

[Home / Features](#)

Features

Sustainability: we must conform

In a discussion with Marloes Knippenberg, CEO of Kerten Hospitality, she unveils the brand's new partnerships with The Sustainability Hospitality Allowance (SHA) and explains the importance of increasing sustainability efforts in the present climate

Emily Curryer • 21 hours ago 5 minutes read



Why did you join the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance?

We know that we can't truly achieve sustainability and transform the industry in a silo. Meaningful collaborations supported by insights from the whole hospitality ecosystem that lead to a positive impact are pivotal for the global sustainability roadmap. The essence is in the action taken by multigenerational and multidisciplinary engagements with a purpose.

The pan-industry table talks between sustainability advocates, the young generation of leaders and decision-makers have demonstrated **results** that benefit all. Global mindsets, a greater pool of resources and investments that ensure scale delivers a better result. There are always fresh and evolutionary concepts, more efficient ways to do things, especially in times of technological advancement, digitalization and it is the hoteliers and the industry leaders that are finding these new sustainable methods.





The Alliance comprises 15 (over 30% globally) of the world's leading hospitality companies, and luckily enough, all with aligning goals of transforming hospitality to a more sustainable, locally impactful industry. The onus is on allying with like-minded organisations to work together to accelerate, to shape the cradle of innovation and to push the sustainability agenda to the hospitality community around a shared goal.

2. Do you have any current sustainability targets for the firm?

This year we have set the course for sustainability to encompass Social, Environmental and Governance (ESG) commitments across our teams, operations, targets, KPIs and goals across our footprint and properties. We are currently working internally to redefine our policies, guidelines, and to set internal targets that truly align with our sustainability goals.

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The momentum is around creating guidelines, principles that are broad/vague enough but at the same time very precise in terms of what we are trying to achieve sustainably. Our guidelines need to be globally understood and easily adapted by each individual property. Our aim isn't limited just to the contribution towards a better, cleaner and more sustainable world. We strove to support local communities, hire and up-skill local talents, collaborate with ecofarms, ensure transparency and governance across our suppliers networks, create meditation and well-being focused spaces and Hubs that support a health and wellness lifestyle.





Soon, we will be announcing our ESG commitments that will enrich the team, support all our owners and partners and ensure project longevity with a special emphasis on governance and transparency. an increase in communication and therefore of course, transparency about the work we are doing.

A key focus for us are: community development, youth and female leadership empowerment, diversity and inclusion, and locality in terms of supply chains and talent **acquisition**. The hotel business and industry cannot sustain itself on simply selling the basic products of hotel beds and traditional F&B concepts. To truly deliver and meet current demands, we plan to dedicatedly support all stakeholders in assuring win-win partnerships. We also want to ensure that employees are satisfied and treated fairly, and that our surrounding community is in a natural state to attract and economically benefit and thrive from our projects and developments.

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A second focus would be addressing the equality and diversity challenge in what once was a previously very classical male-dominated industry. This translates to featuring and motivating women in hospitality, supporting and mentoring the younger generations, ensuring unbiased HR processes, and supporting young entrepreneurship. These are the core tenets of our job.

3. What can you say about the present climate of sustainability in the hotel sector?

There are no universal guidelines that every hotelier can apply in accelerating sustainable developments. There are multiple interpretations of the real sense of sustainability, better or best practises and how to best incorporate sustainability and efficiency within operations. Our industry suffers from a deficiency of guidelines – especially those that can be used as a general learning guide and toolkit with the option to be adapted and modified to suit each individual property.





The industry, however, is now catching up on sustainability promises and actions due to increasing demands and awareness from 'prosumers' (providers and consumers), and the ongoing impact from the pandemic. The Global slowdown not only shed a light on the inefficiencies within operations but also the importance to be sustainable for longevity and value's sake. The standstill resulted in more travel conscious, sustainable consumers, only supporting hotels with aligned environmental and social commitments, beliefs, and values.

This has put hospitality professionals in a position where they are having to conform and meet new consumer and sustainability standards, for the sake of the sustainability of their business.

4. Why is it paramount that hoteliers make sustainable choices?

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Here is the elevator pitch for sustainability in hospitality: If you want to remain relevant, then it is a MUST to have and live by! The whole industry has recognised the need to become more sustainable for the longevity of everyone's own business. It isn't implementing these practices simply to meet consumer demands, gain competitive advantages (short lived), or to have fancy marketing promotions. **Sustainability** is not an amenity. In this day and age and certainly within a 2050 context, it is absolutely necessary for a business to invest in sustainability, to drive continued support from consumers, to see lowered operational costs, and higher returns. **Hotels** need to be shown by example that it is economically feasible and beneficial to become sustainable.

5. Do you have any plans for the future?

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We are looking to really broaden our horizon and understanding, to incorporate all aspects of sustainability, globally. Diving into different energy solutions, working with more sustainable assets, procurement options, and of course water and energy saving methods. We want to find truly effective ways to reduce water usage in guest facilities, to completely remove plastic from F&B operations, and eradicating all kind of waste as much as possible. We truly believe the industry as a whole, should adopt a net positive approach into a hotel concept – from the get go and from the building design stage.

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6. What sustainability changes can we expect to see?

Step by step, there will be steady changes as the industry continues to transform. Thriving from the mixed-use concept – hospitality now and in the future – will be the ‘middleman’ in connecting these eco-conscious travellers to the communities and their businesses.

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In general, industry wise, there will be much more technological advancements, AI and gamification usage to enhance and diversify guest experiences, (hopefully) carbon positive hotel concepts, sustainable energy storage solutions and (hopefully) a complete divestment from the fossil fuel industry. Everyone will have a second thought ordering cappuccino with alternative almond milk, knowing the amounts of used water to grow nuts for just one glass of this hot beverage.

I think we will also see more sustainability roles and advisership positions in executive boards to ensure a constant support line, wider implementations and to ensure that focus remains on sustainable improvement and development. We will see a growing number of young leaders taking the leap of faith and leading the change. It will be up to us to follow them or remain irrelevant.

