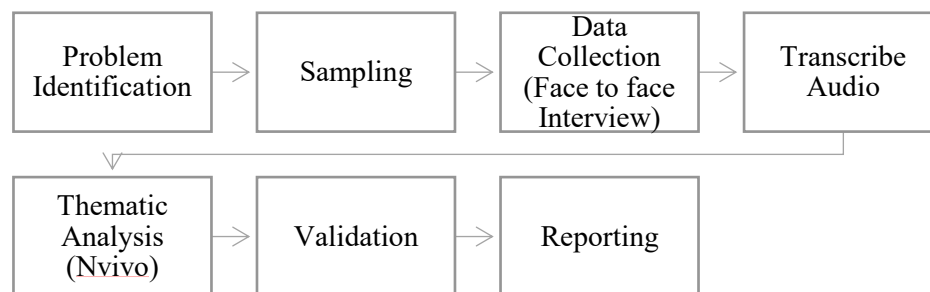

Figure 1: Data Collection Process

Thematic analysis was employed to identify and interpret patterns within the data. Interviews were transcribed using transcription software, then cross-checked against recordings for accuracy. Initial coding was supported by NVivo software, but manual thematic construction was prioritised to retain depth and meaning in participants' narratives. Through iterative analysis, recurring themes and significant statements were identified, providing comprehensive insights into the motivations, barriers, and outcomes shaping sustainability adoption in medium-sized hotels.

Data Analysis

A total of eight informants participated in this study, comprising hotel managers and departmental heads directly involved in sustainability implementation. Their professional experience ranged from 5 to 20 years, with current hotel experience spanning between 2 to 10 years. The informants represented various operational divisions, including housekeeping, maintenance, sales and marketing, and human resources. All selected hotels were medium-

sized, offering between 66 to 189 rooms and a range of facilities such as swimming pools, F&B outlets, meeting rooms, and eco-friendly amenities.

Table 2: Profile of Informant

No.	Informant	Position	Overall Experience (Years)	Current Hotel Experience (Years)	Rooms and Facilities
1	Informant 1	Sales and Marketing Manager	6	2	100 guestrooms, 3-F&B outlet, tanning pool, 4-meeting rooms, 1-ballroom, 1-library
2	Informant 2	Assistant Housekeeping Manager	5	2	100 guestrooms, swimming pool, spa, 1-F&B outlet
3	Informant 3	Hotel Manager	10	10	189 rooms, swimming pool, seminar rooms, ballroom, 2- F&B outlets
4	Informant 4	Maintenance Assistant Manager	8	2	87 guestrooms, swimming pool,5-meeting rooms, 1-F&B outlet
5	Informant 5	Assistant Executive Housekeeper	14	4	136 guestrooms, 1-F&B outlet, 10 -meeting rooms, EV charging, surau
6	Informant 6	Training & HR Manager	17	9	66 guestrooms, spa, swimming pool, gym, 3-F&B outlets, 4-meeting rooms, 1-ballroom
7	Informant 7	Assistant Maintenance Manager	8	2	90 guestrooms, 1-banquet hall, 3- F&B outlets
8	Informant 8	Hotel Manager	20	8	99 guestrooms, swimming pool, 3-meeting rooms, 1-ballroom, 1-F&B outlet

Findings show that medium-sized hotels in Melaka have adopted various green initiatives, resulting in seven key motivations: corporate social responsibility (CSR), enhancing guest experience, heritage conservation and environmental sustainability, encouragement from top management, operational cost savings, compliance with regulations and certifications, and responsiveness to customer demands

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) emerged as a key motivator driving medium-sized hotels to adopt green practices. The findings reveal that CSR is perceived not only as a strategy to minimise environmental impact but also as a meaningful commitment to supporting local communities. This reflects the growing awareness within the hospitality industry of its ethical and social responsibilities in advancing sustainable business practices.

A primary CSR strategy identified by participants is the use of locally sourced products to reduce carbon emissions while supporting local suppliers. As noted by Informant 1, *"For us, one of the reasons we were featured is because all the products we serve are locally sourced, which helps reduce a lot of our carbon footprint." (Informant 1).* In addition, several hotels have formed partnerships with environmentally responsible suppliers. Informant 6 explained, *"We have partnered with companies that focus on green initiatives. For example, all our cleaning materials are sourced from EcoLab, and our pest control services are from Eco-Pest. Both are companies that emphasize green aspects." (Informant 6).* These practices highlight the hotels' efforts to embed sustainability within their supply chains and daily operations.

Government directives also play a significant role, particularly for hotels operating under government-linked companies (GLCs). Informant 8 shared, *"Since we are under a government-linked company, we follow the government's directives. The government has instructed us to implement sustainable practices, so we do it. But there is no official recognition because it is a mandate. However, we always exceed our KPIs." (Informant 8).* This demonstrates how government policies can motivate hotels to go beyond minimum compliance and achieve higher sustainability outcomes.

CSR in these hotels extends beyond operational efficiency or regulatory adherence. By supporting local communities, partnering with green suppliers, responding to policy mandates, and fostering environmental awareness, these hotels position themselves as responsible businesses contributing to both community well-being and environmental sustainability.

Improving Guest Experience

The findings indicate that enhancing guest experience is a key motivation for medium-sized hotels in Melaka to adopt green practices. With growing global environmental awareness, modern travellers increasingly prefer accommodations that demonstrate environmental responsibility. Recognising this trend, several hotels have taken proactive steps to align their services with the expectations of sustainability-conscious guests.

A prominent initiative identified in this study is the replacement of single-use plastics with eco-friendly alternatives. Informant 6 shared, *"Yes, we use LED lights. We've also switched to biodegradable amenities. For example, the toothbrush handles are no longer made of plastic. As for shampoo and shower gel, we've stopped using those small plastic bottles. We now use ceramic dispensers." (Informant 6).* Beyond reducing plastic waste, the hotel introduced locally sourced, handmade bath products to provide guests with a distinctive and sustainable experience. Informant 6 further explained, *"The soap we use in our rooms is cinnamon soap, which is handmade and organic, not factory produced." (Informant 6).* These efforts not only reflect environmental commitment but also enhance guest satisfaction by offering personalised, eco-friendly amenities.

Additionally, hotels have implemented energy-efficient solutions such as LED lighting to improve both environmental performance and guest comfort. Some hotels actively promote their green initiatives as part of their marketing strategies to attract eco-conscious travellers, leveraging sustainability as a competitive advantage. Overall, improving guest experience through green practices is seen as a deliberate strategy to meet evolving customer expectations while strengthening the hotel's market positioning and reputation as a responsible business.

Heritage Conservation, Environment, and Social Impact

Heritage conservation and environmental sustainability emerged as significant drivers motivating green practices, particularly among medium-sized hotels operating in historically significant buildings. These hotels strive to balance cultural preservation with environmental responsibility. As noted by Informant 1, *"It's not just about sustainability in terms of energy or general sustainability that people usually talk about. Our main and biggest focus is always on heritage." (Informant 1).* This highlights how heritage preservation is viewed not merely as a business strategy but as a defining aspect of the hotel's identity.

Growing awareness of climate-related issues, such as flooding and pollution, further strengthens the case for proactive environmental initiatives. Informant 3 highlighted this urgency, stating, *"I'd say it's moderate. It's a good campaign, especially with the current climate issues we're facing. For example, the flooding in Kelantan—it's a sign of how important it is to take care of the environment. These well-being campaigns are essential because if we don't take care of things, situations will only get worse." (Informant 3).* This reflects a recognition that environmental action is necessary to mitigate escalating climate challenges.

Beyond operational measures, these hotels actively engage staff and guests in sustainability campaigns. Informant 6 explained, *"Yes, that's correct. But usually, we also put a note there. We write about it and campaign for it, encouraging guests to support this program as part of our energy-saving efforts ESG initiatives. We're asking for their cooperation as well." (Informant 6).* Such practices foster a culture of shared environmental responsibility.

Additionally, Informant 8 emphasised social contribution, stating, *"Second, we feel like we need to give back to the environment, the country, and the community. This is how we contribute." (Informant 8).* These findings illustrate how heritage preservation, environmental stewardship, and social impact are interconnected, positioning these hotels as responsible, community-focused businesses that advance sustainability beyond economic interests.

Inspiration from Top Management

The findings highlight that strong leadership and top management commitment are critical in driving the success and continuity of green practices in medium-sized hotels. Sustainability initiatives are often championed by owners or senior management who have a personal vision for environmental responsibility. Informant 2 shared how the hotel's green garden concept was inspired by the owner's personal interest: *"Our hotel owner has always liked the garden concept. That's why the hotel is named Swan Garden. If you look at the floor plan, there are many plants around the swimming pool and terrace areas." (Informant 2).* This leadership vision extended to operational practices, with management progressively implementing the owner's suggestions. Informant 2 further noted, *"I'd say we're still working toward green practices. We're just starting out. When the owner suggests something, we try to implement it.*

For example, he wants to replace plastic water bottles in guest rooms with refillable glass bottles." (Informant 2).

In other instances, corporate directives influenced local operations. Informant 6 explained, *"But I think the main driver is environmental awareness itself, especially among the top management. Our management company is based in Singapore, and they've always been green. When they pass down these practices to the hotel here, we adopt them because green initiatives are now the norm." (Informant 6)*. This demonstrates how corporate leadership can institutionalise sustainability as a standard practice across hotel branches.

Leadership commitment also manifests in daily operations. Informant 8 stated, *"For example, cooking oil is collected, and we separate plastic bottles. In the office, we have posters reminding everyone to save electricity. But usually, as the manager, I go around myself. If I notice something, like air-conditioning running when there aren't many people, I'll adjust it." (Informant 8)*. This hands-on approach underscores the importance of visible, active leadership in operationalising sustainability.Leadership inspiration and commitment are key drivers for embedding green practices, ensuring sustainability efforts are consistently implemented and supported at all organisational levels.

Savings on Operating Costs

The findings reveal that cost savings are a key motivation for medium-sized hotels to adopt green practices. Faced with rising utility costs and fluctuating energy prices, many hotels seek cost-effective solutions that maintain guest comfort while reducing operational expenses. As a result, various initiatives targeting energy, water, and resource efficiency have been implemented to optimise consumption and achieve long-term financial benefits.

Energy efficiency is a primary focus. Many hotels have replaced traditional lighting with energy-saving alternatives. Informant 4 noted, *"LED lights save a bit of energy, and their lifespan is longer compared to regular lights." (Informant 4)*. Similarly, heating and cooling systems were identified as significant contributors to energy savings. Informant 5 explained, *"We mostly use split air-conditioning units similar to the ones you'd have at home. Just one unit per room. This is more energy-efficient because, during low seasons, we don't have to worry about running a centralized air-conditioning system. For example, if only one room is occupied, only that room's air-conditioner will be on, and all the others can remain off." (Informant 5)*.

Water conservation practices were also observed, such as dual-pump flush systems that give guests control over water usage. Informant 8 described*, "Yes, we do. And for the flush system, we have dual buttons with one for light flushes (small button) and another for heavy flushes (big button). Some toilets just use one flush for everything, which wastes water." (Informant 8)*.

Investments in renewable energy, particularly solar panels, were also mentioned. Informant 8 highlighted the financial returns: *"For example, with solar panels if we save seven percent, that's already significant. Our monthly electricity bill in Melaka is around RM 20,000. Seven percent of that is RM 1,700. Over ten months, that's RM 17,000. That's a lot. RM 1,700 a month could cover one staff member's salary." (Informant 8)*.

Automation further contributes to savings. Informant 7 explained, *"We use timers instead. For example, the lights turn on at 6 PM and stay on until 6 AM. Then, during the day, they turn off automatically until 6 PM." (Informant 7)*. Additionally, creative resource management is practiced, such as repurposing unused soap. Informant 1 shared, *"Soap is one thing guests usually can't finish in one night. Our housekeeping team collects it in a bucket, disinfects it, smashes it into a paste, and reuses it to clean areas around the hotel." (Informant 1)*.
The study demonstrate that green practices offer both environmental and economic advantages, helping hotels reduce costs while supporting sustainability goals.

Compliance with Regulations and Certification

Compliance with government regulations and industry certifications emerged as a key driver for adopting sustainable practices in medium-sized hotels. Clear policy guidelines from authorities require hotels to align their operations with national sustainability standards. While some view these requirements as regulatory obligations, many recognise them as opportunities to enhance their reputation and gain a competitive advantage.

For hotels that regularly accommodate government guests, visible compliance with national campaigns and recommendations is particularly important. Informant 6 explained, *"We also follow government campaigns and recommendations. Our hotel often hosts government guests, so we want to set a good example." (Informant 6)*. This demonstrates how compliance not only fulfils regulatory requirements but also strengthens the hotel's credibility among key stakeholders.

For government-linked hotels, adherence to sustainability directives is mandatory. Informant 8 described how these policies shape their green initiatives: *"Since we're under a GLC (Government-Linked Company), we follow government directives. The government has instructed us to implement sustainable practices, so we do it. But there's no recognition for it because it's mandated. However, we always exceed our KPIs. For instance, if the KPI requires two activities, we typically achieve three or more, which earns us full marks." (Informant 8)*. This illustrates how mandated policies can motivate hotels to exceed baseline requirements and deliver higher sustainability performance.

In addition to regulatory compliance, hotels set internal Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to maintain their green initiatives. Informant 8 further explained, *"We don't have full-fledged training programs. But we do have KPIs for the hotel. For example, the KPI for green activities requires us to have at least two green initiatives annually." (Informant 8)*. These internal benchmarks ensure ongoing accountability and progress. Regulatory compliance and certification requirements motivate hotels to integrate green practices into their operational and strategic priorities. This not only meets government and customer expectations but also drives continuous improvement and long-term commitment to sustainability.

Responding to Customer Demand

Growing customer demand for environmentally responsible hospitality has emerged as a key driver motivating medium-sized hotels to adopt green practices. With travellers and corporate clients becoming increasingly aware of sustainability issues, hotels are offering eco-friendly products and services to meet these evolving expectations. Informant 1 described their efforts to enhance the guest experience through locally inspired, eco-friendly personal care products:

"They're made from special ingredients. For instance, we have rum-scented shampoo and cilantro-scented body lotion. They're very fragrant and mostly organic." (Informant 1).

Beyond individual guests, corporate and international organisations also prefer hotels with demonstrated green commitments. Informant 1 explained, *"We also host events for international organizations, like the International Red Cross Federation and other NGOs. These groups appreciate our green efforts, like using water dispensers and reducing paper usage. The Red Cross, for example, has held events here three times now because of our sustainable practices." (Informant 1).* This shows how sustainability influences both leisure and institutional clients' decisions.

Hotels also leverage their green initiatives as a marketing tool to attract environmentally conscious guests. Informant 6 noted*, "These initiatives also serve as a promotion because people are increasingly aware of green practices. Some guests are very particular and choose places with green concepts." (Informant 6).* This highlights the strategic value of promoting sustainability to differentiate in a competitive market.

Rising customer expectations for sustainable hospitality motivate hotels to continuously improve their green practices, enhancing their marketability and strengthening their competitive positioning.

Themes of Finding
The study identified seven primary motivations influencing the adoption of green practices among medium-sized hotels in Melaka. These include corporate social responsibility and community engagement, enhancing guest experience, heritage conservation, leadership commitment, operating cost savings, regulatory compliance, and responding to customer demand. Together, these drivers highlight that sustainability adoption is not merely regulatory but also shaped by cultural, operational, and market considerations. The findings provide a holistic understanding of how hotels balance economic performance with environmental stewardship and social responsibility.

Table 3: Summary of Main Findings – Motivations for Sustainability Adoption

Theme	Key Findings	Illustrative Evidence (Informants)
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	Hotels embed sustainability through local sourcing, green suppliers, and GLC directives. Seen as ethical duty and community support.	Locally sourced food (Inf. 1); EcoLab & Eco-Pest partnerships (Inf. 6); GLC compliance (Inf. 8).
Improving Guest Experience	Eco-friendly amenities (biodegradable, handmade), LED lighting, promotion of green branding enhance guest satisfaction and loyalty.	Ceramic dispensers & cinnamon soap (Inf. 6).
Heritage Conservation & Environment	Heritage hotels prioritise cultural preservation and environmental awareness; staff and guests engaged in eco-campaigns.	Focus on heritage identity (Inf. 1); climate urgency (Inf. 3); guest cooperation campaigns (Inf. 6).

Theme	Key Findings	Illustrative Evidence (Informants)
Inspiration from Top Management	Leadership vision drives initiatives; personal owner influence, corporate directives, and managerial monitoring sustain practices.	Owner's "green garden" (Inf. 2); Singapore HQ policy (Inf. 6); manager's daily monitoring (Inf. 8).
Savings on Operating Costs	Energy efficiency, water-saving, solar power, automation, and creative reuse reduce expenses while maintaining quality.	LED lights (Inf. 4); split AC systems (Inf. 5); solar panels ROI (Inf. 8).
Compliance with Regulations & Certifications	Hotels respond to national policies, GLC mandates, and KPIs, using compliance as reputation-building and accountability.	Hosting government guests (Inf. 6); exceeding GLC KPIs (Inf. 8).
Responding to Customer Demand	Eco-conscious travellers and NGOs prefer green hotels; sustainability used as marketing strategy to attract diverse clients.	Eco-products for guests (Inf. 1); hosting NGOs (Inf. 1); branding green initiatives (Inf. 6).

Discussion and Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the adoption of green practices in medium-sized hotels in Melaka is influenced by a combination of operational, environmental, social, and market-driven factors. These findings are consistent with the wider body of research, which highlights that sustainability in hospitality extends beyond environmental concerns to include economic efficiency, regulatory compliance, stakeholder expectations, and the pursuit of competitive advantage (Karuppiah et al., 2024; Seroka-Stolka et al., 2020).

Among the most prominent motivators is the potential for operational cost savings, particularly in relation to energy and water management. This supports Sarkodie et al. (2024), who argue that investments in energy-efficient technologies lead to significant long-term financial benefits. Informants in this study provided practical examples, including the use of solar energy, LED lighting, and energy-efficient air-conditioning systems to reduce monthly expenses. Informant 8 explained, *"With solar panels—if we save seven percent, that's already significant… RM 1,700 a month could cover one staff member's salary."* Such examples reinforce the view that environmental initiatives can yield measurable economic benefits, supporting earlier findings by Rassiah et al. (2024).

Heritage preservation and environmental conservation also emerged as significant drivers, particularly for hotels operating in Melaka's culturally significant buildings. Informant 1 emphasised the importance of this dual responsibility, stating, *"Our main and biggest focus is always on heritage."* This reflects Melaka's recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage City (Atiq & Sharif, 2018), where businesses are expected to preserve cultural and environmental values while serving the tourism market. These findings align with Krause et al. (2021), who argue that businesses in heritage destinations bear an ethical obligation to balance economic activities with heritage and environmental preservation. The Visit Melaka 2024 campaign

further supports these goals by promoting sustainable tourism that benefits both the local community and the natural environment (Visit Melaka, 2024).

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) emerged as another key motivator. Consistent with the findings of Lee and Cheng (2018), the results suggest that CSR not only enhances a hotel's reputation but also strengthens customer loyalty. Informant 8 articulated this commitment, saying, *"We feel that we need to give back to the environment, the country, and the community."* This reflects the principles of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework introduced by Elkington (1998), which advocates for balancing economic, environmental, and social objectives. Informant 6 described how their hotel engages guests in sustainability efforts, highlighting how CSR is communicated as both an operational practice and a brand identity strategy. These activities help position the hotel as socially responsible while fostering guest engagement with green practices.

Leadership commitment was identified as a critical enabler of sustainability adoption. This study found that hotel owners and top management play a central role in initiating and sustaining green initiatives. Informant 2 shared that operational decisions often reflect the owner's personal vision: *"When the owner suggests something, we try to implement it."* This finding aligns with Sharma (2023), who highlights the importance of leadership in embedding environmental values into daily operations. Informant 8's personal involvement in monitoring energy use further illustrates the role of hands-on leadership in sustaining momentum and ensuring that green practices are implemented consistently across the organisation.

Regulatory compliance and certification requirements also influence hotels' sustainability strategies. Particularly for government-linked hotels and those serving government clients, alignment with national and industry standards such as the Green Building Index (GBI) and ASEAN Green Hotel Standard is essential
(MOTAC, 2024). Informant 6 highlighted the importance of compliance in maintaining credibility: *"We also follow government campaigns and recommendations. Our hotel often hosts government guests, so we want to set a good example."* This suggests that regulatory frameworks not only ensure compliance but also enhance market positioning by signalling environmental responsibility to stakeholders.

Responding to customer demand for environmentally responsible hospitality services emerged as another significant motivator. As travellers and corporate clients become more aware of sustainability, hotels increasingly adapt their products and services to meet these expectations. Informant 1 described offering eco-friendly amenities such as *"rum-scented shampoo and cilantro-scented body lotion… very fragrant and mostly organic,"* to cater to guests seeking sustainable experiences. Informant 6 added, *"These initiatives serve as a promotion because people are increasingly aware of green practices."* These observations align with Duarte et al. (2023), Nelson et al. (2021), and Kizanlikli et al. (2023), who suggest that promoting green initiatives enhances customer satisfaction and strengthens competitive advantage.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the motivations driving the adoption of green practices among medium-sized hotels in Melaka. While operational cost savings are a primary driver, the findings highlight the equally important roles of heritage preservation, environmental responsibility, CSR, leadership commitment, regulatory compliance, and customer demand. These multifaceted motivations reflect the need for hotels to balance

economic, environmental, and social priorities in line with the TBL framework (Elkington, 1998).

By embedding green practices into their operations, medium-sized hotels contribute not only to their own business sustainability but also to Melaka's broader environmental and tourism goals (Perbadanan Teknologi Hijau, 2025). These efforts position small and medium-sized hotels as key players in advancing sustainable hospitality, demonstrating that even smaller establishments can make meaningful contributions toward industry-wide sustainability transformation.

Limitations and Future Research Direction

This study, while providing meaningful insights into the motivations driving medium-sized hotels in Melaka to adopt green practices, is not without limitations. First, the study faced time constraints that limited the number of interviews conducted, potentially restricting the diversity of managerial perspectives. Scheduling interviews with busy hotel managers, particularly during peak periods, further reduced the opportunity to gather wider views across the sector. Additionally, the process of transcribing and analysing the qualitative data was time-consuming, requiring careful interpretation to ensure accuracy and depth. These challenges, while managed to the best extent possible, may have affected the breadth of insights gathered.

Moreover, the study's focus on Melaka limits the generalisability of the findings to other regions, where policy frameworks, market demands, and operational conditions may differ. Future studies should therefore expand to include hotels in other states to capture broader perspectives across Malaysia's hospitality sector. It is also recommended that longitudinal studies be conducted to assess the long-term impact of green practices on hotel performance. A mixed-methods approach combining qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys could offer more robust insights, while future research should also explore customer perceptions to understand demand-side expectations for sustainable hospitality services. These directions will strengthen the evidence base and guide more inclusive sustainability strategies for the industry.

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Appendix A

First Operational Objective

FQ 1	What are your current roles and responsibilities within the hotel organization?
FQ 2	How long have you been working in the hospitality industry?
FQ 3	What is the size of your hotel in terms of the number of rooms?
FQ 4	Has your hotel implemented any green practices, such as efficient LED lighting, water conservation measures, a green laundry program, or waste recycling management?
FQ 5	How many years has your hotel been implementing green practices?

Second Operational Objective

SQ 1	How does your hotel define green practices in the context of its operations?
SQ 2	What motivated your hotel to adopt green practices?
SQ 3	How are green practices integrated into your hotel's daily operations?