Sustainable Practices in Luxury Hotels: Case Study of Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts

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Abstract

This research explores what sustainable practices are adopted and how they can be implemented within the luxury hotel industry to align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, focusing on the Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts as a case study. With increasing global awareness of environmental issues and the hospitality sector's significant ecological footprint, luxury hotels are uniquely positioned to lead the charge in adopting sustainable practices.

This research utilised a qualitative case study approach to investigate the sustainable practices employed in the selected case study, and their implementation. Secondary data was obtained through: the official websites of the hotel group; associated websites, for example, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council and the United Nations World Tourism Organization; and available documents, news articles, and annual reports. The content analysis method was used to explore and analyse information.

This study delved into the sustainability practices in terms of environmental, economic, and social dimensions. It examined environmental sustainability through the lenses of resource conservation, waste management, ecosystem preservation, and the reduction of carbon emissions. Additionally, the research investigated social sustainability in terms of community involvement, employee wellbeing, and local purchase practices with suppliers. Economic sustainability was explored through strategies aimed at waste reduction, energy savings, and water conservation. By reviewing sustainable practices in the Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, it was found that an ESG programme has been used as a framework to guide and manage its sustainable practices. Additional to a wide range of basic environmental practices, the Four Seasons has also implemented advanced environmental practices and comprehensive social sustainability practices. This study provides guidelines for luxury hoteliers by showing how sustainability practices can be implemented into their hotels. It also demonstrates that, despite adopting these practices, the Four Season's image is positively maintained, and client

satisfaction remains high.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signature of Candidate: Min Yi

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This research examines the adoption and implementation of sustainable practices within luxury hotels, with the aim being to align with the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This chapter begins with an overview of the research background concerning sustainability in the tourism and hospitality industry, providing a brief history and definition of key terms. It then extends to the significance of sustainability in the luxury hotel sector. Subsequently, it evaluates the benefits of integrating sustainable practices into luxury hotels. Following this, the chapter outlines the research aims and questions that guide the direction of the study. It then presents the methodology and techniques employed to conduct the research. Finally, the chapter outlines the structure of the dissertation.

1.2 Background of Sustainable Development in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

In 1987, the UN World Commission first defined sustainable development as the development that meets the needs of the present without affecting the future (Hajian & Kashani, 2021). Later, in 1992, sustainable development was first recognised as a global initiative and a universal consensus was achieved at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, aiming to achieve economic development in an environmentally and socially sustainable manner (Shi et al., 2019). The UN General Assembly in 2015 introduced 17 SDGs to encourage countries and organisations to work towards a more sustainable future (Singh & Dutt, 2023). Since then, there has been a noticeable increase in publications on this topic as the importance of sustainability has been reported by the media (Kim et al., 2017). The same trend is observed in the increase in volume of academic literature addressing sustainability issues within the tourism and hospitality industry (Khan et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2019).

The interest in sustainability within tourism and hospitality can be traced back to the early 2000s when concerns about climate change, resource depletion, and environmental degradation began to gain significant attention globally (Jones et al., 2014). Over the last two decades, the hotel industry has been influenced by several key factors: the rise of the green movement (Lynch, 2007); a significant increase in energy costs (Baloglu & Jones, 2015); advancements in technology (Lieberzeit & Dickert, 2007); and regulations and policies regarding sustainability from government (Jones et al., 2014). These factors, along with the movement towards sustainability globally and consumers' awareness of environmental protection, have compelled hotels to start implementing green practices within their business (Chan & Hsu, 2016; Jones et al., 2014). These efforts have often been driven by cost-saving motives rather than a commitment to environmental stewardship (Jones et al., 2014). Simple measures such as installing low-flow faucets, energy-efficient lighting and encouraging guests to reuse towels and linens became commonplace (Kim et al., 2017). Although these practices marked the industry's first steps toward sustainability, they barely scratched the surface of a comprehensive approach to sustainable hospitality (Kim et al., 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, one of the most significant crises in its history, caused a sudden halt in the tourism and hospitality industry (Ramkissoonet al., 2020). Travel bans, closed borders, and quarantine periods hit international and domestic travel the hardest, and hotel business decreased significantly in a very short amount of time (Sarwari et al., 2021). However, the crisis presented an opportunity for tourism and hospitality managers to rethink, reset and redefine their business by moving towards more sustainable operations due to increasing demand from consumers for environmentally friendly products and responsible consumption in the post-pandemic era (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2023). This shift in consumer preferences catalysed more profound change in business operations within the hospitality industry regarding sustainability.

The tourism and hospitality industry is regarded as one of the major drivers of the economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic. It contributed approximately 9.5% to global GDP

and accounted for 10.5% of all jobs in 2023 (World Travel and Tourism Council [WTTC], 2024). But the industry's expansion since the pandemic has caused a greater carbon footprint and overall it contributes approximately 5.3% of global emissions (Singh & Dutt, 2023b). As the largest segment of the tourism and hospitality industry, the hotel sector undeniably has the biggest impact on the environment (Pereira et al., 2021). The pandemic has accelerated the importance of sustainability in this industry; hotels have realised the importance of incorporating sustainability into their core values and operations, and they are moving beyond basic efforts to embrace a broader range of sustainable practices (Singh & Dutt, 2023).

1.3 Significance of Sustainability in the Luxury Hotels Sector

Luxury hotels are regarded as offering exclusive, unique, top-tier service, charging premium prices, satisfying personal hedonic or conspicuous expectations, and symbolising their guests' social status and affluence (Peng & Chen, 2019b). They hold the third largest market share in the industry and are regarded as the fastest-growing sector within the global luxury industry (Shin & Jeong, 2022). However, luxury hotels are known for their unsustainable operational traits, such as substantially higher water usage, waste production, and energy consumption, all aimed at providing guests with luxurious and comfortable stay experiences (Filimonau et al., 2023). But, by adopting systematic, sustainable practices in their operations, the industry can make a profound contribution to global sustainability and effect a major transformation on a worldwide scale (Kim et al., 2019; Pratt, 2022).

Pursuing sustainable initiatives can have positive effects on the environment and local communities, as well as having brand image and economic benefits. When adopting sustainable practices, luxury hotels not only preserve the environment they affect and depend on, but they can: reduce adverse impacts on the planet (Kim et al., 2019); help communities improve the quality of life of Indigenous people by offering job opportunities, and providing education and training; and support preferred purchasing from local suppliers (Dutt et al., 2023; Sotomayor et al., 2021). Implementing sustainable water management, waste reduction, and energy conservation practices can reduce operating costs (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2018),

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which directly affects operational performance (Pereira et al., 2021). Engaging in socially sustainable activities, including charitable donations and supporting local communities, fosters a perception of organisations' social responsibility and can enhance brand reputation among consumers (Ding & Legendre, 2022). Sustainable products and services can attract a growing segment of travellers who increasingly favour environmentally responsible and socially conscious brands (Amatulli et al., 2021; Hang et al., 2021). These combined efforts of cost reduction, and brand image enhancement, attract environmentally and socially conscious guests and can ultimately lead to improved performance in luxury hotels.

However, despite the amount of research published on the topic of sustainability and the advantages of adopting sustainable practices, the luxury hotel industry still hesitates to adopt such practices for various reasons (Singh & Dutt, 2023b). Researchers have highlighted guests and employees' attitudes towards and hesitations about sustainable practices (Amatulli et al., 2021; Dang‑Van et al., 2022; Peng & Chen, 2019b; Zizka et al., 2024), concerns about how the co-existence of luxury and sustainability happens (Moscardo, 2017), and the question of what corporate social responsibility (CSR) is (Hang et al., 2021; Hyun et al., 2024; Ramkissoon et al., 2020). According to Singh and Dutt (2023), one of the barriers to hotels adopting such practices is a lack of understanding about what sustainable practices are and how they can be adopted/implemented in luxury hotels. The environmental dimension of sustainable practices is discussed the most in recent studies, while the social aspects are examined the least (Acampora et al., 2022). Therefore, more research on comprehensive sustainable practices and how these can be adopted in the hotel industry has been strongly recommended (Khan et al., 2024). This research addresses what environmental and social sustainability practices have been adopted and how they are implemented in luxury hotels, and the findings can offer insights for hoteliers addressing thses challenges and achieving the UN SDGs.

1.4 Research Aims and Questions

This research aims to explore sustainability practices adopted in luxury hotels and provides

practical guidance in coping with these challenges for luxury hoteliers who seek to implement sustainability practices. This research aims to understand what sustainability practices are adopted and how they are implemented in luxury hotels to align with the UN SDGs. In order to achieve the research purpose, the research questions addressed are:

RQ1: What sustainability practices or programmes are adopted in the case study hotels?

RQ2: How can sustainability practices be implemented by the case study hotels to align with the UN SDGs?

1.5 Research Methodology

A qualitative approach is utilised in this research to explore sustainable practices adopted in luxury hotels and how they can be implemented. A case study method is employed to gather data and conduct the research. The Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts Group ("Four Seasons") is used as the case study to investigate what sustainable practices have been adopted and how they can be implemented to achieve the UN SDGs. Four Seasons is recognised as one of the world's foremost ultra-luxury hotel groups (Ding & Legendre, 2022), with 129 establishments spread across 44 countries and located in diverse and ecologically sensitive locations from the world's most exhilarating cities and pristine retreats nestled into rainforests and mountain landscapes (Four Seasons, 2024d). They are dedicated to identifying opportunities to engage in environmentally and socially sustainable practices which contribute to the UN SDGs. The group provides a rich dataset for analysing the adoption of sustainable practices in various settings.

The research utilised secondary data from various sources, including: the official Four Seasons websites; related sites, such as the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO); and available documents, news articles, and annual reports. Content analysis was used to analyse the date due to its systematic and flexible nature, which allows the generation of detailed and rich data descriptions (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019).

1.6 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is structured into five chapters. It starts with the present introduction chapter, and the remainder of the dissertation is organised as follows:

Chapter Two is a literature review that examines relevant literature on sustainability. This chapter presents definitions, a brief history of sustainability, and its development within the tourism and hospitality industry. It then delves into sustainability specific to the luxury hotel sector. It is followed by a review of sustainable programmes and commonly implemented sustainability practices in the industry. Finally, the chapter reviews the benefits and challenges of adopting sustainability practices.

Chapter Three introduces the methodology utilised in this research, along with the philosophical foundation of the study, including the ontology, paradigm, and epistemology. A qualitative case study approach is utilised in this research, focusing on Four Seasons to investigate sustainability practices and their implementation in luxury hotels. The methods of data collection and analysis are detailed in this chapter.

Chapter Four presents the findings and discussion regarding the sustainable practices adopted by Four Seasons and their implementation. The Environmental Social and Governance (ESG) programme is employed at Four Seasons as the framework to support the achievement of the UN SDGs. The chapter examines environmentally and socially sustainable practices adopted and their implementation. It then discusses the sustainable certifications that Four Seasons has obtained. Finally, the chapter explores sustainability management and governance at Four Seasons.

Chapter Five is the dissertation's conclusion. It addresses the research aims and questions, presents theoretical and practical implications, outlines research limitations, and offers recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of academic literature on sustainability within the tourism and hospitality industry. It first examines the definition and historical background of sustainable development, delving into its three pillars. The discussion then moves to sustainability in the tourism and hospitality sector. It specifically addresses sustainability dimensions in luxury hotels, exploring the operational attributes of these establishments and shifts in consumer experiences of luxury. It is followed by a review of commonly used sustainable programmes and environmental and social practices. The advantages and challenges of adopting sustainable practices are examined. Finally, the knowledge gap is discussed.

2.2 An Overview of Sustainable Development

2.2.1 History of Sustainable Development

In an era marked by increasing environmental degradation and the impacts of climate change, sustainability has emerged as a beacon of hope, guiding the community towards a more harmonious existence with our planet (Amatulli et al., 2021). In 1987, the UN World Commission on Environment and Development first defined sustainable development in the Brundtland Report, titled "*Our Common Future*", where it was defined as development that focuses on meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Giardina, 2019; UN, 1987).

However, it was not widely recognized in global action until 1992, at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Shi et al., 2019). The conference approved and signed an agreement, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and Agenda 21, which highlighted the significance of sustainable development at the global

policy level for the first time in human history (Hajian & Kashani, 2021). The conference also put forward a theoretical advance, namely the three pillars (economic, social and environmental) of sustainable development (Shi et al., 2019). In 2000, 189 countries adopted the Millennium Declaration at the UN Millennium Summit (Shi et al., 2019). This declaration recognised the Millennium Development Goals and emphasised development and the eradication of extreme poverty, and provided guidance and a framework for humanity's development in the new era (Hajian & Kashani, 2021).

The 17 SDGs, set by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015, provided a comprehensive framework for countries and organisations to work towards a more sustainable future by addressing the interconnected global challenges of economic, social and environmental sustainability (Ramkissoon et al., 2020). The SDGs cover a wide range of issues, including poverty, hunger, health, education, gender equality, clean water, clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate change, ocean, life on land, peace and justice, and partnerships (UN, 2015). Initially conceived as a reaction to environmental exploitation, sustainability has transcended its original confines, evolving into a comprehensive framework for global development (Giardina, 2019). Research indicates there is a notable trend in which sustainable development is increasingly acknowledged as a form of development that considers the needs of both present and future generations in the prudent utilisation of resources (Hajian & Kashani, 2021). The three pillars of sustainable development are discussed in the next section to gain an understanding of their different dimensions.

2.2.2   Three Pillars of Sustainability: Environmental, Social, and Economic

The environmental, social and economic dimensions are often referred to as the three pillars of sustainability (Cherapanukorn & Focken, 2014; Purvis et al., 2019) and together they are considered to form one of the most prominent models in sustainable development (Singh & Dutt, 2023). Initially introduced by Elkington (1997), this approach suggests that a company's

success should be measured by its financial performance and impact on social and environmental factors (Elkington, 1997; Giardina, 2019). Since its introduction, the approach has been widely discussed, explored and expanded in the literature in fields such as business, sustainability, CSR, green practices, energy and operational efficiency, and waste management (Assaker, 2020; Jones et al., 2014; Postma et al., 2017; Purvis et al., 2019; Sotomayor et al., 2021). It provides a holistic perspective for evaluating organisational performance while considering economic outcomes and broader impacts on society and the environment. Purvis et al. (2019) argued that the three pillars should be viewed as interdependent, intersecting, and mutually reinforcing rather than as separate entities in this framework. They also suggested that the three factors are often presented in three popular forms, as shown in Figure 1 (Purvis et al., 2019). The following sub-sections introduce each of the three environmental, social and economic dimensions in turn.

Figure 1:The Typical Forms of Sustainability: Interconnecting Circles, Concentric Circles, and Literal Pillars
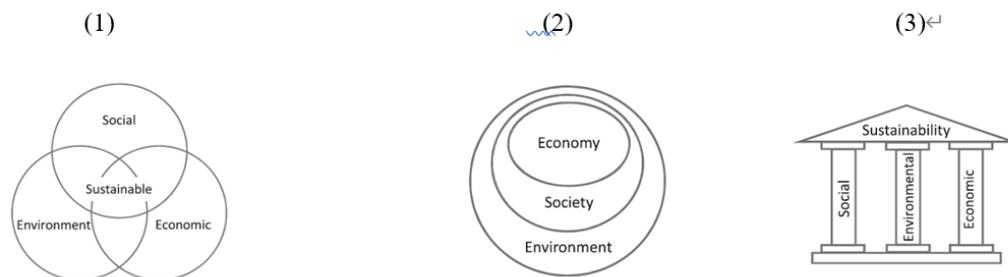
Note. Source: Puvist et al. (2019).

2.2.2.1 Environmental Sustainability

One of the earliest definitions of environmental sustainability was provided by Goodland (1995), who described it as "*the preservation of natural capital*" (p.3). Environmental sustainability involves minimising the depletion of natural resources, reducing waste, preserving biodiversity, reducing carbon emissions and practising sound resource management (Morelli, 2011; Navratil et al., 2019). Similarly, the GSTC (2016) suggested that

environmental practices should be considered in three main dimensions: conserving natural resources, reducing pollution, and protecting biodiversity and ecosystems.

Based on the GSTC's (2016) guidelines, conserving resources encompasses energy conservation, water saving, and renewable energy. Reducing pollution involves reducing greenhouse gas emissions, encouraging clean energy transportation, minimising waste and eliminating the use of harmful substances such as pesticides and detergents (Hamimah et al., 2022). Protecting biodiversity and ecosystems is associated with monitoring invasive species, managing natural site visits, avoiding adverse effects on wildlife and supporting biodiversity conservation (Hamimah et al., 2022). Environmental sustainability emphasises the importance of the natural environment and balancing human activities and the earth's natural systems, while social sustainability concerns people, including employees, suppliers, and local communities (Hajian & Kashani, 2021). The details of social sustainability are introduced in the next sub-section.

2.2.2.2   Social Sustainability

Social sustainability promotes equity, justice, and well-being within and among communities, and focuses on people involved in business development (Hajian & Kashani, 2021). It consists of five core elements: supporting local communities; favouring local purchasing; equal employment; labour rights and the elimination of exploitation and harassment; and culture and heritage conservation. Sustainable practices related to the local community involve employment, offering education and training, and healthcare and sanitation projects (Sotomayor et al., 2021). Initiatives supporting local suppliers encompass fair-trade relationships with local suppliers and prioritising local purchases (GSTC, 2016). Support for local employment includes fair employment opportunities, equal job positions and fair wages for local communities (Day & Romanchek, 2020). Other workforce-related practices involve respecting labour rights, eliminating exploitation and harassment and providing a healthy and safe workplace environment (Day & Romanchek, 2020). The conservation of culture and local livelihoods refers to valuing authentic local culture, respecting the intellectual rights of

local communities, and protecting cultural heritage (Hamimah et al., 2022).

Purvis et al. (2019) stated that environmental, social, and economic sustainability dimensions are interconnected, overlapping, and mutually supportive rather than distinct entities. Hence, it is important to thoroughly consider all three dimensions holistically. Economic sustainability is discussed in the next sub-section.

2.2.2.3 Economic Sustainability

Economic sustainability refers to the organisation's ability to sustain its operations, ensuring that guests, future visitors, and other stakeholders benefit from its operations and services (Jones et al., 2016). Economic sustainability must promote economic growth without compromising the other two pillars of sustainability: the environmental and social dimensions (Cowburn et al., 2018; De-Miguel-Molina et al., 2011). According to Baumgärtner and Quaas (2010), economic sustainability emphasises the interconnection between human activities and nature, the balance between present and future generations, and ensuring efficiency in using natural resources and their alternatives. Sustainable economic practices encompass income growth, cost control, and expanding market share (Modica et al., 2020).

The concept of three pillars emphasises that the long-term success of a corporation depends on all three dimensions of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental. Achieving long-term business success requires balancing economic growth, environmental protection, and social well-being (Purvis et al., 2019). The present social and environmental dynamics, such as population expansion, industrial progress, climate fluctuations, deforestation, and limited water resources, further compound the intricacy of achieving a cohesive integration of these three pillars (Cowburn et al., 2018).

The tourism and hospitality industry has been recognised as a key driver in global economic recovery in the post-pandemic era (Malheiro et al., 2020). Evidence shows that economic growth and business development can have positive and negative effects, as economic

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prosperity is often accompanied by the inevitable exploitation of natural resources in the tourism and hospitality industry (Ali et al., 2021). The next section explores the holistic picture of sustainability in the tourism and hospitality industry.

2.3 Sustainability in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry

The tourism and hospitality industry is recognised as one of the major economic drivers in the post-pandemic era (Ferreira & Sousa, 2020; Malheiro et al., 2020), contributing approximately 9.5% of global GDP and accounting for 10.5% of all jobs in 2023 (WTTC, 2024). However, the industry's expansion has also generated a large environmental footprint, contributing approximately 5.3% of global emissions (Singh & Dutt, 2023b) and consuming 15% of the world's water (Legendre et al., 2024). As the largest segment of the tourism and hospitality industry, the hotel sector undeniably has the broadest impacts on the environment (Pereira et al., 2021) because its operation attributes are highly resource-consumptive (Kim et al., 2019). For example, economy and business hotels, on average, generate at least 1 kg of waste (per guest night), consume around 350-450 litres of freshwater (per guest night), and emit over 180 kg of carbon per square metre annually (Malheiro et al., 2020). Thus, operating sustainably becomes a necessary and important factor for the industry.

The concept of sustainability in the tourism and hospitality industry has been discussed for years, especially since the introduction of the UN SDGs in 2015 (Legendre et al., 2024). However, recently, it has emerged as a dominant trend and has risen higher on boardroom agendas with growing consumer concerns about the environmental issues (Khan et al., 2024). There is a range of factors that have contributed to this trend: the rise of the green movement in the hospitality industry (Fukey & Issac, 2014); concerns about increasing energy costs (Baloglu & Jones, 2015); advancements in technology (Chan & Hsu, 2016); requirements to uphold government environmental regulations and policies (Jones et al., 2014); and the growth in research into sustainability in the tourism and hospitality industry (Kim et al., 2017). These factors, coupled with the global shift toward sustainability and increasing consumer awareness of environmental protection, have prompted hotels to incorporate green practices into their operations (Chan & Hsu, 2016).

The pandemic enhanced the importance of sustainability in the tourism and hospitality industry and underscored the vulnerability of the tourism and hospitality sector to global shocks (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2023). It led to a dramatic downturn in the tourism and hospitality industry (Ramkissoon et al., 2020). Travel bans, the closure of borders, and mandatory quarantine periods hit domestic and international travel severely, and the hotel sector experienced a precipitous decline within a brief period (Sarwari et al., 2021). However, as the world gradually recovers, an opportunity is presented to tourism and hospitality managers to rebuild and reshape their businesses towards more sustainable operations as demand from consumers for environmentally friendly products and responsible consumption increase in the post-pandemic era (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2023). This shift in consumer preferences has catalysed a more profound change in business operations within the hotel industry. Transitioning sustainability from principles and concepts to comprehensive practices and applications in the hotel industry is necessary (Legrand et al., 2022). As previously discussed, the industry is a key sector in the economic recovery and also has significant environmental effects, and these changes in business operations could substantially impact the environment, communities, and the economy (Legrand et al., 2022).

As the largest sub-section of the hospitality industry, luxury hotels, known for their higher levels of energy, water, and waste consumption (Filimonau et al., 2023), are uniquely positioned to influence the industry due to their visibility and operational attributes. The following section examines sustainability, specifically in the luxury hotel sector.

2.4 Significance of Sustainability in the Luxury Hotel Sector

Research indicates that luxury hotels contribute an undesirable environmental footprint when pursuing economic growth (Ramkissoon et al., 2020). Pereira et al. (2021) stated that there is a close correlation between luxury hotels and significantly high consumption of energy and resources, carbon emissions and waste (Pereira et al., 2021). Malheiro et al. (2020) explained that there are three main challenges facing the hospitality and tourism industry in achieving sustainability: excessive resource usage, adverse environmental effects, and equity in socio-

economic development. The unsustainable operation of luxury hotels is largely due to their intrinsic characteristics, which are discussed next.

2.4.1 Operating Characteristics of Luxury Hotels

Luxury hotels are predominantly considered as offering exclusive, unique, top-tier service, charging premium prices, satisfying personal hedonic or conspicuous expectations, and symbolising their guests' social status and affluence (Peng & Chen, 2019b). These establishments are characterised by their attention to detail, personalised service, and exceptional comfort (Line & Hanks, 2016). Luxury hotels typically boast opulent decor, upscale furnishings, and a greater variety of food and dining options compared to business hotels. Additionally, they offer a wide range of personalized and intensive services designed to satisfy their guests' specific desires (Pereira et al., 2021; Shahid & Paul, 2022). Luxury hotels are often located in prime destinations, offering distinct scenic views and private access to popular attractions, and thereby enhancing the exclusivity and appeal of these establishments (Zhang et al., 2020). The definition of a luxury hotel goes beyond mere physical attributes and services; it also encompasses the overall guest experience, which aims to provide a sense of indulgence, status, and uniqueness (Luna-Cortés et al., 2022).

The service requirements of luxury hotels can lead to significantly high levels of water and energy consumption and waste. For example, luxury hotels often have elaborate garden landscapes and multiple swimming pools and spas, leading to high water usage (Damsari et al., 2020). Research indicates that water consumption in luxury hotels is approximately 800-900 litres per guest night, compared to 350-450 litres in three-star and business hotels (Cruz-Pérez et al., 2022). Carbon emissions in luxury hotels amount to approximately 29 kg per guest night, compared to 12.5 kg in three-star hotels (Filimonau et al., 2021). The desire to offer guests maximum comfort leads to substantial energy use, primarily due to continuous and extensive heating, cooling, and lighting demands (Cingoski & Petrevska, 2018). Luxury hotels generate considerable waste, including food waste from multiple dining facilities and disposable products from guest amenities such as dental and shaving kits, combs and cotton pads (Gannon et al., 2022).

The combination of high water and energy usage and substantial waste production highlights the importance and necessity for luxury hotels to move beyond basic conservation efforts to embrace a broader range of sustainable practices (Dang-Van, Vo-Thanh et al., 2023). Adopting sustainable practices protects the environment they affect and proves to be an opportunity to respond to growing market demands for sustainable products and services (Hyun et al., 2024). The change in the consumer luxury experience is discussed next.

2.4.2   Shift in Consumer Luxury Experience

The definition of luxury is elusive, as luxury often means different things to different people (Shahid & Paul, 2022). Wiedmann et al. (2009) previously suggested that luxury consumption motivations could be categorised into four main types: functional value related to perceived quality and uniqueness; social values associated with conspicuous consumption, prestige and social status; individual value linked to hedonism, comfort and self-indulgence; and self-identity or aesthetic consumption linked to fashionable and iconic brands. Heine (2012) defined luxury as anything that is desirable and exceeds what is necessary and ordinary. In its broadest interpretation, luxury relates to goods or experiences that are expensive, beyond necessity, indulgent and extravagant (Tynan et al., 2010).

New luxury, compared with old luxury in terms of price and scarcity, refers to more experiential, more accessible and more affordable (Moscardo, 2017). Amatulli et al. (2021) emphasised that a key evolution influencing the modern luxury market is the rise of the experiential economy, from owning to experiencing. Luxury experiences in the hotel industry are often related to exclusivity, high quality of service, uniqueness, rarity, exclusivity, authenticity, perceptions of comfort, social status and affluence, conspicuous consumption, personalised service, high levels of emotional and hedonic values (Harkison et al., 2018; Yang & Mattila, 2016).

In recent years, luxury experiences have increasingly incorporated sustainability and ethical considerations (Kunz et al., 2020). It is particularly true for the millennial and Z generations,

who are characterised by a high level of education, digital technological expertise, and multiculturalism (Eckhardt & Bardhi, 2020). These modern consumers view luxury not just as a symbol of status but also as an expression of values and meanings (Han & Kim, 2020). Their intentions in regard to luxury consumption are influenced by the following factors and that they find to be the most significant: personal fulfilment, sustainability, experiential value and achievement (Gupta et al., 2023). According to Atkinson and Kang (2022), new luxury can be defined as an object or experience that is not focused on conspicuousness but instead offers consumers intrinsic experiential values such as freedom and meaning, along with well-being and enrichment in the form of personal fulfilment and caring about sustainability (Atkinson & Kang, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly influenced luxury consumer behaviour (Sarwari et al., 2021). It highlighted the environment's vulnerability and the impact of human activities' impact on climate change and ecosystems (Sarwari et al., 2021). Ramkissoon et al. (2020) noted that luxury consumers have started to prefer brands demonstrating genuine commitments to sustainability. Consumers now have a desire for environmentally friendly and ethical luxury consumption (Hang et al., 2021), are willing to engage in socially responsible initiatives (Dabija et al., 2020), and are demonstrating a willingness to pay premium prices for sustainable goods and services (Han, 2020). This trend underscores consumers' evolving preferences towards more environmentally and socially responsible products and services within the hospitality sector. Highlighting this shift, research conducted by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change revealed a notable increase in global travellers' inclination to choose hotels with sustainable practices, rising from 62% in 2016 to 81% in 2021 (Statista, 2024). Therefore, adopting sustainability practices in business operations is a great opportunity to meet growing guest demand for environmentally friendly products and ethical consumption (Hang et al., 2021).

2.4.3   The Need for Luxury Hotels to Adopt Sustainable Practices

The luxury hotel sector holds the largest portion of the global hotel market and is estimated to have a market size that will exceed US$ 250 billion within the next five years (Kim et al., 2022). It is also regarded as having the third-largest market share and as being the fastest-growing sector within the global luxury industry (Peng & Chen, 2019b). By adopting comprehensive sustainable practices in its operations, the industry can make a profound contribution and carry out a major transformation on a worldwide scale (Kim et al., 2019; Pratt, 2022).

As previously discussed, luxury hotels are characterised by high resource consumption and waste production (Pereira et al., 2021). Coupled with increasing consumer environmental awareness, integrating sustainable practices in luxury hotels becomes imperative (Hang et al., 2021). It is crucial not only to minimise their ecological footprint but also to address the escalating demand from guests for environmentally friendly options (Dang-Van, Vo-Thanh et al., 2023). Moreover, governments worldwide are setting stringent environmental standards to combat climate change and promote sustainable development (Zeemering, 2021). Businesses that proactively adopt sustainability measures can ensure regulatory compliance and position themselves favourably for future legislation (Pereira et al., 2021).

Hotels have realised the importance of incorporating sustainability into their core values and operations and are increasingly adopting various eco-friendly measures to mitigate their environmental impact and reduce costs (Singh & Dutt, 2023a). The practices are explored in the next section.

2.5 Sustainability Programmes, and Environmental and Social Practices

As previously discussed, given the increasing concern about climate change and pollution, government regulations, and growth in consumer awareness of environmental issues, the literature on sustainability has garnered increasing attention from academic researchers and

practitioners (Khan et al., 2024). Some of these regulations include environmental, social and governance (ESG) programmes and environmental and social sustainability practices.

2.5.1   ESG Programmes

When an organisation starts its journey towards sustainability, the tasks involved can appear overwhelming and daunting (Gillan et al., 2021). A systematic framework can facilitate the consistency of the company's sustainability goals, guidelines and practices (Bae, 2022). ESG highlights the significance of outstanding environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and transparent governance in corporate settings (Holden et al., 2017). The environmental and social dimensions of ESG correspond to the two of the three pillars of sustainability discussed previously (section 2.2.2). The governance element of ESG is about business operation compliance, integrity, internal controls, and risk, which is connected to the capability of organisations to manage their business to achieve sustainable economic development (Gillan et al., 2021).

In 2006, Goldman Sachs first introduced ESG guidelines as a formal measurement for evaluating and disclosing corporations' operational information related to business plans and risks (Friede et al., 2015; Lin et al., 2024). ESG guidelines emphasise the importance of non-financial factors, which are essential in regulating organisational operations related to environmental protection, social responsibility and corporate governance to improve overall performance (Gillan et al., 2021). Such guidelines help address issues associated with various stakeholders, such as consumers, employees, suppliers and investors (Lin et al., 2024). Gillan et al. (2021) highlighted that the key distinction between ESG and CSR lies in ESG's specific focus on governance matters and its capacity for quantificational measurement.

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) emphasised the importance of disclosing ESG information in the tourism sector and initially introduced guidelines in 2017 on how the tourism and hospitality industry could respond to ESG (Bae, 2022). The guidance outlines common performance metrics for the tourism and hospitality industry across eight aspects:

climate change, energy management, community support, corporate governance, risk and compliance, water management, supply chain, waste management and diversion, and workforce management (Bae, 2022). Each aspect is supported by specific indicators and measurements closely related to achieving the UN SDGs. Table 1, below, summarises the WTTC's suggested ESG guidelines and performance indicators for hotels. According to Lin et al. (2024), non-profit measurements can help managers regularly assess and monitor the achievement of sustainable practices and make appropriate adjustments for improvement (Lin et al., 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic beginning in 2019 has significantly increased the importance of ESG due to growing concerns about natural resource preservation and social well-being (Lin et al., 2024). Many hospitality and tourism organisations have employed ESG programmes as an effective tool to address SDGs and guide their sustainable development (Bae, 2022).

Table 1: The WTTC's Suggested ESG Guidelines and Indicators for Hotels Related to the UN SDGs

ESG Pillars	ESG Guidelines and indicators suggested for hotels	Relation to the Main UN SDGs
Environmental Sustainability	**Climate change:** 1. Total emissions 2. Emissions per available room 3. Emissions per m²	SDG13: Climate action: Mitigating impacts on climate change SDG14: Life below water SDG15: Life on land
	Energy management: 1. Energy per occupied room and per available room 2. Energy per guest night 3. Energy per m² 4. Total energy consumption and reduction	SDG7: Affordable and clean energy SDG13: Climate action: Mitigating impacts on climate change SDG9: Industry innovation and infrastructure
	Water management: 1. Total water usage and reduction 2. Water consumption per guest night 3. Water consumption per occupied room 4. Water usage in different parts (Kitchen, room, amenities, gardening) 5. Water use per m²	SDG6: Clean water and sanitation SDG9: Industry innovation and infrastructure
	Waste management and diversion: 1. Total waste landfilled 2. Waste recycled 3. Waste per guest night 4. Dry waste per room 5. Wet waste per room	SDG12: Responsible consumption and production SDG11: Sustainable cities and communities

Social Sustainability	**Community:** 1. Employee volunteer hours 2. Total charitable donations	SDG1: No poverty SDG2: Zero hunger SDG3: Good health and well-being SDG4: Quality education SDG11 Sustainable cities and communities
	Workforce: 1. Regional employee turnover rates 2. Employee gender ratio 3. Fatality and injury rates 4. Local employee rates 5. Percentage of employees covered by collective bargaining agreements.	SDG8: Decent work and economic growth SDG5: Gender equality
	Supply chain: 1. Percentage of suppliers subjected to human rights screening 2. Proportion of hotels needing supplier code of conduct 3. Percentage of hotels serving fair-trade, local products and organic food	SDG2: Zero hunger SDG8: Decent work and economic growth SDG10: Reduced inequalities SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production
Governance	**Compliance, integrity, internal controls, risk** 1. Number of independent directors 2. Percentage of female directors 3. Allocated financial support for climate change and water risks 4. Percentage of employees trained 5. Number of legal cases related to corrupt practices 6. Percentage of supply chain and operations evaluated for human rights risks	SDG16: Peace, justice and strong institutions SDG17: Partnerships for the goals The essence of all 17 SDGs is related to proactive risk management strategies aimed at tackling global challenges and enhancing the enforcement of management practices.

Note. Sources: UN (2024), WTTC (2017).

2.5.2   Environmental and Social Sustainability Practices

Kim et al. (2017) stated that the hospitality industry's trend towards sustainability, aims to minimise environmental impact through implementing eco-friendly practices. Government compulsory environmental regulations, accompanied by rigorous monitoring and clear penalties for non-compliance, have effectively encouraged organisations to enhance their environmental performance (Jones et al., 2016). Common environmental measures utilised in the hotel industry include reducing water usage, conserving energy, and reducing waste (Malheiro et al., 2020; Modica et al., 2020).

Water usage in hotels is influenced by factors such as water devices, infrastructure and behaviours of guests and employees (Kasim et al., 2014). The primary water consumption

areas in hotels include guest rooms, kitchen activities, landscape irrigation, laundry facilities, and amenities such as swimming pools and spas (Cruz-Pérez et al., 2022). The most popular measures for water conservation include installing low-flow fixtures (Han et al., 2018) and regular leak detection and maintenance (Gavilanes Valle et al., 2019). Some hotels have adopted practices that allow guests to opt out of daily linen and towel changes to conserve water consumption and reduce the use of cleaning chemicals (Cingoski & Petrevska, 2018).

Energy conservation in hotels is critical to sustainability efforts, addressing both environmental impacts and financial efficiencies (Huang et al., 2015). The hotel industry consumes significant energy for heating, cooling, lighting, and operating appliances (Huang et al., 2015). Light-emitting diode (LED) lighting in outdoor and public areas like lobbies and hallways is a straightforward step for hotels to take in conserving energy (Chan et al., 2017). Smart cards, solar thermal systems, and automated air conditioning systems are commonly used in effective energy management (Salehi et al., 2021). Improving building insulation and installing energy-efficient windows can significantly reduce heating and cooling needs as they help maintain temperature and reduce the strain on heating and cooling systems (Salem et al., 2020). The use of motion sensors to control the activation and deactivation of lights and electrical devices and the utilisation of natural light are common practices employed in hotels to reduce energy usage (Gavilanes Valle et al., 2019; Malheiro et al., 2020).

The hotel sector generates substantial waste, including food waste, packaging, and disposable products (Gannon et al., 2022). Implementing effective waste reduction strategies can significantly mitigate the environmental impact of hotel operations (Han et al., 2018). Recycling programmes such as separating waste and recycling plastics are commonly used to reduce waste (Gavilanes Valle et al., 2019). Some hotels have adopted practices such as minimising over-packaging and plastic usage, opting for reusable equipment, and selecting environmentally friendly products to enhance their sustainability efforts (Filimonau & Tochukwu, 2020). Educating hotel staff and engaging guests in waste reduction efforts are also vital for the success of sustainability initiatives (Han et al., 2018).

Social sustainability in the hotel industry encompasses practices that consider the well-being of employees, guests, and local communities (Hajian & Kashani, 2021). These practices foster a positive work environment, support local economies, and engage hotels in ethical business practices (Hajian & Kashani, 2021). According to Kim et al. (2019), 80% of hotels engage in socially responsible activities, primarily focusing on charitable contributions. Fair labour practices, such as ensuring safe working conditions and providing benefits and training opportunities, are adopted in some hotels to create competitive workforce advantages (Samad et al., 2022). Sotomayor et al. (2021) suggested that supporting education and healthcare and prioritising local purchasing are important strategies for exerting a positive impact on local communities (Sotomayor et al., 2021). Implementing sustainable practices offers advantages but presents multifaceted challenges, which are discussed in the next section.

2.6 Advantages and Challenges of Adopting Sustainability Practices

2.6.1   Advantages of Adopting Sustainability Practices

Pursuing sustainable initiatives has positive effects on the environment and local communities, enhances the workforce and the brand image, and generates economic benefits. Adopting sustainable practices not only preserves the environment on which hotels depend and mitigates negative impacts on the planet (Kim et al., 2019), but also enhances the quality of life for Indigenous communities by offering employment opportunities, facilitating education and training, and prioritising purchases from local suppliers (Dutt et al., 2023; Sotomayor et al., 2021).

Ding and Legendre (2022) indicated that sustainable practices yield tangible benefits, for example, cost reductions (Cingoski & Petrevska, 2018), and intangible benefits, including enhanced brand reputation and increased competitiveness (Ding & Legendre, 2022). Implementing water management, waste reduction, and energy conservation practices can reduce operating costs (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2018), and such reductions in operating costs

directly affect operational performance (Pereira et al., 2021). Sustainable practices such as caring for the environment, supporting local communities, and charitable donations bolster a hotel's reputation as a socially responsible entity (Ding & Legendre, 2022). A company's sustainable practices can evoke and shape consumers' emotional connections and attachment to the brand or product, influencing patrons' behaviour and repeat visit intentions (Dang-Van, Wang et al., 2023; Peng & Chen, 2019a). Amatulli et al. (2021) suggested that a communication strategy focused on sustainability (vs. the customer service-focused strategy) can enhance consumer intention to book hotel rooms by reinforcing perceptions of a hotel's integrity and authenticity. These combined efforts in cost reduction, brand image enhancement and attracting environmentally and socially conscious guests can ultimately improve performance (Pereira et al., 2021).

As previously discussed, today's discerning travellers seek not only opulence and traditional luxury but also value experiences that are meaningful, authentic, and unique, as well as being responsible and ethical in their consumption (Harkison et al., 2018; Kim, 2021). By integrating sustainable initiatives into luxury travel, such as locally sourced and organic cuisine, community-engaged and local cultural activities, and nature-preserving activities, guests can immerse themselves in truly authentic, unique and meaningful experiences (Ding & Legendre, 2022; Pereira et al., 2021; Sotomayor et al., 2021). These practices can provide guests with unique and exclusive luxury experiences, creating unforgettable moments that resonate with guests and the place they visit. It fosters the differentiation of products and enhances the company's competitive advantage (Gavilanes Valle et al., 2019).

In addition, introducing socially sustainable initiatives for employees, such as training programmes, work-life balance measures, and career development opportunities, enhances employee satisfaction and commitment, consequently boosting performance (Pereira et al., 2021). Sourvinou and Filimonau (2018) asserted that such initiatives foster increased job satisfaction, leading to a more engaged workforce. According to Filimonau et al. (2023), the

engagement of confident, motivated, and committed employees can contribute to the success of both financial and sustainability initiatives.

Integrating sustainability practices in hotels can improve organisational excellence and long-term viability. However, despite the benefits, adopting sustainable measures is challenging as such practices often require employee and guest engagement and the adoption of new technology (Filimonau et al., 2023). The challenges of adopting sustainable practices are discussed next.

2.6.2   Challenges of Adopting Sustainability Practices

The adoption and implementation of sustainable practices present multifaceted challenges. Integrating sustainable solutions involves higher initial costs than traditional operational methods and requires active employee and guest engagement (Pereira et al., 2021). Compliance with legal and regulatory standards, such as installing renewable energy systems, power control equipment, and air conditioning sensors, can result in increased initial costs which can breed resistance to embracing sustainability practices at the management level (Baloglu & Jones, 2015).

Peng and Chen (2019b) suggested that luxury hoteliers may fear that sustainable actions, such as resource conservation and energy efficiency, could diminish their brand image and compromise the perceived luxury and authenticity of their establishments. It could potentially deter consumers from patronising luxury hotels and negatively impact their financial performance. Managers and frontline staff at luxury hotels may hesitate to implement sustainable practices that could compromise brand image and harm guest luxury experiences and satisfaction (Chan et al., 2020; Ramkissoon et al., 2020).

Employee reluctance to implement sustainable initiatives can also be exacerbated by concerns about increased workloads associated with sustainability practices and a perception among employees that such efforts are merely symbolic forms (Sourvinou & Filimonau, 2018).

Various internal management factors, including inadequate employee understanding and perception of sustainability, resource limitations, inconsistency of organisational culture and attitudes, leadership dynamics, knowledge gaps among managers and staff, and insufficient support and unclear guidance, can all serve as barriers hindering hotels from embracing sustainability initiatives (Chan et al., 2017; Farooq et al., 2022; Filimonau et al., 2023; Giardina, 2019).

2.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored the definition of sustainability and its three pillars (environmental, social, and economic). Research has shown that sustained economic development must align with environmental and social sustainability, as the three pillars of sustainability are interconnected, intersecting, and mutually reinforcing. The tourism and hospitality industry has been one of key drivers of economic recovery in the post-pandemic era, significantly impacting the environment adversely. As the largest sub-segment of the hotel sector, luxury hotels are particularly known for their unsustainable operational traits.

However, the shift in consumer behaviours towards meaningful and sustainable experiences, increasing demand for environmentally friendly products and responsible consumption after the COVID-19 pandemic presents great opportunities for luxury hotels to adopt sustainability practices. By implementing systematic, sustainable initiatives, luxury hotels can make a profound contribution to major transformations on a global scale. Such practices protect the environment and positively contributes to communities, meet market demand, and comply with governmental regulations. Commonly used sustainable programmes and environmental and social practices, and the advantages and challenges of integrating sustainability practices have been reviewed in this chapter to build a comprehensive understanding of such practices.

2.8 Gap in Knowledge

The literature review presented in this chapter highlighted a significant trend towards integrating sustainable practices in the core business strategies of luxury hotels worldwide.

This review explored various dimensions of sustainability, including energy and water conservation, waste reduction and donations to local communities. It underscored the need for a comprehensive approach to real-world examples of successful implementation in the luxury hotel sector. Singh and Dutt (2023) identified one of the major barriers to adopting sustainable practices in hotels as a lack of knowledge about what practices can be integrated into luxury settings and how to implement them. Khan et al. (2024) strongly recommended further research into comprehensive sustainability practices within the industry. The present research examines what environmental and social sustainability practices are adopted in luxury hotels and how they are implemented, using Four Seasons as a case study, as they are one of the leaders in the luxury hospitality industry and are known for their innovative and effective sustainability initiatives. By examining Four Seasons's practices, the research aims to provide insights into comprehensive sustainable strategies in the luxury hotel sector, offering valuable analysis for the industry. The next chapter discusses the methodology utilised in this research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology, including the paradigm and methods employed. It begins with an overview of the research aims and questions. The philosophical foundation of the study is built on a relativist ontology, subjectivist epistemology, and interpretive paradigm. A qualitative methodology, utilising a case study approach, was employed in the research. The process for selecting the research population and sample is then explained. The research specifically utilised Four Seasons as a case study to examine its sustainable practices. Finally, the methods of data collection and analysis are discussed.

3.2 Research Amis and Questions

Research is a process of generating knowledge wherein previous uncertainties are explored to analyse the world and uncover novel information (Scotland, 2012). This research aimed to understand what sustainability practices are adopted and how they are implemented in luxury hotels to achieve the UN SDGs. In order to achieve the research aims, the research questions are:

RQ1: What sustainability practices or programmes are adopted in the case study hotels?

RQ2: How can sustainability practices be implemented by the case study hotels to align with the UN SDGs?

3.3 Research Philosophy

A research philosophy encompasses the values, beliefs, and methodologies that direct the research process and collectively influence how researchers conduct their studies (Booysen et al., 2018). For this research, the relativist ontology, subjectivist epistemology, and interpretivist paradigms were chosen to support the exploration of what sustainable practices are adopted and how they are implemented in luxury hotels. Ontology and epistemology constitute the primary elements of the research paradigm in philosophy (Gray, 2021).

Ontology refers to our perceptions of reality and truth and influences how we perceive entities and their relationships within the world (Booysen et al., 2018). Epistemology is how we know and obtain knowledge (Cohen et al., 2002). Within academic research, ontology defines the subject of study, while epistemology guides the approach and methodology of research. Gray (2021) indicated that researchers can employ various methods to investigate objectively existing things through the lens of subjective understanding. In this dissertation, the ontology refers to the subject of research, the sustainable practices adopted in luxury hotel companies, and the epistemology is the exploration of what practices are adopted and how they are implemented.

3.3.1 Research Paradigm

The research paradigm shapes researchers' understanding of the world by various methods (Fossey et al., 2002). A research paradigm refers to convictions, common values and methodologies that steer the research journey and influence how researchers conduct their investigations (Scotland, 2012). Research paradigms include positivism, interpretivism, critical theory and post-positivism (Gray, 2021). Both positivist and post-positivist ideologies are grounded in an objective viewpoint, asserting that truth remains constant and objective (Krauss, 2005). Interpretivism and critical theory, among others, are connected to subjectivism and relativism, which emphasise the interpretation of research outcomes rather than concentrating on objective truths (Gray, 2021).

This research used interpretivism as the paradigm; this paradigm was suitable because the interpretivist approach acknowledges multiple realities rather than one objective truth (Taneja et al., 2011). It is consistent with qualitative research methods and commonly utilised in content analysis and case studies that explore the meanings behind cultural factors and individual behaviours (Chowdhury, 2014). This research explored what sustainable initiatives are adopted by luxury hotels and how they are implemented. Those initiatives are diverse, and the strategies for their implementation are various. Therefore, this research concentrated on understanding and interpreting what environmental and social sustainability practices luxury

hotels adopt and how they are implemented.

3.3.2 Ontology

According to Barnett (2016), ontologies is categorised into two groups: A realist ontology posits the independent existence of objective entities and human understandings, while a relativist ontology contends that the existence of entities is contingent upon a researcher's perspective, allowing for diverse perspectives among researchers (Barnett, 2016). This research explored what sustainable practices are adopted in luxury hotels. Relativism was considered appropriate as it is the perspective that reality is subjective and varies from person to person (Frowe, 2001).

3.3.3 Epistemology

Epistemology is the science of the process of obtaining knowledge and information (Cohen et al., 2002). Epistemology encompasses three fundamental perspectives: constructivism, subjectivism, and objectivism (Barnett, 2016). Constructivism posits that knowledge is not inherently existing but rather is constructed by individuals. Subjectivism holds that knowledge is projected onto objective reality, while objectivism asserts that knowledge exists autonomously (Creswell, 2009). Constructivism applies to this research, which is linked to interpretivism, because the constructivist epistemology states that meaning is constructed through the interaction between consciousness and phenomena, and refers to the understanding and investigation of phenomena from an individual's perspective (Creswell, 2009).

3.4 Qualitative Methodology

In social research, quantitative and qualitative methods are commonly utilised (Paleček & Risjord, 2013). The qualitative approach involves problem exploration, data collection, and analysis to inform theory development (Myers, 2019), while quantitative methods typically involve statistical data analysis and the deductive method, consisting of the formulation hypotheses and testing for their validity (Myers, 2019).

This research investigated what sustainability practices are adopted and how they can be implemented in luxury hotels. A qualitative method is considered appropriate for this research because it systematically investigates practices and analyses subjective meanings by examining texts, images and content (Flick, 2022). A qualitative method in this study also provided particular benefits; for example, it allowed for flexibility in gathering information and data that related to sustainable practices adopted in the case study hotels.

3.5 Choice of Methodology -- Case Study

The choice of a specific research methodology shapes the design of the research. The chosen methodology offers a theoretical and experimental foundation for scientific investigation through systematic analysis (Adams, 2015). It empowers researchers to comprehend the world through systematic approaches to observing research problems (Hammersley, 2010). The case study method refers to an empirical investigation that delves deeply into a current phenomenon within a real-world setting by using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2009). Case studies are commonly utilised in research where the boundaries between context and phenomena are not readily apparent, and researchers expect to gain insight into complex phenomena within their natural setting (Yin, 2009). Case studies involve examining specific samples of complexity to understand a particular phenomenon within a specific context (Creswell, 2009).

This research used a case study approach to explore the sustainable practices adopted and implemented in luxury hotels. This approach is consistent with the use of qualitative research methods, and allows researchers to use a multifaced perspective and various data to examine problems or phenomena (Creswell, 2009). The case study approach helped the researcher understand the sustainability practices that luxury hotels are employing and how these practices are implemented to address challenges that they face.

According to Yin (2018), there are five commonly used methods for collecting information

in a case study: interviews, observation, document analysis, surveys and archival examination. Among them, interviews, observations and surveys are the methods of collecting primary data through direct interactions and participation with the research case, individuals or groups (Yin, 2018). The present research utilised document analysis and archival examination to explore what sustainable practices were adopted in the selected case study hotels due to limited funding and resources, and time constraints. Document analysis involves analysing reports, emails, records, websites, and other written materials relevant to the case study. An archival examination involves accessing and analysing existing data from archives, libraries, and databases (Yin, 2018). Document and archival analysis can offer valuable and rich data, historical context and supplementary information to enrich the understanding of the case being studied in the research.

3.6 Research Methods

3.6.1 The Population of This Research

The 'research population' refers to the entire group of individuals, cases or elements that share a common characteristic and are the focus of research or study (Majid, 2018). It serves as the broader target group from which researchers intend to draw conclusions or make inferences (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010). This research explored the sustainable practices adopted in luxury hotels and how they are implemented. The global luxury hotel sector is the population; however, the tremendous volume of establishments under the category of luxury hotels poses a challenge for comprehensive examination due to constraints such as restricted funding and resources, and time limitations. A small portion (a sample) of the whole population is selected to make an inference about the population; the sample selection is discussed next.

3.6.2 Sample Selection

A sample refers to a subset of the population chosen for inclusion in a study (Daniel, 2011). The selection of a sampling strategy is significant for research (Harwood & Garry, 2003).

Gray (2021) emphasises that the composition, size, and methods of the sample can influence the research outcomes. Various selection methods, such as systematic, random, and purposive sampling, are available for social research (Gray, 2021).

In this research, purposive sampling was utilised to select a purposeful sample. Purposive sampling refers to the subjective and purposive selection of groups or individual participants (Gray, 2021). Researchers can choose samples that provide useful and pertinent data related to the research question. Gray (2021) explained that predetermined criteria are applied in sample selection. This research explored what sustainable initiatives are adopted in luxury hotels and how they are implemented. To fulfil the research aims, the sample must be renowned as luxury hotels with a steadfast commitment to sustainability (e.g., the Marriott Hotel Group). As outlined in Chapter 2, the definition of luxury hotels is multifaceted and elusive, with a lack of consensus in the luxury hospitality sector (Ding & Legendre, 2022; Peng & Chen, 2019b). The number of luxury hotels worldwide is numerous. Therefore, being among the winners of the Top 25 Hotel Brands at the Travel + Leisure World's Best Awards 2023 has been set as the criterion for the luxury hotel selection, to narrow down an initial dataset. The 25 hotels are labeled as luxury hotels due to their high standards of service, exquisite facilities and amenities, offering unique experiences, prime location and premium price (Travel+Leisure, 2024). These factors align with the luxury hotels attributes that are discussed previously in section 2.4.1. Furthermore, being a member of the GSTC is set as the criterion for the sustainable hotel selection.

Approximately 165,000 Travel + Leisure readers participated in the 2023 survey, casting over 685,000 votes for more than 8,500 unique luxury properties to rate the best hotel brands based on location, food, value, service, and rooms/facilities (Travel+Leisure, 2024). Their readers selected 25 hotel groups as the Best Hotel Brands worldwide. The reason for choosing the Travel+ Leisure Media Awards as a basis for the case study selection was because it is a reputable and prominent platform dedicated to inspiring and informing travellers worldwide (DotdashMeredith, 2024). Travel + Leisure Media encompasses various media channels,

including print publications, digital platforms, social media, and events. It is renowned for its comprehensive coverage of luxury hotels, travel destinations, trends, and experiences (DotdashMeredith, 2024). Using the 25 best hotel brands as the initial dataset helped narrow down the luxury hotel sample selection because of the vast number of luxury hotels there are worldwide.

Sustainable hotels are defined as lodging establishments that uphold their operations by taking into account their environmental and social impacts (Kim et al., 2019). To ensure the selection of the sample, the criterion used was that established by membership of the GSTC. GSTC is an international non-profit organisation founded by the UN Environmental Programme and the UN WTO (Hamimah et al., 2022). It is the leading global authority in making, benchmarking and managing sustainable guidelines for the hospitality and tourism industry to achieve the UN SDGs (Hamimah et al., 2022). As GSTC members, organisations are actively committed to global sustainable development practices and adopting GSTC sustainable criteria in their businesses. Applying this criterion, only two luxury hotel groups, Mandarin Oriental Hotels and Resorts and Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts (Four Seasons), meet both the sample selection criteria.

Upon reviewing the websites of the two hotel and resort groups, it was discovered that the Four Seasons group presents a richer dataset for analysing the implementation of sustainable practices in various settings. The group is recognised as one of the world's foremost ultra-luxury hotel groups (Ding & Legendre, 2022), with 129 establishments spread across 44 countries and located in diverse and ecologically sensitive locations from the world's most exhilarating cities to pristine retreats nestled into rainforests and mountain landscapes (Four Seasons, 2024a). As a Sustainable Hospitality Alliance (SHA) member, Four Seasons has contributed to developing hospitality industry sustainability guidelines and standards, for example, The Hotel Waste Measurement Methodology and The Hotel Net Zero Methodology (SHA, 2024b). Four Seasons is also a member of the Corporate Eco Forum (CEF), a consortium of Fortune 500 and Global 500 enterprises demonstrating a dedicated commitment

to sustainability as a driver of innovation and a business foundation (CEF, 2024). Four
Seasons meets the criteria as a prime example of having a strong commitment to
sustainability and is actively involved in implementing sustainable development practices
within the luxury hospitality sector. The sample selection process is summarised in Table 2.
The data collection method is discussed next.

Table 2: Sample Selection

Population	Criteria for sample selection	Sample	The case selected
Worldwide luxury hotels	1. Worl's Best Top 25 Hotel Brands Across the Globe 2023 (Travel + Leisure) 2. Member of GSTC	Two luxury hotels groups: The Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts Mandarin Oriental Hotels and Resorts	The Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts

3.6.3   Data Collection

Clow and James (2014) stated that research can employ two data collection methods: primary
and secondary. Primary data sources consist of the original data collected through
questionnaires, interviews, experiments, and focus groups (Gray, 2021). Primary data
collection usually entails higher costs and demands more time than secondary data collection
(Salkind, 2010). Secondary data refers to pre-existing information from library articles, online
materials, annual reports, reviews, social media and websites (Gray, 2021). Researchers can
explore or analyse secondary data in conducting new research inquiries (Johnston, 2014).
Collecting secondary data saves time and reduces costs because it is accessible and available
(Clow & James, 2013).

Secondary data was utilised in this research. It was considered appropriate because it saved
time and reduced costs. Data collection took place from February to April 2024. This
research used secondary data resources such as: the official websites of the hotel group;
associated websites, for example the GSTC and the UN; and available documents, news

articles, and annual reports. Systematic website searches were carried out by using the Google index to achieve data collection. In today's digital era, where online services and markets hold great significance (Wang & Law, 2020), hotel establishments, including luxury hotels, rely heavily on their websites to engage directly with guests (VO et al., 2020). Hotel websites serve as important marketing tools that influence consumer decision-making, facilitate direct sales, and enhance communication with customers (Wang & Law, 2020). Studies show that websites significantly enhance customer satisfaction and engagement (Punnasuparom & Choibamroong, 2020). Luxury hotels can quickly respond to the target market to adjust business operations and exploit opportunities that enhance brand images by predicting consumer engagement behaviours via websites and e-commerce (VO et al., 2020).

3.6.4   Content Analysis

Two prominent methods utilised for analysing data are content analysis and thematic analysis (Neuendorf, 2018). Thematic analysis is the process of identifying and analysing patterns of meaning within a dataset through six steps: familiarising oneself with the data, generating codes, producing and reviewing themes, defining themes, and producing a report (Clarke & Braun, 2017). It emphasises a reflective and interpretive approach in developing an interrelated structure of meanings or themes present in the texts (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Content analysis is defined as a systematic and quantitative method used in qualitative research to analyse messages (Neuendorf, 2017). Researchers employ content analysis not only to examine textual material and vast quantities of data but also to uncover the fundamental structures and patterns within the information, and their potential implications (Harwood & Garry, 2003). In qualitative content analysis, the gathered data is usually categorised so as represent specific units of analysis (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019).

This research used content analysis to explore and analyse information. This method enhances the comprehensive and precise understanding of the quality of the information that are reflected in research content (Guo, 2019). In content analysis, a core concept is that the many

words within the text are summarised and classified into considerably fewer categories (Mayring, 2004). It helps locate information while, for example, in the present study, coding sustainable practices into different categories. The systematic and flexible nature of content analysis generates detailed and rich data descriptions (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019), making it an appropriate tool for this research.

A well-structured coding framework is important for accurately examining data and ensuring validity (Mayring, 2004). Coders must also remain open to unique or innovative instances that may not easily align with the code list (Stemler, 2015). The coding framework of this research encompasses the sustainable practices adopted in the selected case hotels. The analysis process is as follows:

Figure 2: Analysis Process
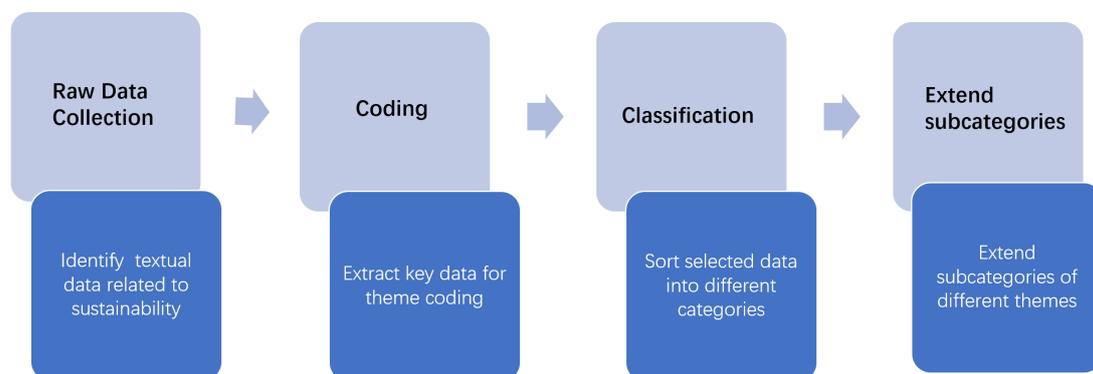
As shown in Figure 2, the analysis process first involved identifying textual data associated with sustainability, sustainable development goals, and sustainable criteria within the selected case. Then, the keywords within the information were identified: environmentally sustainable practices, socially sustainable practices, sustainable development goals, and sustainable governance. The identified text information was then categorised into groups to clarify the content. Then, the coding framework was expanded by extracting data to identify the crucial textual details.

3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the philosophical foundations, paradigms, methodologies, and methods underpinning this research. The study aims were to examine the sustainable practices adopted in luxury hotels and provide insights for hospitality managers seeking to implement these practices. Framed within a relativist ontology, subjectivist epistemology, and interpretivism paradigm, this research utilised a qualitative case study approach to investigate the sustainable practices employed and their implementation in the selected case study. Specifically, it examined the sustainable initiatives embraced by Four Seasons, exploring how these are executed through content analysis. The findings from the data analysis are presented and discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings and discussions on the sustainable practices adopted and implemented by Four Seasons. It begins by outlining the Four Seasons group, then analysing how the ESG framework guides its sustainability practices towards achieving the UN SDGs within the Four Seasons groups. The chapter then examines the environmental sustainability dimension, including energy efficiency, water stewardship, waste reduction, sustainable food and beverage options, environmental conservation, carbon emission reduction, and biodiversity conservation, as well as the social dimension, including community support, workforce wellbeing and health, and local purchasing practices adopted by Four Seasons. Subsequent sections discuss sustainability governance and implementation. Finally, the sustainable certifications Four Seasons has acquired are examined.

4.2 An Outline of the Four Seasons Group

Four Seasons operates 129 establishments across 44 countries. It includes 51 properties in North America, 4 in Central and South America, 19 in Europe, 22 in the Middle East and Africa, and 33 in Asia and the Pacific. These properties are located in diverse and ecologically sensitive areas, ranging from the world's most exhilarating cities to pristine retreats on ocean islands, and in rainforests and mountain landscapes (see Table 3).

Table 3: Four Seasons Properties

Regions	Number of Properties		Landscapes	Number of Properties
North America	51		Coastal	38
Central and South America	4		Mountain Area	6
Europe	19		Rainforest	2
Middle East and Africa	22		Valley	7
Asia and Pacific	33		Wildlife Reserves	1
			City (Downtown and Historical area)	75
Total	**129**		**Total**	**129**

Four Seasons was founded in 1961 by a young architect, Isadore Sharp, in Toronto, Canada, and has established itself as one of the world's premier luxury hotel groups. Isadore Sharp, established a guiding philosophy known as the Golden Rule, which has driven the brand for decades: *treat others how we would want to be treated* (Four Seasons, 2024d). This philosophy elevates the standard for exceptional service quality and provides the foundation for its ESG programme, where employee and community benefits are paramount (Four Seasons, 2024c).

After reviewing the websites of the 129 properties, it was found that 97.6% (126 out of 129) have a sustainability tab on their home page. These cover primary sustainability dimensions, including environmental initiatives, employee wellbeing, local purchasing, and community support. Currently, Four Seasons is concentrating its efforts on six of the seventeen UN SDGs (see Figure 3): Goal 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing), Goal 5 (Gender Equality), Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), Goal 14 (Life Below Water), and Goal 15 (Life on Land).

Figure 3: Four Seasons's Focus on SDGs

OUR PEOPLE FOCUS AREAS   OUR PLANET FOCUS AREAS

Note. Source: Four Seasons (2024c).

4.3 Using ESG as a Framework to Achieve the UN SDGs

To answer the research question concerning how sustainability practices can be implemented in luxury hotels, Table 4 shows how the ESG programme is integrated at Four Seasons as a key framework and a performance indicator to guide its sustainable practices and achieve the UN SDGs. The programme, named *Four Seasons For Good,* encompasses three pillars: people (social sustainability), planet (environmental sustainability) and governance (management) (Four Seasons, 2024d). The environmental and social dimensions of ESG at

Four Seasons correspond to two of the three pillars of sustainable development. The programme is underpinned by specific activities and practices, closely aligned with efforts to contribute towards achieving the UN SDGs. Governance at Four Seasons deals with leadership, internal controls, integrity and compliance. The environmental dimension at Four Seasons contributes to the UN SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), Goal 14 (Life Below Water), and Goal 15 (Life on Land), while the social dimension aligns with Goal 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing), Goal 5 (Gender Equality), and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) (Four Seasons, 2022a).

Table 4: Four Seasons ESG Programme and Summary of Sustainability Performance in 2022

ESG Pillars	ESG Guidelines at Four Seasons	Related ESG Quantificational Performance at Four Seasons in 2022	The related UN SDGs focused on by Four Seasons
Environmental Sustainability (planet)	**Energy Conservation**	1. 74% of properties have electric vehicle charging stations; 2. 65 % of properties adopted solar energy for heating systems.	Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production Goal 14: Life Below Water Goal 15: Life on Land
	Water Stewardship	1. 42% of properties utilised water reclamation systems; 2. 83% of properties report having water-efficient faucets; 3. 86% of properties adopted water-efficient toilets.	
	Waste Reduction	1. More than 2.2 metric tons of soap and 3.8 metric tons of plastic waste were diverted through a partnership with Clean the World; 2. More than 3.5 metric tons of single-use glass packaging waste have been eliminated since 2020 across properties; 3. 63% of properties adopted an organic waste diversion programme; 4.96% of properties adopted a recycling programme; 5. The use of more than 250 metric tons of single-use plastics is avoided annually by using large-format bathroom amenities.	
	Sustainable Food and Beverage	1. 100% of properties having food and beverage (F&B) leaders received sustainable food training programme, and they are responsible for reducing food waste; 2. 55% of properties have food waste composting programmes; 3. 77% of properties adopted a cooking oil recycling programme; 4. Food waste reduction goal set: 50% reduction in food waste by 2030; 5. All suppliers are required to adhere to the Supplier Code of Conduct.	

	Biodiversity Conservation	1. 77% of properties adopted biodiversity programmes; 2. 82% of properties using drought-tolerant landscaping.	
	Reducing Carbon Emissions	1. 74% of properties have electric vehicle charging stations; 2. A carbon calculation programme is being adopted	
Social Sustainability (people)	**Support Local Community**	1.100% of properties have a 'green team' to lead local sustainability initiatives; 2.86% of properties have communities' contribution activities; 3. Raised over US$10.36 million worldwide for cancer research since 1981; 4. 73% of properties adopting product donation programme (donating gently used items like linens, furniture and fixtures); 5. 79% of properties have local artist support programmes; 6. 4,644 people supported by recycled soap programmes.	Goal 3: Good Health and Wellbeing Goal 5: Gender Equality Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
	Decent Workforce	1. Four Seasons 2022 ranked in the top 10% among companies across industries globally with employee diversity, inclusion and belonging programme (DIB); 2. Education remained a top priority in the workforce; 3. Focus on creating an environment where diverse team members are represented, heard, and feel a sense of belonging; 4. Each property offers a programme for employee wellbeing; 5. Promoting respect for human rights across all properties.	
	Local Purchasing, Fair Trade with Local Suppliers	1. 39% of properties serving responsibly and locally sourced seafood; 2. 85% of properties established their local purchasing guidelines and standards.	
Governance	**Compliance, Integrity, Internal controls,**	1. Adding a dedicated sustainable web page across all properties to their website in 2022 (97.6% of properties have sustainability web pages); 2. Establishing ESG teams or 'green teams' across all properties responsible for implementing the Four Seasons For Good efforts; 3. Every property is required to undertake a detailed audit of water and energy consumption and carbon emissions every four years; 4. Each Property has a detailed list of conservation and carbon reduction initiatives (97.6% of properties have sustainability web pages).	

Note. Source: Four Seasons (2022a).

The ESG programme facilitates the resolution of issues related to diverse stakeholders, including consumers, employees, suppliers, and investors (Holden et al., 2017). The quantitative approach to evaluating and disclosing corporations' sustainability performance offers a framework that enables management to assess and monitor their practices (Lin et al., 2024). As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2), organisations within the hospitality and tourism industry have implemented ESG programmes as effective mechanisms to address the UN SDGs and facilitate their sustainable development initiatives (Bae, 2022). Using the ESG programme as a framework, Four Seasons can systematically manage their environmental initiatives, implement social strategies, and allocate resources (e.g., monetary support and investment) to achieve the UN SDGs.

Since 2021, Four Seasons has published its annual ESG report to examine its sustainability implementations' outcomes. Table 4 summarises the Four Seasons ESG quantitative performance for 2022; the 2022 report was used because the 2023 ESG report had not been published at the time of writing this dissertation (February to May 2024). Legendre et al. (2024) stated that the industry is increasingly adopting ESG reporting to enable companies to evaluate and strategically manage their sustainability practices (Legendre et al., 2024). Many tourism and hospitality organisations, such as American Airlines, Wynn Resorts, and Hyatt Hotels, release ESG reports to enhance brand value and attract customers, employees and investors (Gillan et al., 2021). The quantitative performance metrics employed by Four Seasons differ slightly from the indicators recommended for the hotel industry by the WTTC, though the fundamental aspects of sustainability assessed remain comparable. A potential explanation could be that the Four Seasons ESG report, which encompasses all hotels within the group, emphasises collective achievements rather than the performance in terms of specific indicators. The specific practices adopted in each aspect of the ESG guidelines at Four Seasons are discussed in the next section.

4.4 Environmental and Social Sustainability Practices at Four Seasons

To answer the research question of concerning what sustainability practices have been adopted in luxury hotels, the main Four Seasons' website, its annual ESG reports from 2021 and 2022, and all 126 properties' sustainability web pages were reviewed (3 hotels' sustainability websites were not available). As previously discussed, specific activities and practices support the environmental and social pillars of Four Seasons' ESG strategy. After coding and categorising all the data collected on sustainability, seven primary themes of environmental sustainability were identified across the hotels: environmental conservation, energy efficiency, water stewardship, waste reduction, sustainable food and beverage, biodiversity conservation, and carbon emissions reduction. Social sustainability at Four Seasons includes community support, workforce wellbeing and health, and local purchasing practices. These practices are summarised in Table 5; each theme includes specific environmental practices discussed in the following sections.

Table 5: Summary of Sustainability Practices at Four Seasons

ESG Pillars	ESG Guidelines at Four Seasons	Related Specific Practices	The UN SDGs focused on by Four Seasons
Environmental Sustainability (planet)	**Environmental Conservation**	Linens and towels are replaced every third day across all properties; Salt technology used in hotel pool; Eco-certified cleaning and detergent product.	Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
	Energy Efficiency	Regular auditing of energy consumption; Sub-meters used to measure consumption patterns; Solar photovoltaic panels are established; High-efficiency heating, ventilation and air conditioning system (smart sensors, heat recovery system, air-source heat pumps); Smart TVs with low standby energy and energy-efficient refrigerators installed in guest rooms; Low energy bulbs, LED lights and motion sensors in public areas; Passive cooling and natural ventilation by architectural design.	
	Water Stewardship	Regular auditing water consumption; Equip with smart- meters; Water-efficient fixtures (low-flow toilets, faucets and showers); Purification system for drinking water;	

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		Collecting rainwater and growing water for irrigation and gardening; Reducing the frequency of changing towels and linens.	Goal 14: Life Below Water; Goal 15: Life on Land:
	Solid Waste Management	Reusing: composting food waste to organic fertilizer; Soap for hope: recycling soap diverted to new hygiene products donated to local communities; Donation: linens and furniture donated to local communities; Reducing waste by eliminating sing-use plastic products; Using AI to help reduce food waste; Continuously monitoring waste management practices.	
	Sustainable Food and Beverage	Sourcing locally; Offering seasonable, vegetable and organic options; Sustainable food training programme provided to food and beverage leaders.	
	Biodiversity Conservation	Implementing landscaping practices that favour native flora and fauna; Upgrading flora and fauna inventory annually; Coral restoration, sea turtle net protection, gentle giants protection, wild elephant rescue programme; Reforestation and planting efforts.	
	Reducing Carbon Emissions	Using solar energy; Installing electric vehicle charging stations; Encouraging alternative transportation like bike and electric cars Monitoring carbon footprint; Reducing waste and pollution by eliminating single-use plastic products Reforestation and planting	
Social Sustainability (people)	**Support Local Community**	Employees engaged in volunteer work to support local communities; Support educational programmes for youth and local schools; Support local economic development and culture by collaborating with local artists, designers and women artisans; Charity donations to support health programmes and cancer research.	Goal 3: Good Health and Wellbeing; Goal 5: Gender Equality; Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
	Decent Work	Implementing employee diversity, inclusion and belonging programme (DIB); Providing education and training in workforces;	

		Promoting equal employment for women and local talent; Offering programmes for employee wellbeing and health; Maintaining employee labour rights.	
	Local purchasing,	Prioritising local purchasing; Establishing a fair-trading partnership with local suppliers.	
Governance	**Compliance, Integrity, Internal controls,**	All properties adding a dedicated sustainabtility web page to their website in 2022; Establishing ESG teams or 'green teams' across all properties responsible for implementing the Four Seasons For Good efforts; Every property is required to undertake a detailed audit of water and energy consumption and carbon emissions every four years; Each Property has a detailed list of conservation and carbon reduction initiatives based on its location; Cooperation with international and local NGOs.	

4.4.1 Environmental Practices

4.4.1.1 Energy Efficiency

Four Seasons has adopted a multifaced approach to reducing energy consumption across their properties. One notable aspect of energy conservation efforts is their strict adherence to energy efficiency measures. Each property undergoes regular audits conducted by qualified engineers to identify areas where energy consumption can be reduced without compromising the guest experience or their comfort (Four Seasons, 2024c). Sub-meters are widely adopted at Four Seasons properties to measure and enhance the understanding of consumption patterns. The property can develop a customised list of energy conservation initiatives based on these measurements. For example, the audit of energy consumption from fossil fuels at Four Seasons Cyprus found that all guest rooms were using approximately 2 million KWh in 2021 (Four Seasons Hotel Cyprus Operations Team, 2022). Based on this data, the hotel set a goal to reduce energy consumption by 5% by the end of 2022 (Four Seasons Hotel Cyprus Operations Team 2022).

To conserve energy, renewable energy utilisation is a core approach at Four Seasons. Solar photovoltaic panels are widely installed across properties, generating clean energy. As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2), solar energy is a sustainable and widely accessible clean energy source increasingly installed in the hotel industry (Dani et al., 2021). For example, solar panels and heat recovery systems provide 100% of Four Seasons Marrakech (2024) property. The solar panels at Four Seasons Maldives (see Figure 4) save between 250,000 and 300,000 litres of diesel fuel and reduce CO2 emissions by 650 to 800 tons annually, which is equivalent to providing enough energy to power all 103 guest rooms and villas for 32 days (Four Seasons Resrot Maldives at Landaa Giraavaru, 2024).

Figure 4: Solar Panels at Four Seasons Maldives

Note. Source: Travel Asian Now (2021).

High-efficiency heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems are standard in Four Seasons hotels (Four Seasons, 2022a). Smart sensors adjust temperature and humidity based on occupancy and external weather conditions. Four Seasons properties also use innovative energy conservation technologies, for example, heat recovery systems and air source heat pumps to ensure optimal energy efficiency. The heat recovery system recovers waste heat from air conditioning units for the heating system. Air-source heat pumps are refrigerant-efficient systems that use a compressor and a condenser to absorb heat from the outside air and release it inside the building in winter, conversely in summer (Badiei et al.,

2020). Research shows that air-source heat pump systems can increase energy efficiency by about 30-40% compared to conventional air-conditioning systems (Sezen & Gungor, 2023).

In addition, LED lights and low-energy light bulbs, combined with infrared motion sensors, are utilized to save energy in public areas such as corridors, public restrooms, staff areas, and back-of-house areas in most Four Seasons properties. These practices are common methods used by hotels to decrease energy consumption (Malheiro et al., 2020). Smart TVs with low standby energy consumption and energy-efficient refrigerators are provided in rooms (Four Seasons Hotel Cyprus Operations Team 2022). Refrigeration is also recognised as a major source of energy consumption in the hotel (Huang et al., 2015). Energy-saving practices, including LED lighting in public areas and water heat pumps in all guest rooms, have improved energy efficiency by 70% at Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Landaa Giraavaru (2024). The combined energy-efficient practices at Four Seasons Cyprus reduced energy costs by 15% in 2022 (Four Seasons Hotel Cyprus Operations Team 2022). This reduction corresponds to the cost-saving advantages discussed in the literature review (section 2.5.2).

The architectural design of Four Seasons properties emphasises natural light and ventilation. By harnessing passive cooling and natural ventilation from prevailing winds, the reliance on air conditioning is significantly reduced. Green roofs in certain properties (e.g., Boston, London and Las Vegas) provide excellent insulation, reducing heating and cooling demands. Sezen and Gungor (2023) stated that air conditioning and ventilation systems contribute the most energy consumption in the hotel industry. Buildings oriented to take advantage of the sun's path and prevailing winds help maintain natural temperature, significantly reducing energy consumption (Dani et al., 2021).

4.4.1.2　Water Stewardship

Four Seasons properties regularly undertake water measurement initiatives to streamline water consumption. Leak detection systems and smart water meter systems are adopted over 60% of Four Seasons properties to track water consumption patterns, allowing for the

identification of problematic behaviours like leaking pipes and excessive flushing habits. Water-efficient fixtures, including low-flow toilets, faucets, and showers, are installed in all guest rooms to minimise water waste. Research indicates that the average water consumption in luxury and five-star hotels is approximately 800 litres per guest per night (Cruz-Pérez et al., 2022). As discussed previously, installing water-saving devices is the most common practice to save water (Gavilanes Valle et al., 2019; Widiana et al., 2022). It can help hotels reduce room water usage by approximately 20% (Cruz-Pérez et al., 2022).

A built-in purification system supplying reusable glass bottles with drinking water at Four Seasons properties (Figure 5) contributes considerably to water conservation. The refillable glass bottles are cleaned and refilled using the daily filtration system on the property (Four Seasons, 2022a). This approach to replacing traditional plastic bottled water is also used by various luxury hotels such as the Soneva Group (Legrand et al., 2022), and the Six Senses Hotels group (Piuchan & Prachansit, 2019).

Figure 5: Reusable bottled water at Four Season

Note. Source: Four Seasons (2024c).

Four Seasons properties have also adopted important practices such as water collection, greywater reuse, and harvesting rainwater to reduce water usage. Recycled greywater and the rainwater that is collected are utilised in irrigation and gardening. Dani et al. (2021) indicated

that harvesting rainwater and greywater reuse has great potential in reducing hotel water usage (Dani et al., 2021). For example, at Four Seasons Bahrain Bay, 100% of wastewater is treated at a sewage treatment plant funded by the hotel and used to irrigate gardens (Four Seasons Hotel Bahrain Bay, 2024). Xeriscape gardening methods promote the growth of drought-resistant native plants and flowers are adopted at Four Seasons properties such as Austin, Los Cabos at Costa Palmas, and Santa Fe to reduce the need for irrigation.

Additionally, Four Seasons has implemented a policy across its properties whereby linens and towels are changed every third day unless otherwise requested as a measure to conserve water and energy. As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2), the amount of laundry washed significantly contributes to a hotel's energy and water consumption, accounting for approximately 47% of total water usage (Gavilanes Valle et al., 2019). Reduction in towel changes is one of the most common measures for reducing water, energy and detergent usage (Cingoski & Petrevska, 2018). This policy helped Four Seasons Cyprus reduce laundry costs by 15% in 2022 (Four Seasons Hotel Cyprus Operations Team 2022).

4.4.1.3 Waste Reduction

Four Seasons has implemented a waste management plan and recycling programme to reduce, reuse and recover key waste streams (Four Seasons, 2024c). Properties are equipped with recycling facilities that separate glass, paper, metals, and plastics. As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2), recycling and waste separation are the most commonly used measures to reduce hotel waste (Gavilanes Valle et al., 2019). Rather than focusing solely on recycling, the Four Seasons waste management programme prioritises reuse and recovery. In 2022, 2.2 metric tons of soap and 3.8 metric tons of plastic waste were diverted through a partnership with the international NGO Clean the World (Four Seasons, 2022a). Donation is an important strategy for reducing waste at Four Seasons. Old used linens and furniture are donated to the local community through different local charitable partners at each property. The Soap for Hope programme is a recycling initiative that processes used soap into new, lab-

tested hygiene products. The products are donated to communities through Clean the World (Travel Asia Now, 2021).

A key strategy for reducing solid waste at Four Seasons is eliminating single-use plastic products. Plastic bottled water bottles have been replaced by reusable glass water bottles, bathroom amenities have been switched to large-bulk amenities, and reusable fabric laundry bags have replaced traditional plastic bags. These practices have avoided the disposal of over 250 metric tons of plastic annually at Four Seasons properties (Four Seasons, 2024c).

Another strategy adopted at Four Seasons to reduce waste involves food management through donation and artificial intelligence (AI) to minimise food waste. The AI tools can track and measure food waste in kitchens and suggest ways of reducing avoidable food waste. Managing food waste is an ethical concern and a significant global issue, as one-third of all food for human consumption is wasted annually (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations [FAO], 2022). The hospitality industry contributes between 15% and 30% of all food waste (Chhikara et al., 2024). Luxury hotels often provide a wide variety and great volume of food on site to ensure guest satisfaction and enhance the experience of enjoyment (Gannon et al., 2022). Food waste significantly increases operational costs and contributes to carbon emissions by releasing methane (FAO, 2022). Innovative technologies can be used in the hotel industry to reduce spoiled food and overprovision, and sustainably dispose of food waste (Chhikara et al., 2024). For example, Four Seasons Papagayo in Costa Rica reported that the AI tool helped reduce food waste by 50% annually (Four Seasons, 2024b). Excess uneaten food from kitchens and guest rooms is donated to local communities in need. Most food scraps and trimmings at Four Seasons properties are composted with organic fertiliser for vegetable gardens. For example, over 13,000 kilograms of organic waste were diverted to organic soil in 2023 at Four Seasons Papagayo (Four Seasons, 2024b).

Additionally, approaches such as encouraging suppliers to minimise the use of unnecessary packaging and continuously monitoring waste management are crucial strategies for reducing

waste at Four Seasons properties. The monitoring includes regular audits of waste disposal and recycling processes. The goal is to provide each property with a comprehensive understanding of the waste it generates and the efficiency of its on-site waste management practices. The audit results enable the management team to identify areas that need changes or adjustments.

4.4.1.4 Sustainable Food and Beverage

Four Seasons incorporates sustainable practices into its food and beverage services at its hotels and resorts, aligning with its environmental stewardship and social responsibility commitment. Sustainable food initiatives include sourcing locally, offering organic options and reducing waste (Four Seasons, 2024c). Four Seasons prioritises purchasing from local farmers and suppliers to support local economies. This practice ensures freshness and promotes regional culinary traditions, offering guests a taste of local flavours (Alsetoohy et al., 2021). Menus that include organic and sustainably sourced products are offered at 60% of Four Seasons properties (Four Seasons, 2022a). This commitment also extends to seafood, with resorts adhering to sustainable fishing practices guided by certifications such as the Marine Stewardship Council (Travel Asian Now, 2021). For example, 100 % of seafood at Four Seasons Cabo San Lucas and 75% of food at all Four Seasons Hawaii properties come from local certified sustainable farmers, fisheries and purveyors (Four Seasons, 2022a; Four Seasons Resort and Residences Cabo San Lucas, 2024). Educational initiatives and a sustainability-focused food management programme are also provided for more than 600 food and beverage leaders across Four Seasons properties (Four Seasons, 2024c). An educational programme can minimise gaps in employees' sustainability knowledge and enhance their participation and engagement in sustainable practices (Filimonau et al., 2023).

4.4.1.5 Biodiversity Conservation

Biodiversity conservation practices at Four Seasons focus on preserving and enhancing the natural habitats surrounding its properties. The initiatives include the management of their landscapes and conservation approaches (Four Seasons, 2024c). Among Four Seasons

properties, 41.9% (54 out of 129) are located in areas with rich biodiversity, including rainforests like Bali and Golden Triangle in Thailand, coastal regions like Maldives, Seychelles and Hawaii, mountainous terrains like Whistler, Colorado, USA and Megève in France, and wildlife reserves like Serengeti in Tanzania. Four Seasons takes deliberate steps to maintain the ecological integrity of these habitats by implementing landscaping practices that favour native flora and fauna and support local wildlife; the flora and fauna inventory for the property's surrounding area is updated annually (SHA, 2024a).

Four Seasons also partners with environmental organisations (e.g., The Mantra Trust, Clean the World) to support conservation projects. Properties at different locations participate in guest-engagement activities like coral restoration programmes in the Maldives and Bora Bora, sea turtle net protection in the Seychelles, the protection of gentle giants underwater in Hawaii, wild-elephant rescue programmes in Golden Triangle, and reforestation and planting efforts in Costa Rica and Hawaii. These activities enable the protection and restoration of local ecosystems and provide educational opportunities for guests and staff. Luxury hotels increasingly adopt such activities to create unique experiences and enhance consumer engagement in sustainability practices (Dang-Van, Wang et al., 2023; Kim, 2021).

4.4.1.6 Environmental-Friendly Programmes

The environmentally-friendly programmes adopted at Four Seasons includes practices discussed previously, such as providing bicycles and EV transportation, clean energy, and changing linens, and towels every third day. Environmentally friendly practices adopted at Four Seasons also include offering vegan and vegetarian menus at each property, using salt technology in swimming pools, and using eco-friendly detergents and products for cleaning. Approximately 58% of the coastal properties provide employee volunteer beach-clean activities to preserve the coastal environment.

4.4.1.7   Reducing Carbon Emissions

Four Seasons is actively working to reduce its carbon emissions. The initiatives include renewable energy use, an energy efficiency programme, sustainable transportation, a carbon offsetting programme and reducing pollution (Four Seasons, 2024c). Since energy use is closely linked to greenhouse gas emissions, implementing efficient energy-saving strategies and renewable energy can significantly reduce carbon emissions (Bharwani & Mathews, 2023). Four Seasons encourages the use of electric vehicles (EVs) by installing charging stations across properties (74% of properties have these installed) and incorporating EVs into its service fleets (Four Seasons, 2022a). Four Hawaii properties have participated in carbon offset programmes by reforestation and planting to compensate for the emissions they generate. Their carbon footprint has been calculated and monitored through cooperation with the SHA. Reforestation, using clean energy, and waste reduction are the most common measures to reduce carbon emissions (Song et al., 2020).

4.4.2   Social Practices

Social sustainability refers to creating and maintaining sustainable communities that are equitable, diverse, connected, and provide a good quality of life (Hajian & Kashani, 2021). Social sustainability at Four Seasons is associated with supporting local communities, employee wellbeing and development, and local purchasing.

4.4.2.1   Supporting Local Communities

Four Seasons extends sustainability principles beyond its operations through involvement in local communities. The commitments include employee volunteer work, educational initiatives, support for local economies and cultures, and financial donations. Properties across the Four Seasons group are encouraged to engage in local initiatives and support community causes. In 2023, 86% of properties reported having community impact partnerships in place (SHA, 2024a). The staff are encouraged to volunteer at local events, and with local charities and non-profit organisations. According to Sotomayor et al. (2021), staff

participation in volunteer work within local communities is a vital initiative for fostering good relations with the community. It allows employees to understand local culture and traditions better and respect local conventions (Sotomayor et al., 2021).

Four Seasons supports local schools through funding and educational programmes and participating in school visits. The properties implement various educational support measures based on the location of its establishments. For example, Four Seasons Nevis has offered a two-week programme for girls aged 11 to 17 to help them build skills, develop, and share their future ambitions (Four Seasons, 2022a). The BOOK 4 ALL programme at Four Seasons Papagayo has helped more than 13 schools and 1300 children who have difficulties buying notebooks. A range of structured internships and unique educational programmes are provided to Maldivian youth aged 17 to 20, equipping them with the skills to build successful careers in hospitality (Travel Asia Now, 2021).

Four Seasons often sources goods and services from local businesses, aiding the economic development of its operating regions. It collaborates with local artists, designers and manufacturers by incorporating their products and services into the hotel's offerings (Travel Asia Now, 2021). For example, it supports a Saudi women artisans' handcraft training programme by partnering with the charitable organisation Alwaleed Philanthropies. This programme helps women artisans build small enterprises by showcasing and selling their crafts and designs at Four Seasons hotels. In addition, it also offers guest-engagement in cultural activities (see Figure 6) to support traditional business and local cultural heritage protections. These efforts are tailored to address the specific needs of each community, ensuring that the support provided is both meaningful and impactful.

Figure 6: Guest Engaged in an Activity to Support Culture Protection at Four Seasons Bali

Note. Source: Travel Asia Now (2021).

Giving back to local programmes, including charity donations and fundraising, are an important approach to supporting local communities at Four Seasons. Supporting cancer research (see Figure 7) is one of the most notable charity programmes rooted in its commitment to honour the Four Season's founders, who lost their son to cancer in 1978. As discussed previously other activities, like the donation of food, furniture, and linens to local communities, have been carried out across various properties. Charity programmes are commonly used as socially sustainable practices in hotels (Ruiz Molina et al., 2022).

Figure 7: Four Seasons Charity Donations to Support Cancer Research

$10.36 million
Amount raised since 1981 through the Wilket Creek Terry Fox Run, led by Four Seasons Toronto Home Office and Four Seasons Hotel Toronto, with every dollar going directly to cancer research.

$680+ million
Amount raised worldwide for cancer research in Terry Fox's name.

Note. Source: STAY (2023).

4.4.2.2   Decent Work

Employee support is another significant focus at Four Seasons. The company invests in extensive training and development programmes to enhance the skills of its workforce and ensure a supportive work environment. Each Four Seasons property has a learning professional responsible for supporting employee learning and development, ensuring employees possess the skills and confidence appropriate for their roles and career stages (Four Seasons, 2024e). Susanto et al. (2023) noted that training contributes to healthier working

conditions and improved employee satisfaction and engagement. Both financial and sustainability success depends on engaged employees who are confident, motivated and committed (Filimonau et al., 2023).

To advance workforce equality, Four Seasons has implemented the diversity, inclusion, and belonging (DIB) programme, which includes activities such as Pride Month, LGBTQ+ celebrations, and gender equality advocacy. Four Seasons also promotes equal employment for women and talented local people by offering them a safe, fair, respectful working environment and career advancement path. Women hold 56% of leadership positions at Four Seasons (SHA, 2024a). To ensure a safe and secure workforce, it has developed Four Seasons human rights policies informed by the *UN Guiding Principles on Business and human rights* (Four Seasons, 2022b). According to Zhao and Zhou (2021), ensuring a safe and secure work environment complies with legal requirements and improves staff morale and retention. Creating an environment of gender equality and fairness adheres to ethical standards and fosters a positive workplace where employees feel valued and respected regardless of gender (Russen et al., 2021). Hotels that emphasise diversity, inclusion, and gender equality can benefit from a diverse workforce and increased creativity (Hora et al., 2021). According to Ghani et al. (2022), hotels that successfully integrate these values are better positioned to attract and retain talent and ultimately gain competitive advantages.

Four Seasons places significant emphasis on employee wellbeing and health. The programme Lead With Care seeks to advance the commitment to protecting the health and wellbeing of employees and guests (SHA, 2024a). Other initiatives, including flexible working hours, leading employee travel programmes, and online wellbeing curriculums accessible through social media, are in place at Four Seasons to ensure employees' mental and physical wellbeing (Four Seasons, 2024e). These practices foster employees' sense of belonging, strengthen job satisfaction, and enhance sustainability and operational performance (Samad et al., 2022).

4.4.2.3   Local Purchase, Fair-Trade with Local Suppliers

Four Seasons' social sustainability efforts also extend to managing their supply chains. It actively promotes sustainable sourcing through its local purchase and fair-trade policies with local suppliers. As discussed in section 4.4.1.4, Four Seasons prioritises purchasing products, vegetables and fruit from local farms and rural communities. It complies with the commitment to the supplier code of conduct and emphasises fair-trade practices. The practices include paying fair prices and collaborating in ways that respect local labour standards and environmental practices. Through these initiatives, Four Seasons not only enhances the authenticity of the guest experience by offering local flavours and crafts but also fosters a more equitable and ethical treatment of local suppliers (Ding & Legendre, 2022).

4.4.3   Sustainability Governance and Implementation

To address the research question concerning how sustainable practices can be implemented in luxury hotels, it is important to consider how, as previously discussed, Four Seasons has adopted an ESG programme as a framework and follows specific governance and implementation strategies. Firstly, the three primary hierarchies (see Figure 8) steer the implementation of ESG practices (Four Seasons, 2022a). The Four Seasons board's ESG committee sets out their ESG policies and goals, assesses ESG progress, and provides strategic direction. A steering committee meets every six weeks to ensure consistency in ESG and overall corporate strategy. At each property, an ESG core team or 'green team' is responsible for developing and implementing specific ESG environmental and social practices (Four Seasons, 2024c). Filimonau et al. (2023) stated that the consistency of organisational mission, culture and management on sustainability is crucial to employee engagement and implementation outcomes.

Figure 8: Four Seasons ESG Governance Structure

Secondly, as discussed in section 4.4.2 social sustainability practices, including employee engagement, training, and empowerment, are key elements for implementing sustainability practices. Employee engagement is facilitated through the 'green team', an employee-led group committed to implementing sustainable practices at each hotel. The Four Seasons' approach to sustainability is also embedded in employee training programmes designed to educate staff on the importance and knowledge of environmental conservation and how their roles play a part in these efforts (Four Seasons, 2022a). Four Seasons also empowers its workforce by involving them directly in its sustainability initiatives, such as volunteering in local charity activities and Run for Hope fundraising marathons. But the success of sustainability implementation and operational performance does depend on engaged employees (Filimonau et al., 2023).

Thirdly, internal controls are important for implementing sustainability practices. Robust internal controls detect and address deviations or misconduct. Each property conducts regular audits and reviews of water and energy consumption, waste generation, and carbon emissions. The outcomes of these implementations are regularly reported to the ESG core team. Based on the evaluation, the board committee at Four Seasons can monitor and adjust behaviours.

Finally, partnerships with various international and local NGOs are important for implementing sustainability practices. For example, individual Four Seasons hotel partners with international NGO Food Banks, to donate surplus edible food to communities while

reducing food waste. Four Seasons Amman cooperates with Amman's local NGOs, Green Wheelz and the Jordan River Foundation, funding wheelchairs, physiotherapy and education for children with cerebral palsy to improve these children's life quality. These sustainability NGOs can be considered upstream suppliers, offering support, training, and recommended activities to hotels (Chan, 2021). Partnerships with related NGOs allow hotels to collaborate effectively to implement sustainability practices, as they share similar cultural values and goals, thus achieving a mutually beneficial outcome (Chan, 2021). Acquiring sustainability certifications also helps guide implementing sustainable practices, which is discussed next.

4.5 Sustainability Certifications Acquired by Four Seasons

Four Seasons has acquired several key sustainability certifications (see Table 6) to provide indicators for improvement and to guide sustainability implementations. These certifications help Four Seasons align its operations with globally recognised standards and mutually support the ESG programme in achieving the UN SDGs. Certifications include Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification, EarthCheck and Green Globe. Adhering to environmental regulations and certifications can enhance the credibility of a brand's reputation and demonstrate the organisation's dedication to sustainable practices (Damsari et al., 2020).

Four Seasons faces an intriguing scenario with only 11 out of its 129 properties globally having acquired these international sustainability certifications. This statistic raises several interesting considerations about its environmental stewardship and sustainable practices. It could suggest that a strategic decision to prioritise other aspects of luxury service over environmental concerns, a lack of urgency in addressing the environmental impact of their operations, or it may reflect that properties are still struggling to meet stringent environmental standards. The low number of certified properties suggests a potential broader challenge facing the entire industry. However, this gap also presents an opportunity for Four Seasons. By increasing the number of certified hotels, the brand could strengthen its market position and potentially lead the luxury hotel sector towards a more sustainable future.

Table 6: Summary of Sustainability Certification Acquired by Four Seasons

Certificate	Hotel Name	Hotel Region
LEED (Platinum)	Four Seasons Gurang Zhou	Asia and Pacific
LEED (Platinum)	Four Seasons Philadelphia at Comcast Center	North America
LEED (Gold)	Four Seasons Bengaluru at Embassy One	Asia and Pacific
LEED (Gold)	Four Seasons Madrid	Europe
LEED (Silver)	Four Seasons One Dalton Street, Boston	North America
EarthCheck	Four Seasons Resort Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt	Middle East and Africa
EarthCheck	Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Landaa Giraavaru	Asia and Pacific
EarthCheck	Four Seasons Hotel Cairo at Nile Plaza, Egypt	Middle East and Africa
Green Globe	Four Seasons Resort Seychelles at Desroches Island	Middle East and Africa
Green Globe	Four Seasons Resort Seychelles	Middle East and Africa
Green Globe	Four Seasons Resort Montreal	North America

4.5.1   LEED

LEED is a globally recognised green building certification system which has evolved since 1998 (United States Green Building Council, 2024). It was developed by the U.S. Green Building Council to provide a framework for environmentally responsible building design, construction, operations, and maintenance (United States Green Building Council, 2024). Two Four Seasons hotels, in Guangzhou and Philadelphia, are platinum-certified. Two others, in Madrid and Bengaluru, are gold-certified, and one in Boston is silver-certified. These levels are determined based on a points system where buildings earn points for various aspects of their construction that meet specific green building criteria (Clay et al., 2023). The criteria are categorised into different areas, such as sustainable sites, water and energy efficiency, materials and resources, and innovation in design (Clay et al., 2023). Four Seasons incorporates various sustainable construction and design practices, such as having sustainability consultants, energy-efficient HVAC systems, and water-saving plumbing fixtures. Buildings seeking LEED certification undergo a rigorous process that encourages architects, engineers, developers, and owners to adopt sustainable design and construction practices (Wei et al., 2020). Research shows LEED is the most adaptable system used in America, Canada and Asian countries like Sri Lanka, among other green building rating systems (Widiana et al., 2022), due to its global recognition (Damsari et al., 2020).

4.5.2   EarthCheck

Another certification that Four Seasons has acquired is EarthCheck. EarthCheck is a leading international environmental management and services group specialising in helping the tourism and hospitality industry achieve sustainability (Widiana et al., 2022). It emphasises a scientific approach and offers certifications that assess an organisation's performance on various environmental and social criteria, including energy and water consumption, waste production and disposal, community involvement, and the management of natural and cultural heritage (EarthCheck, 2022). These practices and standards align with the UN's 17 SDGs, helping organisations understand how they can contribute to achieving the UN goals (EarthCheck, 2022). Founded in Australia in the late 1980s, EarthCheck now operates in over 70 countries and is widely recognised in the tourism and hospitality industry (e.g., accommodation, airport, cruise, railway, golf course and destination) for its rigorous scientific approach to sustainability (Baumber et al., 2021). More than 50 hotel brands, including market leaders such as ACCOR, InterContinental, Aman Group, Banyan Tree, and Marriott Group, have adopted it to improve sustainability (Baumber et al., 2021; EarthCheckMembers, 2024; Rodríguez-García et al., 2023). Three Four Seasons properties are currently certified by EarthCheck. The benefits of EarthCheck certification include improved efficiency, reduced environmental impact, and cost savings from better resource management (Rodríguez-García et al., 2023).

4.5.3   Green Globe Programme

Two Four Seasons properties also participate in the Green Globe programme, a US-based certification programme established in 1994 that promotes sustainable practices within the travel and tourism industry (Ásványi, 2021). It offers guidance, certification, and educational services to businesses striving to improve their sustainability. The Green Globe Certification Standard includes 44 globally accepted criteria in four groups (environmental, cultural heritage, social and economic, and sustainable management) and is supported by over 380 compliance indicators (GreenGlobe, 2024). Its standards and indicators are primarily based on

the GSTC criteria, the criteria of Sustainable Tourism Certification of the Americas, and International Organization for Standardization(ISO) 9001 (Quality Management), ISO14001(Environmental Management) and ISO19011(Auditing Management) (GreenGlobe, 2024). According to Cheng (2021), one of the strengths of Green Globe's certification process is that it is holistic and flexible, being tailored to meet the diverse needs of various types of tourism and hospitality organisations, from small eco-lodges to large resorts (Cheng, 2021). Its regular evaluation of operational processes also presents better risk management (Amoah & Smith, 2024). Statistics show that adopting the Green Globe programme can bring approximately 10% energy and water savings and a 7% increase in staff satisfaction (Ásványi, 2021; Cheng, 2021).

4.6 Chapter Summary

The findings show that Four Seasons are using its ESG programme as a framework to guide its sustainable practices and achieve the UN SDGs. The environmental and social dimensions of Four Seasons' ESG correspond to two of the three pillars of sustainable development. These dimensions are supported by specific activities and practices closely aligned with efforts to achieve the UN SDGs. The fundamental themes of the ESG report used by Four Seasons are consistent with the guidelines suggested by the WTTC.

The environmental practices found at Four Seasons consist of seven aspects: energy efficiency, water stewardship, solid waste reduction, sustainable food and beverage, environmentally-friendly programmes, biodiversity conservation and reducing carbon emissions. The social practices discovered at Four Seasons consist of supporting the local community, ensuring employee wellbeing and favouring local purchasing and trade with local suppliers.

Sustainability governance and implementation at Four Seasons include consistency of management philosophy at different levels, employee training and engagement, regular auditing and monitoring, cooperation with NGOs and acquiring sustainable certification.

Three primary elements in the hierarchy—the board ESG committee, the steering committee, and the ESG core team—guide the implementation of ESG practices. The management approach ensures consistency in the organisation's culture, ethos, mission, and management of its moves towards achieving sustainability goals. Employee training, empowerment and engagement are the key elements for implementing sustainability practices. Regular audits and reviews of sustainability performance enables the management team to assess and monitor its implementation appropriately. Cooperation with NGOs is crucial for hotels to efficiently implement their sustainable practices. Some Four Seasons properties also adhere to the requirements of environmental certifications, such as LEED, EarthCheck, and Green Globe, to guide and improve implementation. Recommendations and implications from this findings and discussion chapter are discussed in the conclusion chapter which follows.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the dissertation. Firstly, it outlines the theoretical and managerial implications for academic researchers and hotel managers. Then the limitations of this research are discussed and, finally, recommendations for future research are discussed.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

An increasing concern from governments and the public about climate change and the carbon footprint has resulted in a shift in consumer preferences for sustainable services and products in the luxury hotel sector. It is now necessary and important for luxury hotels to adopt comprehensive sustainable practices. As one of the fastest-growing sectors within the global luxury industry (Shin & Jeong, 2022), luxury hotels can drive major global transformations by implementing systematic, sustainable practices in their operations and significantly contributing to environment conservation and social and economic improvement (Kim et al., 2019; Pratt, 2022). This research has explored what sustainability practices are adopted and how they can be implemented in luxury hotels to achieve the UN SDGs. It employed a qualitative case study approach to investigate the sustainability practices adopted at Four Seasons.

The findings of this study shows that Four Seasons utilises an ESG programme as a framework to guide and manage its sustainable practices in aiming to achieve its focus on the UN SDGs. According to Gillan et al. (2021), an ESG programme is an effective tool that facilitates the consistency of organisational sustainability goals, guidelines and practices. Its non-financial performance indicators enable management to evaluate and monitor the implementation of sustainability initiatives in a timely fashion (Bae, 2022). Compared to the ESG guidelines suggested by the WTTC, Four Seasons has developed additional measures for sustainable food and beverage, environment conservation, and biodiversity conservation.

ESG-guided environmental and social sustainable practices at Four Seasons also align with the three pillars of sustainability as discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2).

The findings indicate that Four Seasons has adopted a wide range of basic environmental practices, including reducing water usage by installing low-flow fixtures, detecting leaks, and implementing non-daily linen and towel changes; conserving energy through the use of LED lighting and motion sensors; and reducing waste by enhancing recycling and encouraging separation of the recycling (Han et al., 2018; Malheiro et al., 2020; Salehi et al., 2021). Four Seasons has also implemented advanced environmental practices such as: the use of solar panels, HVAC systems, EV charging stations, water purification and water treatment systems, and sustainable food and beverage programmes, the recovery and reconstitution of waste products; eliminating single-use of plastics; engaging in carbon offsetting initiatives; and setting up various guest engagement biodiversity conservation activities. In addition to global initiatives like changing linens and towels every third day and offering vegan menus, each Four Seasons property has developed its customised list of sustainable practices based on local regulations and the specific needs of its location.

The social dimension of sustainability practices at Four Seasons focuses on supporting local communities, employee wellbeing and local purchasing. Supporting local communities includes a wide range of practices such as donating products and food, fundraising for health programmes, supporting education for local women and youth, supporting local artists by selling their products in hotels, and engaging in natural environment and cultural activities. Four Seasons is committed to employee wellbeing through training, providing health programmes, and deploying the DIB programme. As previously discussed, the successful implementation of sustainability practices in hotels largely depends on employee engagement because they are responsible for delivering such practice (Pereira et al., 2021). Social sustainability efforts at Four Seasons also extend to favouring local purchases and fair-trade policies with local suppliers.

5.3 Managerial Implications

This study provides guidelines for hotel managers by showing what measures can be adopted to reduce environmental impacts and contribute positively to the community and economy. It also demonstrates how sustainability practices can be implemented in hotels, including such elements as: consistency of management philosophy, developing a sustainable practices list, employee training and involvement, regular auditing and monitoring, and cooperation with NGOs. The findings indicate that Four Seasons considers installing energy and water-efficient practices and waste management initiatives as investments rather than one-off costs, and as commitments to environmental protection and operational efficiency. This study also challenges the notion that sustainability practices in luxury hotels compromise consumer comfort, dilute luxury experiences, and diminish the hotel's prestige (Ramkissoon et al., 2020). It demonstrates that, despite adopting these practices, Four Season's image is positively maintained (it was among the Top 25 Best Hotel Brands in 2023), and client satisfaction remains high.

5.4 Limitations of the Research

This study utilised a qualitative approach to investigate sustainability practices adopted at Four Seasons and their implementation. Gray (2021) noted that the results of qualitative research are subjective, being tied to the researcher's understandings and interpretations, which their personal biases could influence. This research used secondary data from websites, social media, and hotel ESG reports as data sources. The use of secondary data may cause accuracy and reliability issues as the data has been collected for purposes other than addressing specific research questions (Johnston, 2014). The data has been collected may be outdated and not sufficiently detailed for the researcher's needs (McBurney & Kubas, 2022). The case of Four Seasons, as a global luxury hotel group, may not represent all luxury hotels worldwide. Accordingly, research on the adoption and implementation of sustainability in the luxury hotel sector in different contexts is suggested for the future.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Research

Given the limitations of this research, future suggestions are that research could be carried out in various independent luxury hotels in metropolitan cities or diverse landscapes to explore what sustainability practices are adopted and how they can be implemented in different contexts.

This study utilised secondary data collected from online sources; future research could employ data collection methods such as field research, questionnaires and interviews to gather primary data, thereby enhancing the accuracy and credibility of the research outcomes. This approach could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the adoption and implementation of sustainability practices in luxury hotels. For example, future research could conduct interviews to understand how hotel management and employees perceive the benefits and challenges of integrating sustainability practices into business operations. The framework and practices implemented at Four Seasons could be a reference point for future studies.

This research explored the environmental and social dimensions, the governance and the implementation of sustainability initiatives in luxury hotels, using the Four Seasons as a case study. Future research could examine a specific aspect of sustainability or management measures taken in relation to sustainability efforts adopted in the luxury hotel sector. It could provide comprehensive strategic guidelines and a deeper understanding of sustainable development in this industry.

In the era where an increasing number of consumers are making environmentally conscious choices, the luxury hotel industry cannot afford to lag behind in adopting sustainable practices. The achievement of Four Seasons provides an example of the ways in which luxury and environmental stewardship can coexist harmoniously. Despite the challenges, luxury hoteliers should consider that adopting sustainable practices can be an avenue for innovation and brand differentiation.

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