

Eco-labels and their influence on travellers' accommodation choices

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<p>Sustainable travel choices are increasingly important in the travel industry and accommodation providers have been consciously developing “greener” services and ways of operation. To support and showcase sustainability results there are plenty of eco-labels available.</p> <p>Eco-labels and sustainability efforts come with a cost. Obtaining and maintaining such certificates cost yearly or periodical fees as well as working hours and plenty of effort by the accommodation providers. These efforts pay off as lodgings and services become eventually more sustainable through conscious decisions regarding water and energy use, waste management, amongst others.</p> <p>This thesis is researching if Finnish travellers appreciate eco-labels. It attempts to find out if having an eco-label, or in general sustainability efforts have any effect on accommodation choices with the help of an online survey and interviews with managers of accommodation provider services.</p> <p>Managers all agreed that eco-labels are beneficial for accommodations as they give directions towards more sustainable operations and guide decision making. A survey conducted between 150 Finnish travellers proved that sustainability efforts and actions matter to travellers, but eco-labels by themselves are not affecting their buying decisions.</p> <p>The thesis research serves as a base for further research in the topic of eco-labels and in understanding how sustainability efforts affect reservations.</p>	
Keywords eco-labels; sustainability in hospitality; sustainability marketing; socially responsible consumers	

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1 Introduction

The author of this thesis is employed by a centrally located hotel in Helsinki, which has an eco-label. In order to fulfil the eco-label criteria there is a regular audit by the certifiers. There are numerous measurements to perform as well as paperwork to present in order to pass the audit. In mentioned hotel this is the responsibility of the hotel manager together with the so-called eco-label ambassadors from the reception team.

The author is one of the ambassadors, hence responsible for overseeing the eco-label related processes. Together with the hotel manager they had lengthy discussions on the topic of sustainability in general as well as the role of eco-labels. The idea for the topic of this thesis was also born from one of these conversations. Do travellers really care about a hotel's eco-label? Is it something they consider when they are choosing their accommodation? Do they act more responsibly when they stay at a hotel that has put a lot of effort to sustainable operations? Do they choose the hotel because of the eco-label? Thus, the topic was chosen for this master's thesis.

As mentioned above, the thesis idea was developed in cooperation with the writer's manager, but the thesis is not commissioned by any individual hotel nor is it for any hotel's specific use. However, as the idea was out of common interest, the employer of the writer had taken on an active advisory part in the research as well as introducing the writer to relevant professionals for further assistance.

1.1 Research questions

The thesis is research-oriented. The fundamental research problem, therefore the objective of the thesis is to study how sustainability certifications influence hotel choices of travellers. It aims to investigate how much customers value accommodation providers' sustainability efforts.

The main research question was set as follows: do sustainability certificates influence leisure travellers' accommodation choices? The research question was narrowed down to four investigative questions. An online questionnaire was used to examine the consumers' point of view and interviews were conducted to get a better understanding of the accommodation service providers' point of view.

Table 1. presents the investigative questions as well as the theoretical background, and research methods used in order to get a better understanding of them and eventually find answers to the main research question.

Table 1. Overlay matrix

Investigative question	Theory	Research method	Results (chapter)
Q1. What are sustainability certifications?	Sustainability in tourism and in the accommodation sector	Secondary research (literature review)	2; 6.1
Q2. What are the benefits of acquiring an eco-label?	Introduction to eco-labels for accommodation providers	Secondary research (literature review)	2; 3; 5.1; 6.1
Q3. Do travellers recognise eco-labels?	The responsible traveller (characteristics of green travellers; socially responsible consumption)	Qualitative research (interviews); quantitative research (survey)	3; 5.1; 5.2; 6.1
Q4. How do accommodations' sustainable practices influence travellers' choices?			5.2; 6.1

The first investigative question is asking why accommodation providers have eco labels. Literature review, as a secondary research, introduces the reader to the concept of sustainability in the tourism sector and specifically in terms of accommodations. The second investigative question is answered partially by the literature review and partially with the help of interviews conducted with managers working in the Finnish accommodation sector. The third and fourth investigative questions focus on guests and how they perceive sustainable accommodations. The answers will be established with the help of aforementioned interviews as well as an online survey which was completed by 150 travellers living in Finland. The secondary research conducted for each investigative question serve as a basis for understanding the data collected from the survey and the interviews.

Once the research results are analysed, the conclusion of the thesis will provide an answer to the research question.

1.2 Structure of the thesis work

The thesis is divided into three parts. First a literature review introduces the reader to sustainability in the accommodation industry and eco-labels in chapter two, followed by a deeper look into the characteristics of sustainable travellers in chapter three. Secondly, chapter four introduces the methodology used for the research and gives justification on the choice of research methods. It explains both the design processes and the ways the survey and interviews were conducted. In chapter five the results of the research are analysed, so that in the third and final part of the thesis, chapter six, conclusions can be drawn as well as suggestions for further studies in the topic.

Figure 1 presents the data collection methods that were used for the thesis.

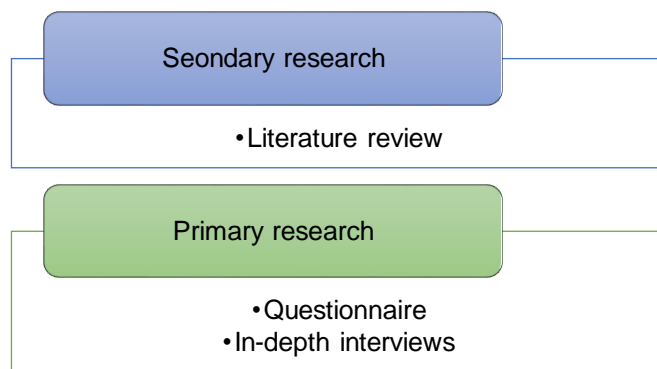


Figure 1. Data collection methods

2 Sustainable travel

The following literature review looks at how sustainability in tourism gained a momentum. The reader is introduced to the concept of sustainable accommodation as well as what an eco-label is. The most widely used eco-labels in Finland are listed.

2.1 Sustainability in the tourism industry

On 22 December 2015 the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) declared 2017 to be the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. The facilitator of the international year was the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) and the Sustainable Development Goals were set to promote tourism's role in five different areas of sustainable development: sustainable economic growth, social aspects, resource efficiency, cultural aspects and finally peace and security. (UNWTO 2016a.) Within these categories there are a total of 169 targets and 330 indicators to be reached by the year 2030.

It is often emphasised that tourism has extensive effects on natural and built environments. (Page 2019, 415.) But how did sustainability in tourism become so important that the UN declared a whole year to its promotion and further development?

Tourism adds 10% of the world's GDP and provides one in every eleven jobs globally. In many developing countries it is the largest export category. Tourism promotes cultural diversity and raises awareness to the value of heritage. It is a tool to break down barriers between territories and according to the UN it is a not so secret tool for soft diplomacy. (UNWTO 2016b.)

The complexity of tourism is well described by Leiper (1979, in Fennel & Cooper 2020, 11.) who defines it as:

Tourism system involves the discretionary travel and temporary stay of persons away from their usual place for one or more nights. The elements of the system are tourists, generating regions, transit routes, destination regions and a tourist industry. These five elements are arranged in spatial and functional connections. Having the characteristics of an open system, the organisation of five elements operates with broader environments: physical, cultural, social, economic, political, technological with which it interacts.

Since the beginning of the 20th century there has been a boom in tourism and hospitality and the sector became the world's largest service industry. Hospitality and tourism organisations have an important role in being examples and educators for sustainability.

Independent on the type of operations, all organisations need to be environmentally conscious as well as able to run the business with a sustainable state of mind. (Legram, Sloan & Chen 2017, 16.)

The tourism sector is diverse, broad and consists of several players that all have different impact on the environment. Tourism is generally thought of as a service industry. Due to the broadness of infrastructure and ancillary services used, tourism has a high environmental impact. As Beltz & Peattie (2012, 107.) highlight, sustainability-oriented and environmentally conscious tourism are among the most important growth segments within the tourism market.

UNWTO defines sustainable tourism as:

Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities (UNWTO 2020.).

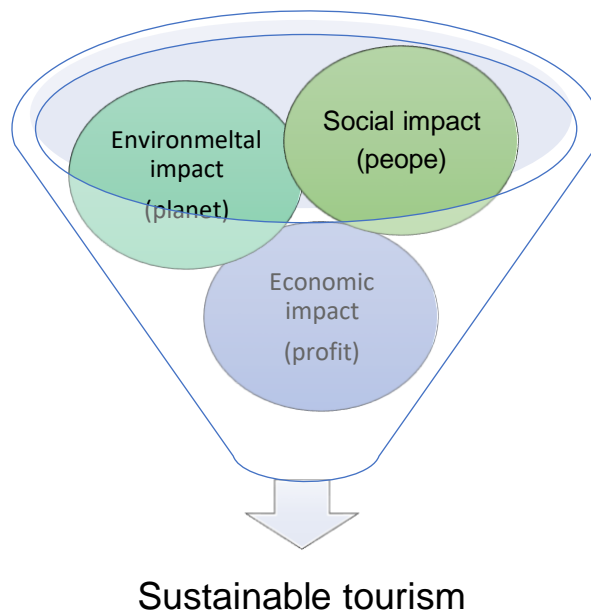


Figure 2. Three pillars of sustainable tourism development (adapted from UNWTO 2020.)

Travellers are becoming more conscious of their travel habits (Page, 468.), and on how destructive tourism can be. This created the new need for environmentally conscious travelling and the chance for tourism service providers to shape their existing products or create new ones that are more sustainable. The demand for such green developments is not new on the agenda, as according to Fennell & Cooper ideas emerged as early as the 1950s. At the same time, travellers' eagerness for more sustainable products have been challenging tourism service providers. (202, 16.)

The topic of tourism has been a constant participant in the world’s largest economic and environmental meetings. Thus, the previously mentioned UNWTO Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development agenda is only one of the many international endeavours which aim to set guidelines for sustainable service and product design. It is crucial to assemble these protocols in such a way that they are mindful of economic, ecological and sociocultural aspects as well. Based on Fennell & Cooper (202, 8.) the following guiding principles created by international organisations have also dealt greatly with sustainable tourism principles: The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (established in 1992 by UNESCO) and the Millennium Development Goals (developed by the UN in 2000).

Another important organisation dealing with sustainability concerns in tourism is the European Network for Sustainable Development (Ecotrans) which is part of the European Environment Agency. Ecotrans is working on tools and best practices for sustainable and ecological tourism development. In order to achieve the UNWTO’s Sustainable Development Goals that are directly connected to tourism development they determined 10 so-called action fields were determined. Ecotrans provides resources and gives a helping hand to tourism service providers to work on the goals. (DestiNet 2017a.). These sub-topics and goals are supporting the understanding the core of sustainable tourism.



Figure 3. The 10 action fields for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of the UNWTO (DestiNet 2017a.)

It is important to differentiate the key influencers and decision-maker agencies in terms of sustainable tourism, as these public and private groups are the ones that establish the policies that are then used by service providers. These organisations have different levels of involvement. Fennell & Cooper (2020, 256.) categorises them based on their connections with the national governments. The four main categories they divide the key influencers into are:

- intergovernmental bodies
(e.g. UNWTO, Tourism Committee of the OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)
- non-governmental organisations and pressure groups
(e.g. Greenpeace, WWF: World Wildlife Fund)
- business and membership organisations
(e.g. World Tourism Council, The Global Sustainable Tourism Council)
- public sector influencers
(e.g. public-private partnerships, benefit corporations).

The role of education needs to be emphasised as well when significant influencers of sustainability and sustainable tourism are discussed. Education is a powerful tool for shifting travellers' attitudes towards sustainable tourism. According to a study by Wals & Benavot (2017, 406) sustainability and environmental education need to focus on engaging the public to participate in sustainable development issues by teaching them how to make sustainable living a default. If the principles regarding water, energy and food consumption, as well as the care for one's environment is integrated early enough into one's values it will have a lifelong impact on making sustainable choices when consuming goods and services.

The goals are set for sustainable development, but as many actions are intangible, collecting statistical data challenges the UNWTO. The International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics guidelines have been in operation since 2008 (UNWTO 2020). Specific performance measurement protocols have been in development by the UNWTO since 2015. The framework will provide integrated information on the progress of the three pillars of sustainable tourism: economic, social and environmental developments. (UNWTO 2020.)

2.2 Sustainable accommodations

Page (2019, 208-217) defines accommodation as a component of the complex hospitality sector that can be divided into numerous establishments providing lodging services. The accommodation is a commercial venue and its diversity allows for travellers to choose from a wide range of options according to their preferences. Properties range from non-serviced rental apartments to all-inclusive luxury complexes. The accommodation sector is going through constant and rapid change, and it must always to technological innovations as well as tourism trends.

Sustainable accommodations are eco-friendly operations that apply environmentally friendly practices such as conscious usage of water and energy, application of eco-friendly operation and policies, reduced waste production and responsible waste disposal. Such lodgings follow a strategy that protects the natural environment and contributes to

the wellbeing of the local community. The management system follows international and national sustainability standards and guidelines. Managers execute sustainable improvements and aim to balance the negative environmental, economic and social effects of lodging operations. It is important to mention, that lodging providers have various reasons for implementing green practices, ranging from real environmental consciousness to cost savings or stakeholder pressure. (based on Barber 2014; Barber & Deale 2014; Van Felius et al. 2016)

A 2014 report by the UNWTO (in Van Felius, De Vries & Cavagnaro 2016, 503) suggests that an increasing number of accommodation providers are committed to become more sustainable and are ready to invest in it. The same report also warns that hotel visits per se are unsustainable.

Consumers' environmental awareness is growing, but at the same time accommodation providers are confronted with balancing two operational goals. Whilst they are working on adhering to the sustainability procedures and plans they set up and are acting according to their limitations, they are faced with service requests of hotel guests such as high-pressure showers, fresh linen or lavish buffet breakfasts that are in contrast to their efforts. There is a rather fine line that should not be crossed as no service provider wants to make their customer feel guilty by their consumption choices. The goal is not to lecture guests, who are at the property to enjoy themselves. (Barber & Deale 2014, 100)

To increase consumer demand and appreciation for more environmentally friendly hospitality services customers need to be part of the programme for awareness and sensitisation. When accommodation providers showcase their sustainability efforts, they should educate the customer on how they benefit from these during their current and future stays. (Tasci 2017, 386.)

There are many ways how accommodations can shift their operations towards sustainability. Such examples are: efficient water and energy use, organic and local produces throughout the food & beverage section, decreasing the use of paper and disposable plastics throughout the property or cleaning on demand, just to name a few. The survey research of this thesis is looking into these environmentally friendly practices and how customers perceive them when making reservations and during their stay (see Chapter 5.2 for results of the analysis).

2.3 Eco-labels for accommodation providers

Organisations can use different methods to document and report on their sustainability activities. One of these methods is to obtain an eco-label, which can also be referred to as sustainability certificate.

By definition:

with eco-labels consumers can select products and services according to specific environmental and societal criteria. For businesses, eco-labels are a means of measuring performance and also communicating and marketing the environmental credentials of a given product. (UN 2020.)

Several types of eco-labels exist. We can differentiate them based on who owns the standard (public, non-profit or hybrid); if they are mandatory or voluntary (e.g. mandatory labels are very frequent in many industrial fields in terms of energy efficiency); based on how the monitoring and audit happen, to name a few categories. Tourism service providers choose their eco-labels from a range of certifications available in the country they operate in. The choice between available certifications (or not choosing any) is at the tourism service provider's discretion. The research part of this thesis will return to this question as part of the in-depth interviews (see Chapter 5.1).

Eco-labels are important tools of environmental management, as they strengthen transparency of the business. According to International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) eco-labels are certifications that give information about the tourism product or service in terms of its overall environmental character. Eco-labels are standards, that give information to (potential) buyers on the product's environmental characteristics. As stated "the provider of the product or service hopes the environmental label or declaration will be effective in influencing the purchasing decision in favour of its product or service". (ISO 2000.)

Eco-labels are also tools for performance management, as they require adherence to set measures and limits. These limits are based on standards related to sustainable tourism development.

Obtaining and maintaining a sustainability certificate is not free for businesses. Besides the administrative costs it requires extra labour hours and, in many cases, financial investments from business owners. (Tasci 2017, 378)

Along with the increasing interest in sustainability the use of eco-labels has been increasing as well. Taufique, Vocino & Polonsky (2017, 523) have examined eco-labels in

terms of consumer behaviour and have concluded, that if used strategically, these certificates serve as tools to enhance pro-environmental consumer behaviour.

Indeed, tourism businesses need to be ready to do more than fulfilling the minimum criteria and displaying the logo of the sustainability certification they were awarded with. They need to be ready to invest in raising awareness of their sustainability efforts in general as well as the peculiarities of their eco-certification.

DestiNet (2017b) is a portal developed by EcoTrans, the European Network for Sustainable Tourism Development, who emphasize an eco-label's importance in orienting travellers towards better choices as well as for creating better supply chains with business partners. (DestiNet 2017d.)

DestiNet connects eco labels with the UNWTO's aforementioned Sustainable Development Goals. (UN 2017.) The five targets that are connected to the most common expectations of eco-labels are the following: quality education; affordable and green energy; decent work and economic growth; responsible consumption and production; peace, justice and strong institutions and partnerships for the goals.

According to their registry there are over 250 sustainability quality labels available worldwide (data from May 2020).

Van Felius et al. (2016, 507) argue that it is difficult and essentially not possible to compare eco-labels and classify them as superior and inferior, as the operational environments and regulations differ by country, and the reliability of labels depends on how they are awarded and monitored. Also, sustainability certifications are issued by different government agencies, non-governmental organisations as well as private companies, which also makes comparisons complicated and, on many levels, inessential.

The DestiNet portal features a search engine for sustainability certificates called Global Certification Quickfinder (DestiNet 2017d), that lists available environmental labels for tourism businesses, destinations and tour operators. The search can be narrowed down to continent, country or the operational level of the certificate. As a feature one can filter also based on credibility (i.e. how the certification is accredited) or the specific field of tourism it is applied to (e.g. destinations, transport & mobility services, accommodation providers).

To narrow down all registered tourism sustainability labels to ones that apply to lodging services, the Quickfinder was tested with the following search criteria:

- Category: Accommodation providers
- Country: All
- Operation level: All
- Sustainability: All
- Credibility: All

The search resulted in 180 different eco-labels. Figure 4 illustrates the result. The blue pins on the map mark the headquarters of eco-labels, whilst the red ones are cropped due to the density of main offices in the areas. Visibly, the majority of sustainability certifications are headquartered in Europe and North America.



Figure 4. Eco-labels for accommodation providers worldwide (DestiNet 2017d)

To find out how many of the 180 certifications operate on a global level, the “Operation level” was changed from “All” to “Global”. The search resulted in 42 eco-labels.

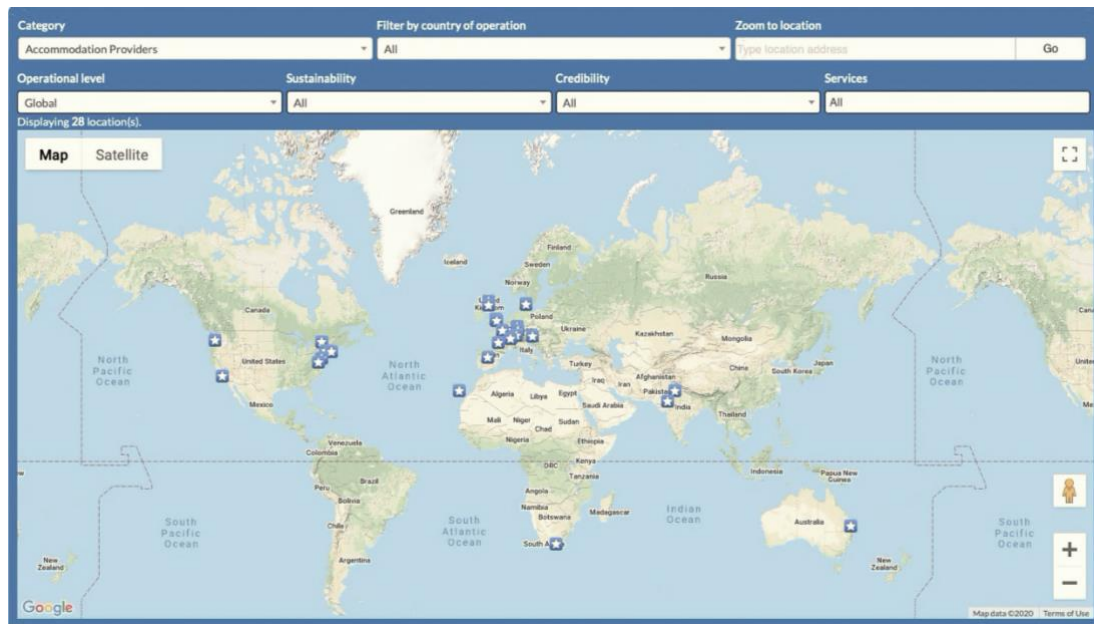







Figure 5. Eco-labels for accommodation providers worldwide, operation level: global (DestiNet 2017d)

Since this thesis is researching Finnish travellers’ habits and will interview managers working at Finnish hospitality operations, the Quickfinder search was first narrowed down by changing the first, original search to “Country” criterion to Finland. The rest of the search fields stayed the same, and the search resulted in 6 labels. Further filtering by changing the operation level revealed that out of these 4 labels are “Global” and 2 are “Sub-Global”

The result of the search, including the names and short descriptions of the eco certifications available for Finnish accommodation service providers, are presented in table 2. According to DestiNet Quickfinder there are no registered national certificates in Finland specifically for accommodation services. However, despite not being listed on DestiNet, accommodation providers in Finland do have the opportunity to apply for eco-labels which are headquartered in Finland and are meant for accommodation operations (more on this in chapter 2.4).

All the below eco-labels are registered elsewhere in the world. It is important to point out that there are several, well-known and widely used certifications internationally (e.g. Green Globe), however, due to lack of local administrative offices or partners, Finnish accommodation operators cannot apply to obtain them at the moment.

Table 2. Eco-labels for accommodation providers in Finland, operational level: global and sub-global (DestiNet 2017d.)

Name and operational level	Logo*	Description
B Corporation - global		<p>The certification measures the company's entire social and environmental service and helps balancing profit and purpose through public transparency and legal accountability.</p> <p>1 certified business in Finland (not in the field of tourism)</p>
Green Key - global		<p>Voluntary eco-label for accommodations, conference centres, restaurants and attractions, that has strict criteria regarding sustainability management and education.</p> <p>113 certified businesses Finland (not only accommodation providers)</p>
Hostelling International (HI) Quality & Sustainability Certification - global		<p>HI developed their own certifications for youth hostels worldwide to create high quality guest experiences with a positive effect on local economy, communities and the environment.</p> <p>8 certified hostels in Finland</p>
TourCert - global		<p>The TourCert certificates are awarded for sustainability and corporate responsibility in tourism.</p> <p>3 awarded companies in Finland (all of them are tour operators)</p>
European Ecolabel for Tourist Accommodation Services and Campsite Services - sub-global (Europe)		<p>Also called EU Ecolabel, this is the voluntary environmental scheme of the European Union for products and services that meet the high environmental standards through their life-cycle.</p> <p>No certification holders in Finland</p>

<p>Nordic Swan - sub-global (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Iceland)</p>		<p>Nordic Swan certifies a wide range of products and services in the Nordics in all fields of business. In Finland the label is known as Joutsenmerkki.</p> <p>30 accommodation providers are certified in Finland</p>
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*all logos are from DestiNet 2017d.

The table shows that eco-labelled accommodations in Finland have Green Key, Nordic Swan and HI Quality & Sustainability certifications. The table does not examine costs and exact criteria of these eco-labels, the intention is only to provide an overview of available labels to the reader. The survey analysis is going to examine whether any of the above were known to the respondents (see chapter 5.1).

Whether it is feasible for accommodation providers to obtain an eco-label or not has been the topic of academic research. Tasci (2017) examined sustainability certifications from the customer demand's point of view (the idea somewhat resembling the basic research question of this thesis). He emphasized that nowadays it is considered very old-fashioned and non-profitable on the long run to think only about financial profits of a business. Tourism service providers cannot afford not to think about the social and environmental responsibilities of their operations. The result of his study was that eco-labels are indeed beneficial, but consumer awareness of them is low, and his final conclusion is that "demand cannot exist in the lack of awareness, and without demand, supply will not be necessary". (Tasci 2017, 388.)

2.4 Sustainable accommodations in Finland

Living sustainably and in harmony with nature has a central role in the Finnish way of life as well as in engaging travellers. Sustainable tourism objectives aim at leaving a low ecological footprint while honouring and supporting local cultures. Sustainable travel marketing communications are overseen by Visit Finland (part of Business Finland), that works on developing Finland's travel image and helps facilitate investments in the tourism industry. Overall their program promotes respect for nature, wildlife and age-old customs through ethical and sustainable living. (Business Finland 2020a.)

Visit Finland established a eco-label to help Finnish tourism companies and destinations to develop more sustainable practices. The certification is called Sustainable Travel Finland (STF) and companies that fulfil the criteria are eligible for the label, with the logo presented in figure 6.



Figure 6. Sustainable Travel Finland eco-label (Business Finland 2020b.)

The STF programme came to life in order to draw attention to proactive tourism planning by service providers, and it is a tool for control on national and international level. According to Business Finland's survey in 2018 over 80% of Finnish tourism service providers supported the idea of a national level sustainable programme. A year later, in 2019 sustainable tourism was set as one of the priorities of Finland's tourism strategy for 2019-2028. The STF programme focuses on all dimensions of sustainable tourism (ecological, cultural, economic) and provides the tourism industry with toolkits to put strategies into action. They offer a seven-step approach towards sustainable tourism and provide learning and support environment for companies that are interested in obtaining the label. (Business Finland 2020b.)

Achieving the Sustainable Travel Finland label is possible since 1 June 2020 and at the time of accessing the registry, six accommodation providers have received the eco-label. (Visit Finland 2020.)

As the eco-label is fairly new, it was not featured yet in the search engine of DestiNet which was presented in chapter 2.3. The STF eco-label does not prohibit the lodging operators from having an international certification as well and vice versa (at least in the case of Green Key).

Another eco-label not listed in table 2 (and not listed in DestiNet either for unknown reasons) is Ekokompassi. Ekokompassi is a Finnish environmental management system and eco-label that is designed for small and medium-sized enterprises and events.

Accommodations that comply the criteria can apply for the label within the travel- and hospitality category. The eco-label is owned and managed by a non-governmental organisation, the Finnish Association for Nature Conservation. (Ekokompassi 2020.)



Figure 7. Ekokompassi eco-label

The next chapter will discuss sustainability in tourism from the customers' point of view as well as promotion of sustainable efforts to them.

3 Sustainable travellers

When accommodation providers want to reach travellers who value sustainable efforts, first they need to understand these travellers' characteristics. A large portion of tourists consider themselves generally environmentally conscious, but that does not necessarily apply to their travel habits, whilst there are some who are equally environmentally conscious when they are travelling. This latter is the group hospitality marketing managers have to recognise and target specifically.

This chapter deals with the phenomenon of the socially responsible traveller and discusses the ways of engaging with them through marketing.

3.1 The responsible traveller

The general public is getting more environmentally aware and the focus on environmental issues and sustainable practices are increasingly relevant in the accommodation industry. Chen & Tung (2014, 224) define environmental concern as a general attitude towards environmental protection.

Tourists as well are starting to be aware that their consumption might be harmful to the environment and are shifting towards eco-friendly buying behaviours when travelling whilst leading a greener, eco-friendlier lifestyle. (Chen & Tung 2014, 221)

Tourism service providers as well as travellers are getting concerned about environment, gradually attitudes and preferences are shifting to travel products and services that are also sustainable. (Millar, Mayer & Baloglu 2012, 396)

Van Felius et al (2016, 502) support the above by referring to a research conducted by TripAdvisor which questioned if travellers consider the environment when booking their accommodation and two-third of the respondents answered yes.

But who are those consumers that specifically search for and appreciate most sustainability efforts? Marketing researchers have been trying to profile customers that are interested in sustainable products and services since the 1970s and have been generally referring to them as "green consumers". This label according to Millar et al. (2012, 396) applies to consumers who recognise that their personal purchases have an environmental impact.

This new group of tourists are called pro-environmental, socially responsible, sustainable tourists, or as a collective name that will be used throughout this thesis work: responsible travellers.

Responsible travellers have high environmental concerns both in their daily lives and as well as during travels. They value accommodations that participate in and demonstrate their sustainability efforts to their customers, which they also appreciate being part of. These tourists are concerned about the negative environmental impact of purchasing tourism services and their behaviour is defined by their desire to make more eco-friendly purchasing decisions. (based on Barber 2014; Chen 2015; Van Felius et al. 2016; Taufique, Vocino & Polonsky 2017)

Referring to the UNWTO definition for sustainable tourism a sustainable traveller is anyone, whose purchase and travel behaviour is influenced by the three dimensions of sustainable tourism: environmental, social and economic matters. (Barber & Deale 2014, 102.)

When profiling the responsible traveller, it is worth mentioning Barber & Deale's mention of an earlier research (2014, 108) which points out that women are more likely to make decisions regarding the family's travel plans, and that in general women tend to be more sensitive to sustainability-related matters. The survey research will prove the same (see chapter 5.1)

Njite & Schaffer (2017, 219) use the term consumer social responsibility when talking about the needs and habits of sustainable tourists. This phenomenon confirms and completes the characterisation of the responsible traveller. Consumers' are paying more attention to products they purchase, use and discard. When thinking about tangible products this led to the remarkable growth of environmentally friendly products. Whilst in the case of intangible products, such as tourism services, the attention to environmental issues has led to the development of greener lodgings and the need for development of sustainable services.

It is highly beneficial for hospitality service operators to have better understanding of responsible travellers and to understand their behaviour and motivation in different phases of consumption to effectively communicate to them. (Tasci 2017, 379.)

3.2 Sustainability marketing

Marketing has an inevitable part in promoting sustainable tourism. The development of marketing strategies in sustainable tourism is shifting towards a more complex strategy of

reaching customer satisfaction, business profit and overall societal benefits at the same time. (DestiNet 2017.)

Accommodation providers are recommended to reach out specifically to responsible travellers through appropriate communication. This particular segment of customers promotes sustainable behaviour and is motivated to act sustainably when travelling. They support the environmentally friendly efforts of the tourism industry and are seeking to find accommodation with sustainable practices where they also get relevant information on equally sustainable-minded services and activities to complete their experience. Hence, hospitality organisations wishing to engage with responsible travellers are advised to expand their marketing segmentation to responsible travellers. (Barber & Deale 2014, 108.)

Segmentation is the first step in identifying who marketing should target. Once the segment of responsible travellers is understood, products and services can be optimised to appeal to them. To study sustainable customers a behavioural segmentation is to be performed: it divides markets by behaviours and decision-making patterns such as lifestyle, purchases and consumption. (Qualtrics 2020a.)

Targeted marketing strategies allow service providers to capture the peculiar need of the travellers which will also be financially beneficial for the company in the long run. A study by Berezan, Millar & Raab (2014, 4) points out that a sustainable accommodation's satisfied customers are more likely to return and to promote the accommodation through word-of-mouth.

For accommodation providers to position their sustainable products and to communicate their efforts to responsible travellers, segments according to the extent of the consumers' environmental concern need to be identified. (Barber 2014, 362) Among the customers who identify as environmentally conscious, there is a wide variety of influences on their consumer behaviour. Their level of involvement and values that they consider important differ, consequently their purchasing decisions will vary. Page (2019, 95) highlights that often travellers might know what they are looking for exactly or that the role of marketing is in providing the stimuli that lead customers to make choices such as sustainable products and services.

What needs to be identified is what are those environmentally practices that the guests are most satisfied with at the present, and what motivates them to take part in these, as well as looking into what is missing that guests would like to see. (Berezan et al. 2014, 2)

Whilst most tourists choose their accommodation based on price, location and service quality (Berezan et al. 2014, 5) Fennel & Cooper (2020,276) explain that responsible travellers actively look for accommodation options which have reduced impact on the environment (compared to the regular alternatives). They are also willing to pay extra to contribute to sustainability efforts. The latter is a concern many accommodation service owners have when shifting towards a more sustainable way of operation can be costly. (Berezan et al. 2014, 15.)

Examining tourist motivation in a complex issue, as we need to figure why people go on holidays in order to promote tourism products. Few studies have actually measured the specific values as a source of motivation that prompt travellers' to book sustainable accommodation. (Sirakaya-Turk, Baloglu & Mercado 2014, 115.)

When approaching responsible travellers, both value-based and expectancy-based marketing approaches are applicable. Page (2019, 84) finds the value-based approach suitable to reach travellers who place human values and consumption of certain experiences (i.e. environmentally friendly stays) highest on their motivation for travel. Expectancy-based marketing approach on the other hand targets travellers whose prime motivator for travel is the attractiveness of achieving an outcome (i.e. supporting local businesses and lowering environmental footprint by domestic travels).

To position sustainable accommodation options on the market, service providers need to examine the potential customers in different stages of the customer journey. First appropriate advertisement is needed to encourage them to make the reservation. It is important to engage with potential customers already before they book the accommodation. Social media sites, for example, and the interaction they facilitate offers a better insight in the purchasing behaviour and decision making of the customer. (Van Felius et al. 2016, 510.)

A responsible traveller may treat a regular accommodation as a loss (Barber 2014, 366.) hence guests should feel involved in sustainability efforts throughout the stay. Barber's article refers to a survey (2014, 380) to justify the above statement and also highlights the importance of demonstrating commitment and results of environmental activities at the property.

There are many ways to promote sustainable practises during the stay (Barber & Deale 2014, 108). For example:

- labels and signs
e.g. presenting energy saving results in the lobby or food waste amount at breakfast
- feedback about impact
e.g. a message in the room thanking guests for turning off the light when leaving the room
- engaging the local community
e.g. option to purchase some product or produce that is used at the facility

These activities add to overall guest satisfaction and especially for responsible travellers they might be influencing their willingness to rebook.

Sustainability marketing and targeted segmentation were topics of the in-depth interviews as well, and the answers and practices are analysed in chapter 5.1.

An eco-label can be used as a promotional tool to reach responsible travellers. As Taufique et al. (2017, 515) explain, travellers, especially those more sensitive to environmental issues, need to be aware of the eco-label and trust that based on what they learn about the certificate, the accommodation is going to be serviced according to their expectations. The challenge for tourism marketing is to incorporate the eco labels into the travellers' decision making.

It is important to mention that a traveller's general environmentally friendly attitude and their actual purchase decision might be in contrast. Oftentimes travellers consider themselves environmentally conscious, however, they pay much less attention to eco-friendly practices when on holiday. This is the so-called "attitude-behaviour gap". If accommodation providers would like customers to make more sustainable decisions, they need to take this behavioural phenomenon into consideration as well. Tools might include for example increasing education to tourists about environmentally destructive behaviour. (Fennell & Cooper 2020, 277)

Once more, it must not be forgotten that customers are not meant to be frightened or made feel guilty if they are not choosing the most sustainable out of the options available. The attitude-behaviour gap concept will be discussed again during the survey analysis (see chapter 5.2).

Guests leave the accommodation with memories of experiences. An important part of marketing is to measure satisfaction post-travel as well as future intentions to see how willing travellers are to book the same accommodation once more. Sustainability efforts

might have a (positive or negative) effect on re-bookings, which as well will be examined with the help of the survey research (chapter 5.2).

4 Methodology

This chapter is explaining the reasons why the used research methods were chosen, as well as presenting how the data collection methods were executed from the planning stage up until the data collection was concluded.

4.1 Research design

This thesis is research oriented. The target of the research was to observe customer's perception of eco-labels both from the customers' and the service providers' point of view, and eventually answer the fundamental research question: do sustainability certificates influence leisure travellers' accommodation choices?

Research design is the general plan that determines how the main research question and the investigative questions will be answered. (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2016, 163.)

The study method was explanatory research. By definition it is a research that: focuses on studying a problem in order to be able to explain the relationships between variables. An explanatory study is looking for new explanations and insights to a phenomenon. (Saunders et al. 2016, 716)

The methods chosen for conducting the primary data collection were: qualitative study (interviews) and quantitative study (survey). Multiple research methods are useful for observing the research topic from different angles. Questionnaires regarding customer attitudes are well complemented by interviews that explore and understand these attitudes. (Saunders et al. 2016, 439.)

The online questionnaire for travellers living in Finland was used to get a better picture of the customer point of view. Parallely in-depth interviews were concluded with managers of tourist accommodation provider establishments operating in Finland, to find a better understanding of the main research problem from the service providers' point of view.

The research design was already under construction when the covid-19 pandemic reached its peak in Finland. Plans and their execution had to be modified, as during the time period scheduled to complete the research, most accommodation and tourism businesses were forced to temporarily shut down their operations.

Had it not been the situation, the survey would have been distributed amongst guests of different hospitality establishments. Originally, they were meant to be distributed with the help of the managers who took part in the interviews. The concept was to attempt to

compare the management's views on their sustainability results with that of their guests. Unfortunately, some interviews never happened due to managers not responding to messages. Survey distribution needed to be amended as well, as it was no longer an option to distribute between guests. Hence, the approach for data collection had to be re-designed and the initial idea adjusted.

After re-evaluating the options for conducting the research, the decision was to go on with the interviews as planned and conduct a modified survey research and compare the two points of views with the key findings of the theoretical review of Chapters 2 and 3.

4.2 Validity and reliability

In a valid research the research methods used measure well the concepts the researcher is attempting to measure. (Lindstedt 2017.)

The research of this thesis has a decreased validity as the data collected is biased compared to the whole population, as it was non-probability convenience sampling. Respondents were selected based on their easy access, through the professional and private network of the researcher. They do not represent the whole population of Finland, though living in Finland was one of the pre-requisites of participation. The requirement was added to limit participation.

Convenience sampling comes with the possibility of skewedness of data, as it might be heavily weighted towards certain characteristics. The survey demographics prove this, as a large number of participants belong to the same age groups and domicile (see table 4). The interviews had most participants from one region as well.

To consider a research reliable it must apply data collection methods and analysis that produce consistent findings, meaning that the measures will produce the same results if used in other occasions or other researchers with the same methods will receive the same results. (Saunders & Lewis 2018, 135.)

In order to control the reliability of the study the questions had only a limited number of concepts that could have been misleading (e.g. eco-label definition, examples of sustainability actions), and the sample group was limited with pre-requisites. The research is considered reliable.

4.3 Data collection method: interviews

Five qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with managers from the Finnish accommodation service sector. Interviews give valid and reliable data that are

relevant to the research questions. Several types of research interviews exist, and for the purpose of this research semi-structured interviews were the best fit. The method gave enough freedom for the conversation to have a natural flow as well as the option to gain additional information by adding questions (or removing some in case pre-set questions became irrelevant during the interview). Semi-structured interview questions are usually set around themes and can be easily varied during the actual interview to foster the discussion. (Saunders et al. 2016, 391)

The original intention was to handle the interviews face-to-face or via video calls. Only three interviews were conducted via video call, as out of the five participants two specifically asked for the possibility of answering the questions via email, with the option of a phone call if something stays unclear from either side. As the covid-19 situation was highly influencing the willingness and availability of accommodation service managers to interview, the decision was to agree to the written interviews. The same interview questions were used as for the video calls (Appendix 1.), with minor modifications and explanations in order to make sure the question is fully understood as intended. Few emails needed to be exchanged, but both of the written interviews were deemed very useful for the sake of the research and was treated as equal with the video interviews during the analysis.

The below table summarises the conducted interviews time and length while listing the participants as well. It came as no surprise that the participants would come mostly from the Uusimaa region, as the professional network of the researcher is largely based in this area. The aim was to contact managers who represent different types of accommodation provider services.

Table 3. Conducted interviews

Position	Type of accommodation and location	Date and channel of the interview	Length of the interview
Hotel manager	luxury hotel Uusimaa	12.05.20 Zoom videocall	00:47:01
Front office manager	boutique hotel Uusimaa	28.05.20 Zoom videocall	00:23:09
Service manager	chain hotel Uusimaa	29.05.20 Whatsapp videocall	00:37:12
Front office manager	castle hotel Kanta-Häme	13.05.20 questions sent via email	not applicable
Hostel manager	hostel Uusimaa	27.05.20 questions sent via email	not applicable

All five of them were well aware of their respective organisation's sustainability work and had extended knowledge regarding the eco-label the accommodation uses. A selected list of questions was sent in advance to the interviewees in order to give them an opportunity to think them through and to be able form opinions and prepare for giving examples.

The interviews were aimed to discover concrete actions and opinions on sustainability in the hospitality industry from the managerial point of view, those who work closely with the accommodations' environmental efforts. Complete privacy was agreed with the participants, so their answers cannot be traced back to them. Therefore, only their position in the organisation, the type of accommodation they work for and the region they are located in are mentioned in the above table. They will be referred to as manager A, manager B, etc., and it will not be revealed which respondent is under which pseudonym.

4.4 Data collection method: survey research

The data from travellers was collected via an online questionnaire. When evaluating possible data collection methods, for the purposes of this explanatory research the survey method was chosen as best, as it gives the opportunity to examine and explain relationships between the different variables. (Saunders et al. 2016, 439)

The survey used for this thesis was designed with the Webropol 3.0 surveys and reporting tool. (Webropol 2020). The questionnaire was automatically optimised for different devices (smartphones, tablets, computer screens) which was a feature that made completing the survey convenient for responders. Webropol offers professional survey analysis tools built into the user interface, so statistical calculations could be performed as well as deeper analysis. As Webropol version for Haaga-Helia students did not support the data to be analysed with SPSS statistical software, the mentioned built-in analysis tools were utilised.

Non-probability, convenience sampling technique was used. The need was to obtain a sample with fairly easy access, which has the risk of having lower credibility and less control of who will be included in the sample. Convenience sampling is also referred to as availability sampling. It is used widely but has proven to be bias and due to this convenience sampling is often given low-credibility. (Saunders et al. 2016, 304.)

The choice for the sampling technique usually depends on the ability to gain access to population. Should the original plan have been realised, an exact sampling frame would have been formed and probability sampling techniques would have been chosen.

Originally the size of the population was to be determined based on the size of each lodging where interviews are conducted. But as the plans had to be adjusted and surveys were not possible to complete with actual guests, determining the population size for the survey turned out to be challenging. Finally, there was no population size set, but the aim was to receive at least 100 answers in order to draw conclusions.

The survey was distributed entirely online as a link via mailing lists. Additionally, the link was published on social media, namely on LinkedIn and Facebook. Answers were collected from 11 to 17 May 2020.

290 people opened the link and 200 of them have started to answer. Finally, 150 surveys were completed. The statistics are depicted below in figure 8.

	Total	
	(N)	%
Submitted responses: Public weblink	150	75
Survey opened by respondents	290	145
Started responding	200	100

Figure 8. Follow up statistics

140 people, almost half of those who opened the link did not start answering the questions, or they left the survey incomplete. As the criteria for inclusion was clearly stated on the introduction page before any questions, we can assume that they were outside the criteria. There is no way to be sure why the questionnaires were not started, so only assumptions can be made. The same applies for the 50 unfinished surveys, as the tool did not save them for further analysis. It would have been valuable to see at what stage did respondents stop answering, for example if there was a specific section or question which caused the highest number of withdraws.

The respondents had the option to complete the survey in English (43 responses) or Finnish (107 responses). Both the original English and the Finnish version are attached to this work in Appendix 2.

Over 85% (130 people) of the respondents completed the survey in less than 12 minutes. No incentives were provided in return for the response, therefore no email addresses or other contact information was asked from the respondents. This guaranteed anonymity to the respondents, as the responses cannot be traced back to individuals. The opening instructions of the survey included the criteria for inclusion as follows:

- The respondent lives in Finland (regardless of nationality)
- The respondent is at least 18 years old (legal adult age)
- The respondent stayed at least one night at any accommodation category during the last year, which was paid for by themselves (staying at friends and family or trips credited on business expenses do not count).

The respondents' nationality was not considered. As a pre-requisite they had to live in Finland and Finland is the country is where they start their travels from. They will all be considered Finnish travellers.

Apart from basic demographic questions, the survey gathered information regarding the investigative questions listed in chapter 1.1 to gain a deeper understanding on how consumers perceive accommodations' sustainability efforts and how the environmental aspects that influence their accommodation choices. Another goal was to find out if there are any connections between people's perceived environmental friendliness and their preferences during the stay.

5 Results summary

This chapter presents the results of the survey and the interviews. The survey analysis is divided into topics just as the survey itself can be divided into four parts: demographic information about the respondents, their travel habits and environmental friendliness, their knowledge on eco-labels and lastly preferences during the stay and willingness to rebook. The same way the interview analysis is divided into three sections.

5.1 Interview analysis

The interviews with hospitality industry professional proved to be very fruitful. The participants were very open and showed genuine interest in discussing about their sustainability work. They proved many of the pre-expectations but at the same time brought a diverse range of views and opinions on the matter.

The interview questions can be divided into three main categories, and the analysis will follow according to the themes: sustainability in the Finnish hospitality industry followed by eco-label practices and finally sustainability marketing. As mentioned in chapter 4.3 anonymity was promised to the participants and will be referred to as manager A, manager B, etc.

5.1.1 Sustainability in the hospitality industry

To start the discussion participants were asked to reflect on what in their opinion makes an accommodation sustainable. What they all highlighted were the ecological impacts of the hospitality business, and that water, energy and waste consumption have to be controlled in order to have sustainable operations.

Manager E added that they consider especially important out the avoidance of using unnecessary resources and conserving nature in their operations.

Manager C and manager D also mentioned that it was having an eco-label that pushes them to thrive towards even more sustainable operations, and work beyond the minimum requirements.

“Eco-labels give you specific goals to reach. Progressive eco-labels provide you continuous growth challenges and you can move from goal a to b and then further on to goal c. Continuous improvement is the only way towards sustainable operations.” (Manager C)

*“Sustainability should mean concrete actions, not just a poster on the wall.”
(Manager D)*

They all agreed that not only their own staff, but the partner companies should be aware of the sustainable efforts and should be equally involved in them. Three managers mentioned the role of laundry and cleaning services as examples, as these are typically outsourced.

When talking about their views on the current state of sustainable tourism in Finland, manager A and manager C agreed that sustainable and eco-centred tourism should be more emphasised both for domestic and international travellers. Environmental issues are often mentioned in a negative context and there is too much talk about negative effects instead of highlighting the positive results.

Manager E on the other hand experiences that sustainable development is a growth industry with a lot of visibility especially in the capital area and feels that tourism business providers are getting support in developing their own eco-friendly practices.

The interviewees agreed on the importance of purchasing local products and have mentioned it in some context during the interviews.

They were all asked to tell who they consider as trendsetters: any company, person or phenomenon that they think has the most effect on sustainable tourism development. All managers approached the question in a different way. Manager B and manager D thought that sharing economy and working close together in the business community are the drivers towards sustainable tourism at the moment.

*“For me, companies such as Bike Tours are the trendsetters. They are creating a great atmosphere about working together in the industry.”
(Manager B)*

“Sharing economy and companies in the sharing economy are now pop, and they are leading the trends in the tourism industry.” (Manager D)

Manager A mentioned education and the role of families, emphasizing the values and examples that we set for children as crucial for a sustainable future. At the same time manager C added that the city has a large role in setting the trends. The example was Helsinki, which was named European Capital of Smart Tourism last year, and the programme included sustainability. Manager C also pointed out, that sooner or later

companies are going to ask for accommodation providers to include their sustainability certification when preparing long-term cooperation contracts.

“In Sweden, for example there are many companies that demand sustainability information before signing contracts. Finnish companies have not really started to ask for such data. Yet.” (Manager C)

Interestingly enough manager E mentioned the role of businesses who are asking for eco-certifications in order to partner up (the interviews were completed separately, and the interviews were not aware who other participants are).

“Our staff are trendsetters as well. They encourage and educate others to follow suit with sustainable efforts” (Manager E)

There are many properties that were converted to be lodging facilities from old buildings. During the building or renovation period sustainable measures should be considered and the building itself can be energy efficient from the get-go. There are quite a few hotel openings coming up in the next couple of years, and this approach should be a trend as well. Manager B took part in a full building renovation where they had the option to set up energy, heating and water systems in such a way that the building itself is eco-certified (not only the accommodation operation).

5.1.2 Eco-label specifications

Out of the five managers who participated in the interviews, one works at an accommodation service provider that does not have an eco-label, albeit they are considering obtaining one. However, they are applying sustainable measures, such as geo-heating system as well as highly controlled waste management amongst others.

“Sustainability is already part of our strategy, even if we don’t have an eco-label. Until now we didn’t think it was really necessary, but it would be an advantage for the future. It is now only a matter of will. If we had an eco-label, I’d suggest we had a Finnish one.” (Manager A)

All other four properties are eco-labelled. Part of the confidentiality agreement with the interviewees was that the name of the eco-label they use will not be mentioned, and for the sake of this research it was not necessary to know either. What can be revealed is that all certificates are international ones.

Three of the managers disclosed, that the decision of the eco-label they applied for happened on a chain level, and the individual property managers had no say in the

decision. However, properties are individually responsible for handling the documentation, measurements and all other work related to the audit and the eco-label. These three managers are all responsible for handling the work regarding the co-label.

“I wouldn’t mind sharing the responsibility with some colleague who is interested in eco-issues, but for now I am alone”. (Manager C)

“I am handling the eco-label work alone. The property is rather small, and there is no need for a team as such. I actually used our trainees’ help to do the mandatory measurements for this year’s audit” (Manager D)

Managers C and D work at properties which have undergone an eco-label change. Manager D could not share much about the differences as it the change happened before their employment started.

Manager C participated in the eco-label change process. The change happened when the property joined a chain, therefore the label had to be synchronised to be the same as in all other properties. The change was rather easy as they did a very thorough work with the previous one, so only adjustments needed to be made. Overall, they have been happy with the new label as it gives them more support with material to use in their own communications as well as better international visibility.

Manager E mentioned that besides their current eco-label - an international one - they are about to receive the Finnish STF certificate. Their property has been in operation for almost three decades, however they did not see a need for obtaining an official eco-certification until a couple of years ago. At that time, they obtained one which is tailored to the accommodation category they fall into.

“We have been trying to work in a sustainable way since the beginning of the 00s, but only obtained our first eco-label in 2018 and soon we will be among the first ones to receive the STF eco-label. We did not apply for any official certification earlier partially because most certifications come with costs and some eco-label reports we felt like were just greenwashing.” (Manager E)

Chapter 2.3 listed how eco-labels differ from each other and with the help of interviews the aim was to find out how Finnish accommodation providers chose the eco-labels they use. Based on the answers gained from the interview, this question cannot be answered. Three managers belong to chains (the decision is coming from a higher level) and one manager is working at a property without an eco-label, and at the moment they are only considering obtaining one (they do not belong to a chain, so the decision will come from

within the management, but it is unsure at the moment what they will base their choice on), and one property had limited choices because of the accommodation category they fall to.

The obligation of displaying the logo is challenging the properties. Manager B mentioned, that as the logo must be displayed and the physical display options (poster, board, panel etc.) are limited, it caused them some trouble to place it near the reception. Manager C mentioned the same, even though they did not have any trouble with finding a place for the eco-label in their glass cabinet that stores their awards.

“The logo is not that esthetical with its colours, so it gives some extra challenges when you want to display it”. (Manager C)

“We display the label both on our webpage, near the reception, and in the rooms as well as on our info screens. However, if customers don’t recognise the logo itself, the advertisement of an unfamiliar logo does little to improve sustainability awareness.” (Manager E)

Eco-label briefing is integrated into the new hire training on different levels. Manager B mentioned, that they do not go into the specifics very thoroughly and systematically, as there seem to be “so many other things to discuss”. Manager E indicated the same, eco-label is introduced to new staff members, but without any real structure.

Staff involvement in sustainability work varies at each property. All managers remarked that different sustainability topics, as well as issues specific to eco-label criteria are regularly discussed on team meetings (departmental and all-staff meetings as well).

“Waste handling is a constant issue, even though staff is aware of the problem and it is a constant topic on meetings. (Manager B)

“Maybe more involvement would result in more environmentally friendly ideas for the property. Some staff members are very interested in eco-issues, some are not.” (Manager C)

“The same way we inform our guests, we inform our staff as well about sustainable achievements.” (Manager E)

One of the investigative questions for this research is looking into the benefits of acquiring an eco-label, hence this exact question was asked from all interviewees. One common perspective they all highlighted is eco-labels work as a guide and a reminder for the everyday operations and that they raise awareness to sustainability both for the industry

workers as well as guests. It serves as a reminder, and something to consider when making long- and short-term operational decisions.

“If we wouldn’t have an eco-label maybe we wouldn’t think about sustainability that much. We might not always reach our targets exactly as planned, but the eco-label gives us a good direction.” (Manager B)

“An eco-label is a concrete message to guests and partners which says that at this company we are doing something for a better future.” (Manager C)

“Eco-labels allow you to have peer support from properties that obtained the same eco-label. Some financial investments were also easier to get through the final decision makers when the reason for them was eco-label criteria.” (Manager E)

5.1.3 Sustainability marketing work

The most important learning from the answers regarding targeted sustainability marketing is that for these lodgings it is at the moment not in their business interest to measure nor it is to specifically advertise to guests who identify as responsible travellers.

The answers to the question whether they segment their customers based on how environmentally conscious they are or not were mostly no, but there was always a “but”.

Most interviewees said that they don’t have distinct marketing for responsible travellers, but there are initiatives and in some case campaigns that responsible travellers will be more interested in.

“We sometimes mention the eco-label in our marketing messages.” (Manager C)

Managers B and C both emphasized that they do not market the property as especially environmentally friendly or eco-conscious. Manager B explained that they segment mostly based on the purpose of travel (business or leisure) and booking codes (special agreements and booking channels) and the sustainability efforts as marketing tool are not necessarily in line with the property’s vision for guest experience. manager C thinks that all messaging (e.g. newsletters, campaigns) should contain the same information, “*there should not be eco-message and non-eco message*”.

Even though manager D said that there is no segmentation, and larger marketing decisions are all made on a higher, chain level, they, as a property make sustainability work and the eco-label part of their communication and marketing.

“We have centralised material for marketing through the chain, but we made a separate plan for each month on what sustainability aspect we highlight on our Instagram. We also take part in events such as Earth Hour every year and support other causes. We advertise these efforts, along with the superb sustainability work of our restaurant, through social media” (Manager D)

Neither of the participant managers thought that having an eco-label had a significant influence on the number of their bookings, or if there was some, it has never been measured. The answer did not come as a surprise from the researcher’s point of view, as neither of these lodgings has segmented responsible travellers separately or had marketing campaigns for green customers. Manager E added that based on customer feedback, they are considered somewhat more professional from those competitors in the same accommodation category that do not have eco-labels. However, this does not show in the amount of reservations.

The interviewees were also asked to list some sustainability efforts that have been very well received by their customers and what they are most involved in. Based on the answers customers are complimenting on efforts such as geo-heating system (manager A), the use of tap water instead of bottled (managers A and B), rental bike / scooter for rent and tips on what to visit nearby (managers B and D).

The sustainability efforts the managers are most proud of are mostly related to criteria of the eco-labels in the fields of water usage, energy, cleaning practices and waste sorting. Managers B and D both mentioned the role of the restaurant located at the property, as those lodgings that have a restaurant have to also fulfil eco-label requirements regarding its operations.

“We use as much of local and organic products as possible. We also prepare everything possible ourselves.” (Manager B)

“The breakfast has plenty fresh produce and vegetarian options. We always have a vegetarian option for lunch and our last a la carte menu featured only one dish with red meat.” (Manager D)

Manager C gave an example on customer involvement and attention to sustainability, by mentioning that they have received a lot of feedback on still using mini-amenities in the bathrooms, instead of refillable larger bottles.

“We use the mini, 5ml bottles in the bathrooms, and even though the bottles are made of recyclable material, we received a lot of negative feedback on them, especially since the media picked up on this issue as well. We are now in the process of changing them to big bottles”. (Manager C)

In the meanwhile, what manager E thinks is that customers tend to point out the negative issues more often, but general feedback is very good about sustainable efforts. They have put information about their aims in every room which provides a good start for conversation with guests.

“We use 100% wind power at the property and donate yearly to the fund for protection of the Baltic sea as well as the to the protection of Finnish evergreen forests.” (Manager E)

There are, however, some aspects of the eco-label criteria which do not come down as customer-friendly. Both managers B and D have mentioned negative customer feedback about regulated shower pressure, with manager B adding regulated maximum room temperatures to the list. Customers do not appreciate that these comfort items are regulated and set according to the eco-label standards.

The above is a good example for the attitude-behaviour gap concept discussed in chapter 3.2. These are the areas where customers need to be carefully educated about environmental friendliness and sustainable travel practices without shaming or causing bad feelings.

5.2 Survey analysis

Through the questions the survey aimed at linking existing environmentally friendly customer behaviour to value orientation and accommodation booking decisions of Finnish travellers. Its purpose was to analyse sustainable choices of guest.

The survey was divided into four main parts. The first was a demographic part, the second was regarding travel habits. The third part was regarding their general awareness of eco-labels and factors that matter to them at the time of booking. Finally, the fourth part was regarding the stay at the accommodation and questions regarding rebooking. All of the

questions were mandatory to answer, and only few of them had options to add open answers.

5.2.1 Background of the respondents

Demographic questions did not only serve as a warm-up for the respondent but also gathered information about their gender, age and the part of Finland they currently live at. These questions were asked in order for further analysis of relations between their views on sustainability and demographic background.

Table 4 demonstrates the age groups and figure 9 demonstrates the division between age groups and gender.

Table 4. Age groups of respondents (N=150)

	N	%
18-24	3	2.0
25-34	44	29.3
35-44	74	49.3
45-54	23	15.3
55-64	1	0.7
65 or older	5	3.3
Total	150	100.0

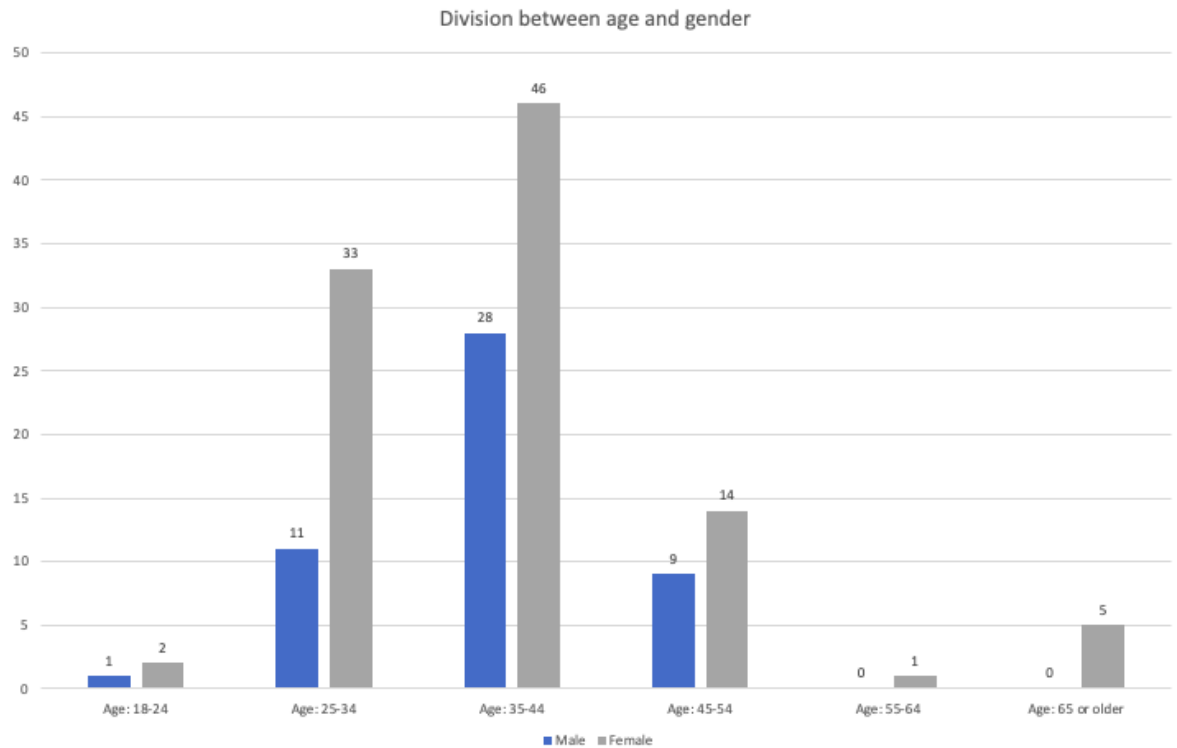


Figure 9. Division between age and gender of respondents (N=150)

More than half of the respondents are between the age 25-44, and almost 1/3 of all respondents are women aged 35-44, whilst some age groups are not represented at all (men in age groups 55-64 and above 65), and some only with 1 or 2 representatives (18-24 age groups and 55-64 women).

Large majority of respondents currently reside in the Uusimaa region (117 out of 150). The second largest representation was from Pirkanmaa and Päijät-Häme regions with 8-8 participants each. The survey was expected to be skewed in this sense, and is not representative of Finland, but this question was added to see if domicile has any significance on sustainable travel habits.

75% of the respondents (113 people, N=150) hold a bachelor or master's degree. All of the respondents were at least high school / vocational high school educated. Education level had a high confidence interval (3.18 - 3.45 range).

Out of the demographic data collected, highest level of education was not observed further, and domicile was only used for the analysis on one occasion. Gender and age received priority in the analysis.

5.2.2 Environmental friendliness and travel habits

Next, respondents were asked to reflect on whether they consider themselves environmentally conscious or not. Figure 10 shows the answers of the question in relation to gender and age.

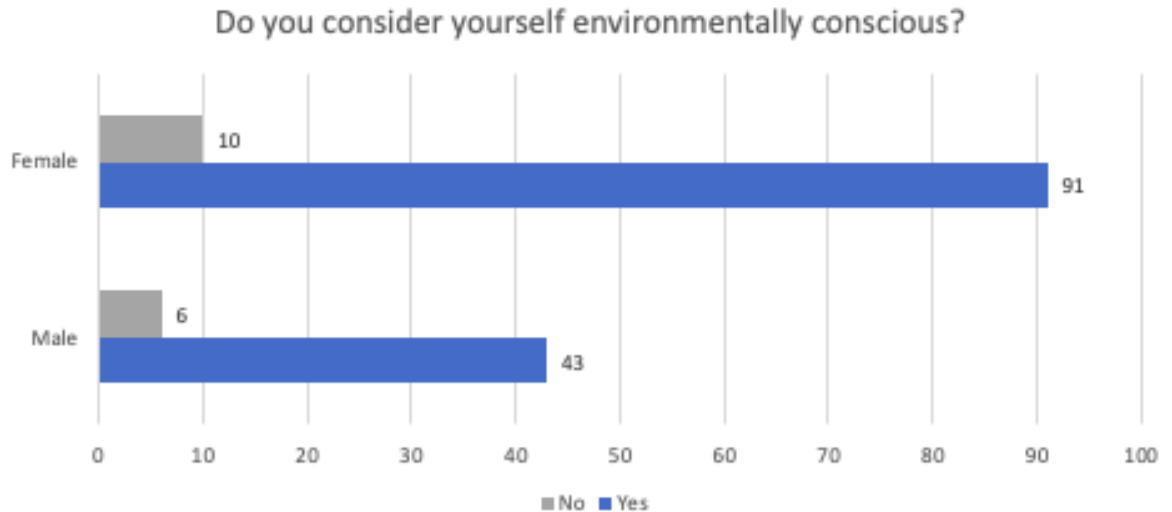


Figure 10. Environmental consciousness in relation to gender (N=150)

Majority of the respondents consider themselves environmentally conscious, as 134 of them (89.3%) responded yes. In chapter 3.1 it was already discussed that women tend to be more sensitive to sustainability-related matters as well, which is confirmed with this question as well, as 90% of women respondents answered agreeing to the question.

When considering the age of the respondents as well, we can conclude that the highest rate of environmental consciousness is in the age group 35-44, where over 91% of respondents of this group consider themselves environmentally conscious. The ratio is slightly above the overall agreeing response rate of 89.3%.

On the other hand, out of the 117 respondents from the region of Uusimaa 106 consider themselves environmentally conscious, (79,1%) which is under the overall environmentally consciousness rate. The survey continued with the same questions regardless the answer.

With the help of Q6 sustainable habits were outlined. The aim of this question was to discover what every day eco-friendly acts do respondents practice, so that later on we could compare if the same attributes matter to them when at the time of booking and during the stay. A three-point Likert-scale was used, and the answer options were always, sometimes and never (where 1=always, 3=always).

When interpreting the results of this particular question, it must be mentioned that due to the researcher's survey design error, the higher value means less environmentally conscious behaviour, as the "Never" option was given a numerical value of 3. In retrospect this particular question should have been a four-point Likert-scale as well, with the least eco-friendly behaviour marked with the lowest value. The design error was realised only when the analysis of the results started, and the decision was to go on with the project and not repeat the survey. The issue was not revealed at the testing phase of the survey.

Average, median and standard deviation were counted in order to understand travellers' sustainable habits and the results are seen in table 5.

Table 5. Sustainable habits of travellers (1=always, 3=never) (N=150)

Do you:	Average	Median	Standard deviation
use water consciously	1.73	2.00	0.58
use energy-saving lightbulbs	1.38	1.00	0.51
separate rubbish for recycling	1.28	1.00	0.48
re-use items (i.e. fix instead of buying new)	1.63	2.00	0.48
take part in charity activities (e.g. donation, participation)	2.02	2.00	0.51
read about environmental issues	1.77	2.00	0.50
buy organic food	2.01	2.00	0.44
buy from local producers	1.93	2.00	0.34
use public transport / bicycle instead of car	1.65	2.00	0.56
minimise paper use	1.73	2.00	0.63
use eco-friendly cleaning products	1.98	2.00	0.54
avoid wasting food	1.30	1.00	0.50

N=150

When looking at the average and median points rubbish recycling, avoidance of food waste and energy saving are the most common practices between respondents. They do not tend to participate in charity activities, neither do they buy organic or local products.

Environmental consciousness was set as the target question and the correlation coefficient (R) and the P-value were calculated. Based on the below chart, the relationship between the attributes and environmental consciousness is not strong and are statistically irrelevant (P values stay under 0.5).

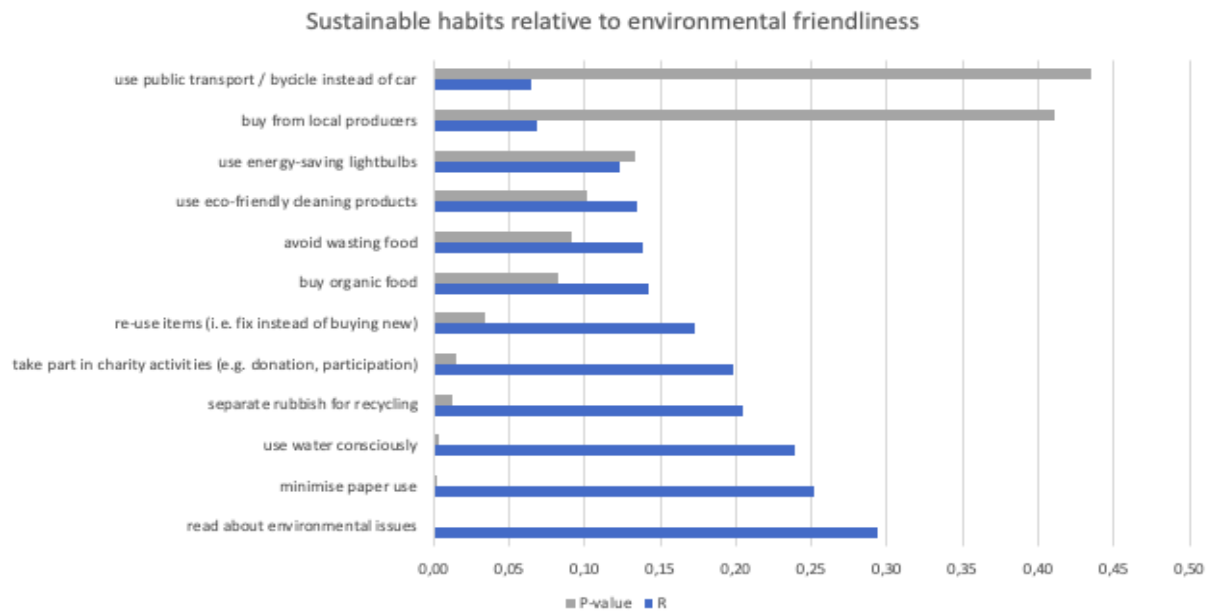


Figure 11. Sustainable habits relative to environmental friendliness

After getting and insight into travellers’ overall environmental consciousness three questions were asked regarding their travel habits. The first question was about the booking channel they use: whether they book directly or through a third-party booking page (e.g. an online travel agency). The reason this question was featured is, that in general third-party pages do not feature detailed information about eco-labels or sustainability efforts. To their own websites, accommodation service providers can add eco-label logos, articles, and any range of information regarding their environmental activities. In the meanwhile, online travel agencies use standardised forms for hotel information, as that helps customers to easily compare facilities of different lodgings. As see below in table 6. almost 60% of the respondents use third party booking pages, thus sustainability efforts are challenging to communicate to them in advance.

Table 6. Booking channels (N=150)

	N	%
Directly	61	40.7
Through third-party	89	59.3
Total	150	100.0

Secondly, to map out travel habits the respondents were asked what accommodation they choose most of the time, and the data was compared with the booking channels they use most frequently. This question has a respondent number of 148. Two responses were disregarded, as the “Other” option was answered by “staying with friends and family” –

even though respondents were reminded to consider only accommodation services that they pay for and not count stays with friends and family. The other two “Other” answers were valid, the responses were: rental cottage and travels with own RV and staying in facilities that cater for such vehicles. Figure 12 presents the results in detail.

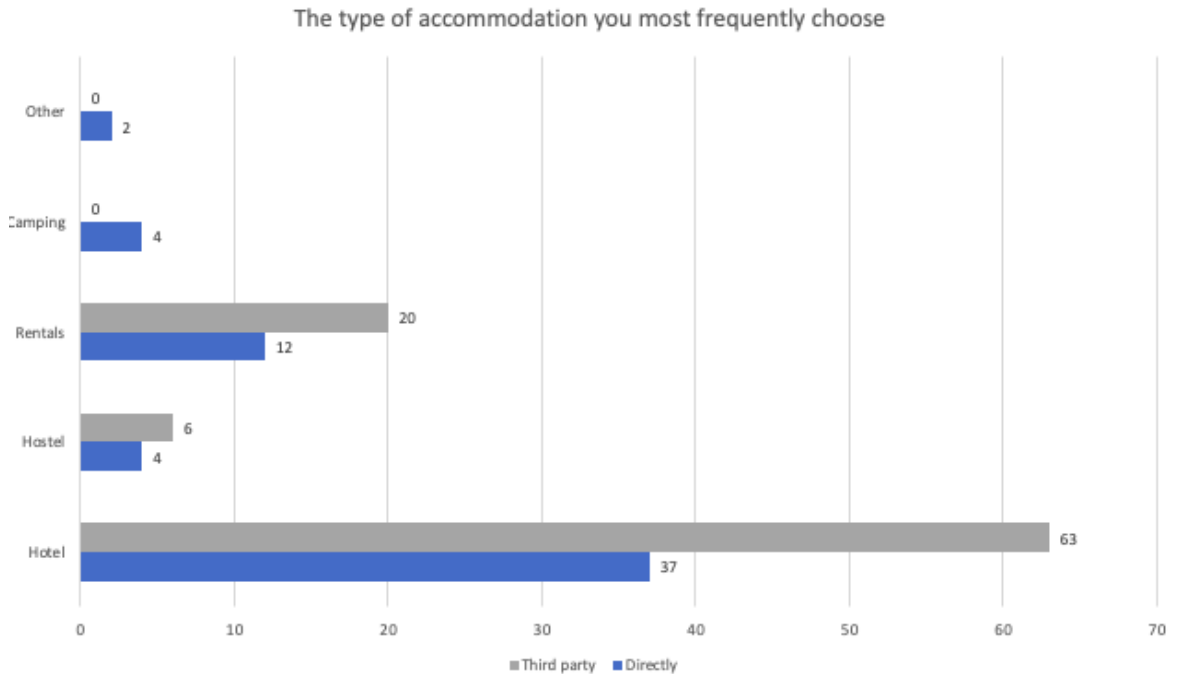


Figure 12. The type of accommodation most frequently chosen in relation to booking channels (N=148)

An interesting case is that of rental apartment stays where direct booking and third-party booking might be hard to separate. AirBnB, InterHome, etc. are third parties in the sense that they charge commission from accommodation providers and all accommodations featured are listed in accordance with the standardised looks of the page. However, most of the time the listed rental properties are not possible to book any other way, thus these pages provide the only surface and work almost as the “own” webpage for these apartments. If the accommodation provider has any communication regarding sustainability they are going to share it through the listings.

Based on the responses to the third question in the topic of travel habits, we can conclude that the survey responders are frequent travellers, as seen below.

Table 7. Average nights of leisure travel per year

	N	%
1-5 nights	28	18.7
6-14 nights	62	41.3
15 nights or more	60	40.0
Total	150	100.0

When answering the question, travellers were asked to disregard business travels and count only leisure trips. Over 80% of them spend at least 6 nights away from home per year. 60 Respondents travel over 2 weeks (at least 15 nights) away from home.

The data was compared to the answer regarding environmental consciousness. 89% of those who travel less (under 5 nights a year) consider themselves environmentally conscious, and the percentage is even higher, 91% within the group of respondents who travel over 2 weeks a year. Out of the group of respondents who travel 6-14 nights a year, 87% consider themselves environmentally conscious.

5.2.3 Eco-labels and bookings

The survey was looking for an answer to the main research question, the importance of eco-labels for customers. The exact research question and the investigative questions of the thesis were not introduced to the respondents (see Appendix 2 for the cover letter of the survey) to avoid influencing too much the answers. However, there were questions which contained the information needed in answering the main research question of this thesis and are important in order to understand travellers.

Q14 was asking whether they know what an eco-label is, Q13 asked if they have ever pro-actively searched for information regarding an accommodation's sustainable activities and finally Q16 included a remark how important it is for them for the accommodation to have an eco-label.

First, we examine, whether travellers know what an eco-label is. 120 respondents (N=150) answered yes, and only 30 of them (20%) said that they do not know what an eco-label is. There were 26 people who considered themselves environmentally conscious but did not know what an eco-label is, and the trend is the same in the age group 35-44. 92% of them answered originally that they are conscious about sustainability but 13 of them have no knowledge about eco labels.

Figure 13 presents the responses in relation to age and groups and figure 14 presents the cross-tabulation result of Q5 (do you consider yourself environmentally conscious) and of Q14 (do you know what an eco-label is).

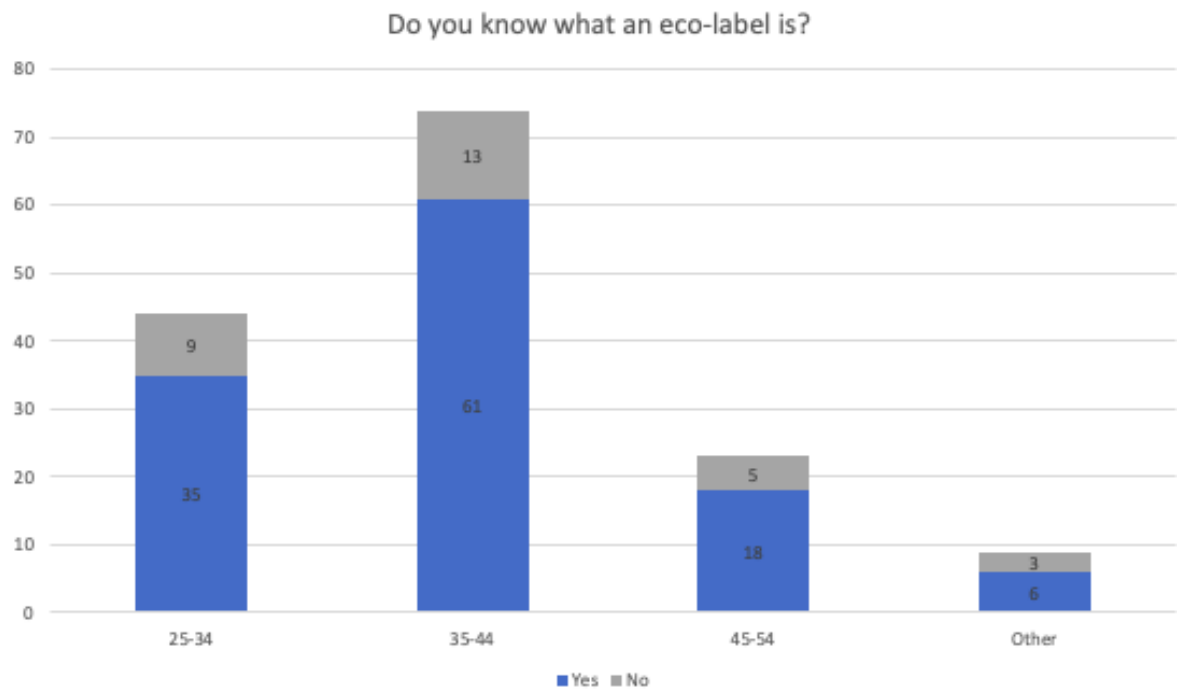


Figure 13. Do you know what an eco-label is? (N=150)

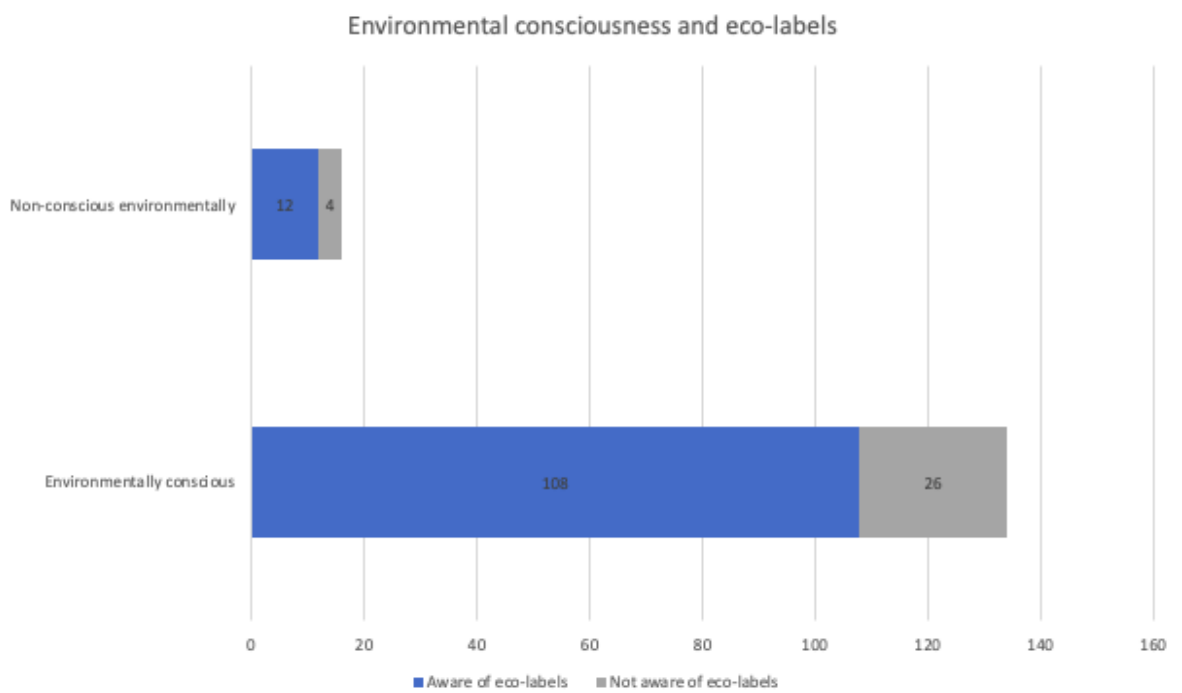


Figure 14. Environmental consciousness and eco-labels (N=150)

Respondents were also asked if they can mention any eco-labels by name. The question was not mandatory, and they were not asked to mention labels in connection with travel.

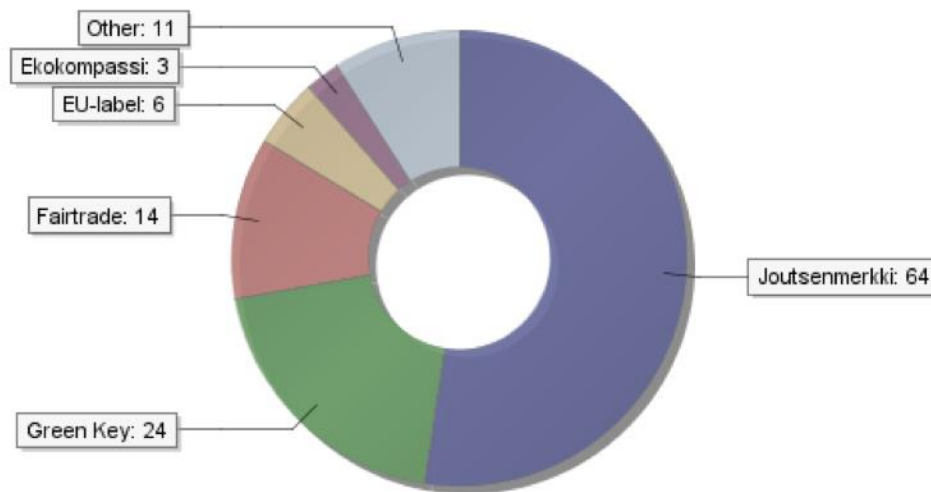


Figure 15. Environmental consciousness and eco-labels

As seen above in figure 15, respondents themselves associated the question with the hospitality industry, as the questions earlier were all regarding travel habits. The Nordic Swan label (called Joutsenmerkki in Finnish) was mentioned 64 times, followed by Green Key 24 times. The Fairtrade label was mentioned over ten times, and any other labels were mentioned less frequently. As the Nordic Swan certification is the most widely used sustainability certification in Finland, with presence in over 60 different groups of service and product categories (Joutsenmerkki 2020), the above result is not surprising. We can conclude that Finnish travellers are aware of eco-labels listed in Table 2 (chapter 2.3).

Right after this question, the next page gave a short definition for eco-labels for clarification (ISO 2000). The survey continued with the same question regardless respondents' knowledge on eco-labels.

Out of the 150 respondents only 41 can confirm that they have actively researched information regarding an accommodation's sustainability efforts, while 87 of them (58%) have never looked for such information. The rest, 22 respondents, were not able to give an exact answer.

Q16 was a four-point Likert-scale without a middle point investigating how important respondents find different aspects of sustainability at lodging services at the time of

booking. The lowest score (1) was given to the least important, and the highest score (4) was given to the most important aspect when choosing accommodation.

This question was asked, because the listed attributes relate to most common criteria of eco-labels for accommodation providers. So even though some customers don't know what an eco-label is or do not consider themselves environmentally friendly, they might still have an interest in sustainability efforts. The question examines how they reflect on these environmental initiatives at the booking stage of their stay. Some of the listed attributes are part of eco-label criteria, some are related to sustainability efforts in general.

When the answers were analysed, the average and median were calculated. All the options received at least a 2 median, which was expected, as we have already established that the majority of survey respondents are environmentally conscious. Table 8 lists the averages, medians and standard deviations of the data.

Table 8. When you choose accommodation how important are the following to you? (N=150)

	N=150	Average	Median	Standard deviation
they involve the local community		2.60	3.00	0.92
they have information on their environmental activities online		2.31	2.00	0.83
they use organic ingredients in the restaurant		2.31	2.00	0.84
they buy from local producers		2.73	3.00	0.93
there is an option for paperless check in and check out		2.61	3.00	1.05
they have an eco-label		2.29	2.00	0.83
the hotel has clear strategies regarding their sustainable goals		2.43	2.00	0.87
partnerships with local non-governmental organisations		2.17	2.00	0.87

The importance of an eco-label was asked. Having an eco-label scored an average of 2.29 and the median is 2, which shows that it is not too important for travellers to book lodging with eco-certification.

Two of the highest average points were related to the social pillar of sustainable tourism: involvement in the local community and buying from local producers; while one was related to paperless check in and check out options. We must mention once more, that at the time of the research the covid-19 pandemic was at its peak, and contactless services were getting introduced in several fields of business, creating a new standard expectation in the general public. The relatively high standard deviation regarding paperless check in

and check out shows that customers are probably not very used to having this option at accommodation services (a larger number for standard deviation tells that respondents disagreed on the topic). Partnerships with local and non-governmental organisations are the least important for travellers

The answers were also observed considering respondents' environmental consciousness, by counting the correlation coefficient (R) and the P-values.

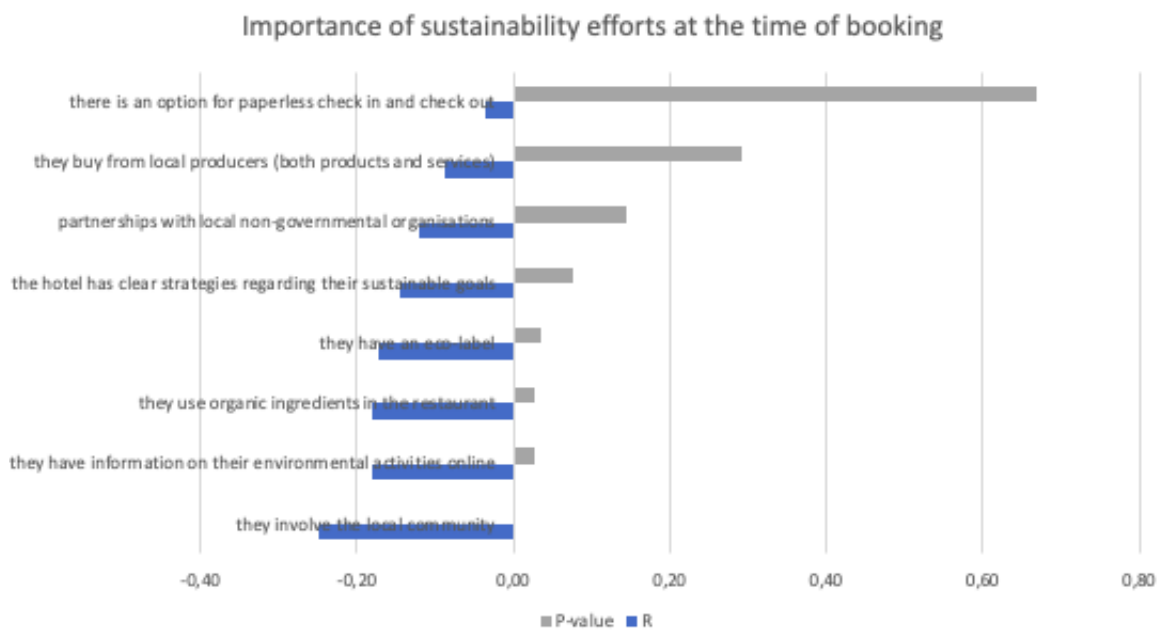


Figure 16. Importance of sustainability efforts at the time of booking (N=150)

Environmentally conscious travellers expect their future accommodation to have a strong involvement in the local community. Availability of organic food at the restaurant are important for them. They will most likely search information about sustainable activities of the lodging online.

The question regarding the importance of having an eco-label, resulted in the majority of the respondents (41.3%) scoring the question a score 2 (rather not important). Figure 17 below shows in detail how the question was scored divided by environmentally conscious and non-environmentally conscious respondents.

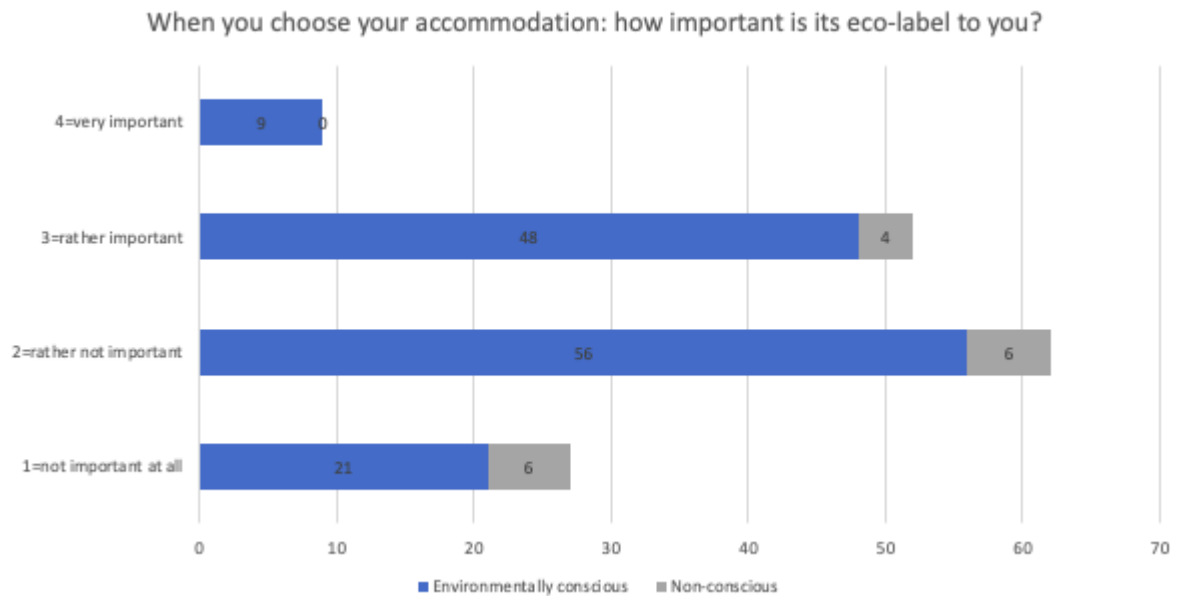


Figure 17. The importance of eco-label at the time of booking (N=150)

5.2.4 During and after the stay

In order to find out how travellers perceive sustainability efforts during their stay, a four-point Likert-scale question was mapping out traveller's views on aspects of the stay (1=not important at all, 4=very important). There are certain attributes that are only applicable on sport and travellers are not aware of their existence at the time of booking (e.g. room cleaning frequency, room amenities).

Averages and median were counted for the analysis as well as the standard deviation which are shown in table 9. All questions reached a median 3, which shows that respondents tend to find sustainability efforts important.

Table 9. During your stay how important are the following attributes to you? (N=150)

	N=150	Average	Median	Standard deviation
there is an option to separate rubbish for recycling in the room		2.93	3.00	0.86
there are energy-saving light bulbs or motion sensor lights		2.55	3.00	0.93
water pressure is regulated to standards		2.36	2.00	0.97
the heating system is energy efficient		2.57	3.00	0.91
there is an option for on-demand cleaning		3.07	3.00	0.93
shading systems are efficient		2.65	3.00	1.06
bathroom amenities are in refillable bottles		2.64	3.00	0.98
minimum amount of disposable amenities in the room		3.01	3.00	0.97
they provide information on transport options to reduce your carbon footprint		2.92	3.00	0.90
they provide information on local products to take home as souvenirs		2.63	3.00	0.94
they provide you with ideas on what to visit nearby without a car		3.15	3.00	0.94
there are visible signs of sustainable measures around		2.83	3.00	0.94
they emphasise the use of local products		2.86	3.00	0.89

When looking at the average of the answers, we can conclude that some aspects are not important for travellers during their stay. Regulated water pressure got a low scoring, which correlates with the interviews conducted with managers as complaints regarding low water pressure has been a returning issue at these lodgings. The highest average points, thus considered very important, were getting advice on what to visit nearby and the option for on-demand cleaning. The former was mentioned by managers as well, as one of the most well-received sustainability efforts by customers.

Correlation coefficient (R) and P-value were calculated and the relationship between attributes and self-proclaimed environmental consciousness observed.

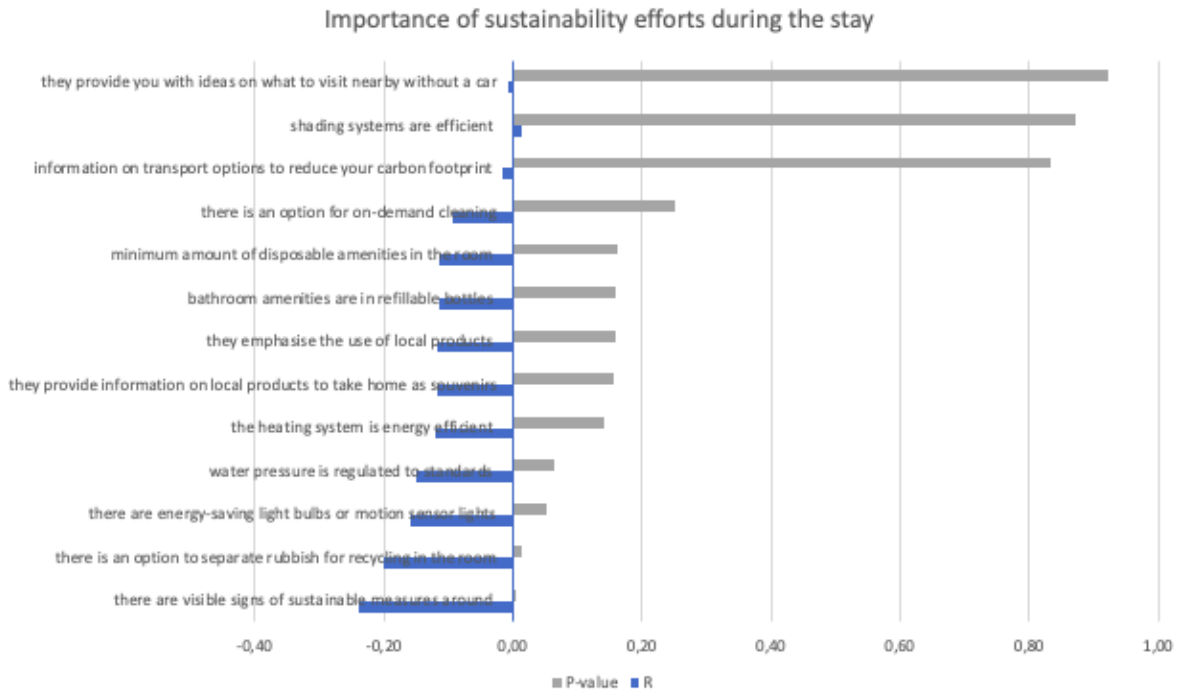


Figure 18. Importance of sustainability efforts during the stay (N=150)

Environmentally conscious travellers find visible measures of sustainable efforts (such as food waste count at breakfast), waste recycling and energy saving efforts the most important throughout their stay. The same environmentally friendly attributes were on the top of the list when respondents were asked about their everyday sustainable habits (Q6). This answer does not correlate with the attitude-behaviour gap concept (see chapter 3.2) which suggests that most travellers neglect sustainable habits during their stay. It rather shows the tendency that Finnish travellers find the same environmental issues important during travels as they do at home.

The final part of the survey was attempting to see if an accommodation's sustainability efforts will prompt customers to rebook. Respondents were asked in Q10 to rank what prompts them to book accommodations while Q18 asked them what are the factors that has an impact on their willingness to rebook. The pre-booking aspect of Reputation was exchanged with Staff for the rebooking attributes.

Table 10. Ranking of attributes (N=150)

What matters to you most when you make a reservation?	Rank	What prompts you to rebook?
Price	1	Location
Location	2	Staff
Brand	3	Price
Reputation	4	Environmental impact
Additional services	5	Additional services
Environmental impact	6	Brand

The above ranking shows that before the stay the price of the accommodation matters the most to travellers, followed by the location and the brand. The environmental matters are ranked last. However, when answering the question what prompts them to rebook, most respondents put location to the first spot, followed by staff and price level. Sustainability matters more, as it is not anymore on the last place. The question about the rebooking was one of the last questions and as a consequence the result might be biased. The survey was highlighting sustainability efforts and was researching preferences and views, and we must consider that respondents were influenced by the survey content while deciding on their answer.

The respondents were also asked to reflect whether they would be willing to pay extra to contribute to the sustainable efforts of the accommodation they are booking. 88 respondents (59%, N=150) have answered affirmatively. More than half of them, 53% would be willing to pay 5-10% extra relative to the price of the room. Only 7 respondents would be ready to pay over 10% extra. Interestingly, there were 6 respondents who would be willing to pay an additional amount, even though at the beginning of the survey they did not consider themselves environmentally conscious.

The very last question of the survey was a net-promoter score question (NPS). The NPS calculation is a management tool that measures customer experience and assists with business growth predictions. The tool is especially useful when a company would like to find out how likely their customers are to recommend them. Promoters respond with a score of 9 or 10 and are the most loyal customers. Passives respond with 7 or 8. They are generally satisfied but are not happy enough to be considered promoters. Scores under 6 are by unhappy customers who are not likely to buy the service again, neither they are likely to recommend the service further. NPS question, as a single customer feedback question is very widely used by accommodation providers. (Qualtrics 2020b.)

The NPS question of the survey was measuring how likely respondents are to choose an accommodation that promotes sustainability for their next trip.

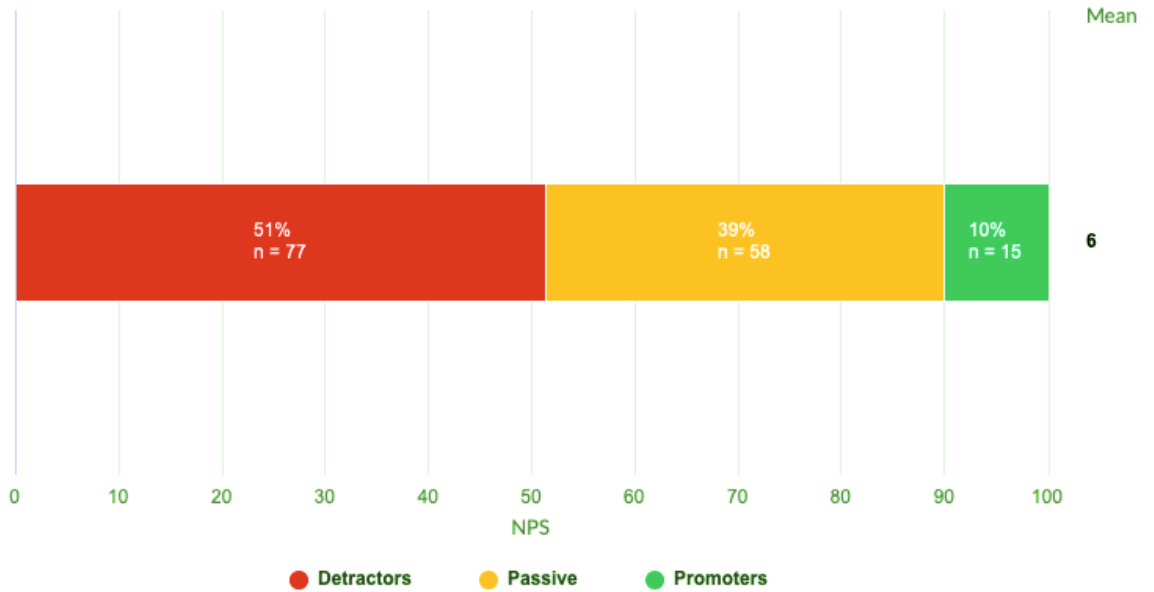


Figure 19. NPS results

The mean of the questions, therefore the result of the NPS question is 6, which falls to the detractors category. Over half of the respondents, 77 people (N=150) have said that they are not going to choose an openly environmentally responsible accommodation for their next stay, and only 15 respondents (N=150) are likely to be promoters.

To interpret the result the scores were analysed in terms of environmental consciousness.

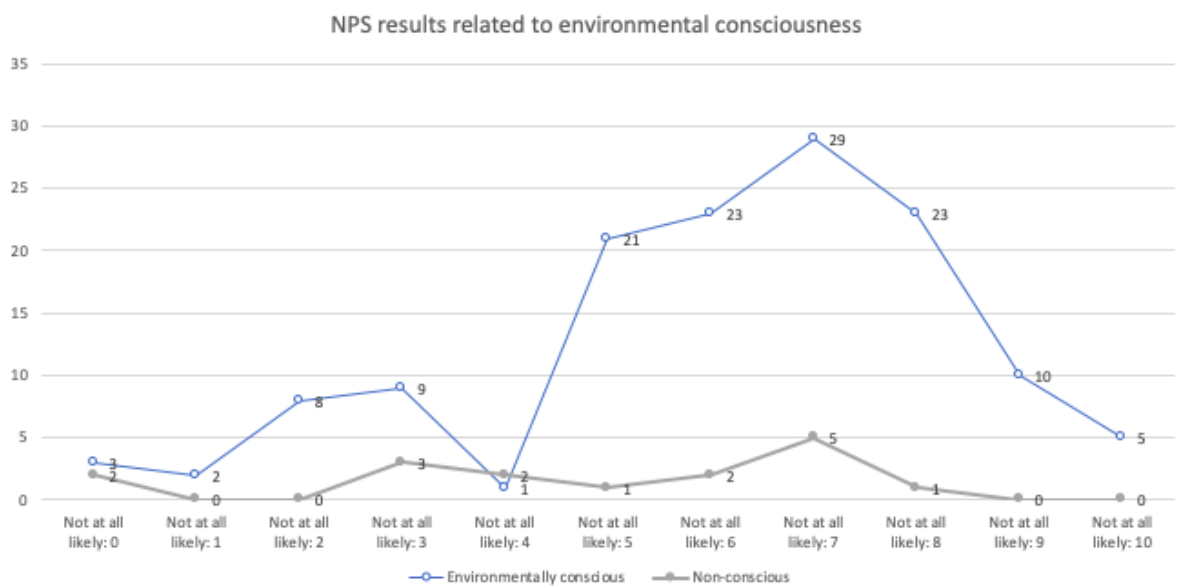


Figure 20. NPS results related to environmental consciousness

Figure 20 shows that exactly half of the environmentally conscious respondents have given an NPS score under 6. This once more enhances the attitude-behaviour gap theory from chapter 3.2: consumers, who are environmentally conscious in general, end to mind less eco-friendliness when making travel decisions.

A positive result of the NPS question is that 6 respondents, who do not consider themselves environmentally conscious would possibly consider booking a sustainability-focused accommodation for their next stay as their NPS score was 7 or 8.

6 Discussion

Taking environmental factors into account and running sustainably conscious operations are more and more important in the tourism industry. It is especially true to accommodation services, where eco-friendly initiatives are under constant development. Long before the UNWTO set concrete goals for sustainable development, lodging operations have recognised the need to thrive towards eco-friendlier practices.

A large number of tourists consider themselves environmentally conscious in their everyday life, but they might not practice the same level of environmental friendliness when they travel. An evolving group of travellers, called responsible travellers are those who especially value sustainable efforts and as it supports their idea to leave a smaller impact on the destinations they visit.

Eco-labels for accommodation services provide guidelines and control on sustainable operations. Managers might question the benefits of having an eco-label, which gave the research problem for this thesis work.

6.1 Revisiting the research question

The main research question of the thesis was asking whether sustainability certificates influence leisure travellers' accommodation choices, which was narrowed down to four investigative questions. Before answering the research question, the answers to the investigative questions will be discussed.

Q1: What are sustainability certifications?

In order to investigate traveller behaviour, first it was necessary to understand the use and role of eco-labels in the accommodation industry. Eco-labels assist in documentation and control of sustainability efforts. They are the result of a long development journey of sustainable tourism.

When an accommodation service decides to obtain an eco-label, they commit to working towards a more sustainable operation overall and are ready to incorporate the three pillars of sustainable tourism into their everyday operations. The targets set by eco-label issuers, and the periodical audits will prompt accommodation facilities set goals and reach them by taking concrete actions.

Q2: What are the benefits of acquiring an eco-label?

Besides setting goals for sustainable development, having an eco-label will communicate to customers and business partners that the lodging is committed to working for a better future.

Eco-labels are tools for performance management as well as environmental management. They serve as a constant reminder in everyday operations and when making short- and long-term decisions.

Q3: Do travellers recognise eco-labels?

Based on the survey results, the answer to the third investigative question leans towards no. Travellers tend to recognise and appreciate the different aspects of sustainability work accommodations do, however, they do not associate these attributes with eco-labels.

Travellers are aware of eco-labels and are able to name different certifications. They understand what purpose they serve but are not necessarily interested in understanding the boundaries eco-labels set to tourist accommodation providers.

Q4: How do accommodations' sustainable practices influence travellers' choices?

Travellers' sustainable habits and preferences were observed with the help of an online survey, and compared to the attitude-behaviour gap theory, which claims that generally eco-conscious people tend to neglect their eco-friendly needs and habits during travel.

Finnish travellers, however, seem to partially contradict the above theory, as they find certain sustainability efforts and environmentally friendly rather important already at the stage of choosing accommodation for their trip. Environmental friendliness is not on top of their importance list, but when we the phenomenon down to smaller attributes, the results show that travellers' are influenced in their choice by them. Finnish travellers are more likely to stay at and rebook accommodations that involve in sustainability efforts.

RQ: Do sustainability certificates influence leisure travellers' accommodation choices?

Based on the literature review, the interviews and the online survey, we can conclude that the single fact that an accommodation has an eco-label has no influence on travellers' accommodation choices. However, the different sustainability efforts and concrete actions required by the eco-label are the ones that have the most power to influence travellers' choices.

Finnish travellers recognise eco-labels, but they are not actively looking for environmentally friendly options. They appreciate the ecological and social aspect of sustainable tourism, such as energy saving solutions around the lodging, organic food and local products in the restaurant or having the option to visit nearby attractions on bike. On the other hand, they do not appreciate boundaries such as water pressure control.

Very few travellers claim that they would purposely reserve eco-labelled accommodations for their leisure trips. Marketing plays an important role in raising awareness of eco-labels and sustainability work. Service providers should utilise their solid sustainable results in their marketing efforts better in order to have real influence on travellers' accommodation choices.

6.2 Implications for further research

With the main research question of this thesis answered, there are further areas of interest that would prove useful for the hospitality industry. The contribution of this thesis to the Finnish hospitality industry is an understanding of the eco-label knowledge of travellers.

The thesis research used a sample of the Finnish population and the results cannot be generalised to the entire population. With very similar methods, further research studies should be conducted in different regions of Finland as differences in values and buying decisions might occur.

Another research direction would lead towards better service design. By understanding travellers' everyday eco-friendly habits, service providers would be able to develop their own sustainability efforts further and provide even better services. A representative research would provide a clearer picture on what are those sustainability attributes of accommodations that are well received by travellers and what are the ones that need better marketing.

Additional research should be done towards better marketing to responsible travellers and educating those who are leaning towards eco-friendliness. Market segmentation and marketing communication have an undeniable importance in sustainability work. As seen in the survey research of this thesis brand and reputation are high on the list of factors that help travellers decide what accommodation to book. Innovative marketing tools are widely available. For example, with the help of design thinking, based on research, a responsible traveller persona could be created, which would describe the needs, values and desired experience of a potential responsible Finnish traveller.

6.3 Conclusions

The thesis research was conducted during the spring of 2020 and was aiming to answer the question: do sustainability certificates influence leisure travellers' accommodation choices? The research did not have a commissioner per se, but the results can be implemented by accommodation providers who seek to understand responsible travellers and are wondering the benefits of acquiring an eco-label for their tourist accommodation provider business.

What we can conclude is that sustainability has an important role in the everyday operations of tourist accommodations. Eco-labels provide guidelines towards more sustainable operations, and in many cases, they result in higher customer satisfaction. Managers who participated in the research all agreed that obtaining certificate has had an overall positive influence on their business.

However, accommodation providers do not see a need in marketing specifically to responsible travellers. Customers do not necessarily recognise the importance of an eco-label and how they benefit from it. Often generally environmentally conscious consumers care less about eco-friendly practices when travelling. Albeit, they appreciate and seek sustainable practices at their destination lodging.

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Attachments

Appendix 1. Interview questions

1. The type of the accommodation you work at, its location (county) and your position.
2. What do you think makes an accommodation sustainable?
What are your views in on the current state of sustainable tourism in Finland and in the city / region you operate in?
Who are the trendsetters?
3. How long have you had an eco-label? (since opening or did you apply later on?)
Is it international / Finnish?
How do you display the label? (any physical displays, or only web?)
4. How frequent is the audit?
Who is your eco-label responsible? (is it on managerial level or other staff)
Who is handling the documentation and measurements?
5. Have you always had this particular eco-label?
If not: why did you change? What is the most significant difference? Which one are you more satisfied with?
If yes: why did you choose to apply for this particular eco-label? How did you choose from the options available?
6. Is sustainability part of your marketing strategy?
Have you ever had any campaigns / promotions that highlighted your sustainability efforts?
Do you segment your guests based on how "green" they are?
Are questions regarding your sustainability efforts part of your post-stay letter / questionnaire?
7. Which of your accommodation's sustainability efforts do you think your guests are most involved / interested in?
Any particular sustainability achievements you are proud of?
Any sustainability achievements that got good customer feedback?
Any sustainability efforts that didn't go down so well with customers?
8. Is eco-label part of the new-hire training?
How do you involve staff in your sustainability efforts?
9. What are the benefits of an eco-label in your opinion?
10. Do you think your eco-label has an influence on your bookings?

Appendix 2. Sustainable travel choices survey

English version

Sustainable travel choices

Dear Respondent,

I am conducting a survey on sustainable travel choices as part of my thesis at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences Tourism master's degree program. The survey should only take 10 minutes to respond, and your responses are completely anonymous.

The pre-requisites for filling out the survey are:

- you live in Finland,
- you are at least 18 years old, and
- you had at least one trip last year, which was paid for by yourself.

Please reflect on your personal travel preferences, on those cases when choosing your accommodation is entirely up to you. Do not consider trips when you are bound by company contracts, or when you stay at private residences of friends and family.

Thank you in advance for your time.

Sincerely,
Agnes Kusiak

Next

17% Completed

Sustainable travel choices

1. Your gender *

- Female
- Male

2. Your age *

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65 or older

3. What is the highest level of school you completed? *

- Less than a high school diploma
- High school / vocational high school degree
- Bachelor's degree (e.g. BA, BSc)
- Master's degree (e.g. MA, MSc)
- Doctorate
- Other, please specify

4. Which part of Finland do you currently live at? *

Sustainable travel choices

5. Do you consider yourself to be environmentally conscious? *

Yes No

6. Do you *

	Always	Sometimes	Never
use water consciously *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
use energy-saving lightbulbs *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
separate rubbish for recycling *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
re-use items (i.e. fix instead of buying new) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
take part in charity activities (e.g. donation, participation) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
read about environmental issues *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
buy organic food *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
buy from local producers *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
use public transport / bicycle instead of car *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
minimise paper use *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
use eco-friendly cleaning products *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
avoid wasting food *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[Previous](#)

[Next](#)

50% Completed

Sustainable travel choices

7. For your travels, you choose most often: *

- Hotels
- Hostels
- Home / vacation rentals (e.g. AirBnB, Homeaway)
- Camping stays / Caravan stays
- Other, please specify
(accommodation that you pay for, staying with friends and family are not relevant)

8. How do you book your accommodation? *

- Directly through the accommodation provider (via email, phone or their website)
- Through an online travel agency (e.g. booking.com, hotels.com)

9. On average, how many nights do you spend travelling per year?
Count only travels for leisure. *

- 1-5
- 6-14
- 15 or more

10. Please list the following in terms of importance when booking accommodation: *

Brand	Select ▼
Location	Select ▼
Price	Select ▼
Reputation	Select ▼
Environmental impact	Select ▼
Additional services	Select ▼

11. Have you ever looked for information regarding an accommodation's sustainability activities when you were searching for a place to stay at? *

- Yes No
 Can't remember

12. Do you know what an eco-label / sustainability certificate is? *

- Yes No

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Sustainable travel choices

According to International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) eco-labels are certifications that give information about the tourism product or service in terms of its overall environmental character. Eco-labels are standards, that give information to (potential) buyers on the product's environmental characteristics.

13. Can you name any eco labels (Finnish or international)? *

- Yes
- No

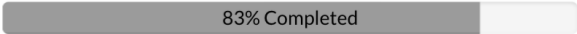
**14. When you choose your accommodation how important are the following to you?
1=not important at all, 4=very important ***

	1	2	3	4
they involve the local community *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
they have information on their environmental activities online *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
they use organic ingredients in the restaurant *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
they buy from local producers (both products and services) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
there is an option for paperless check in and check out *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
they have an eco-label *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
the hotel has clear strategies regarding their sustainable goals *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
partnerships with local non-governmental organisations (e.g. charity, human rights, environmental protection organisations) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**15. During your stay how important are the following to you?
1=not important at all, 4=very important ***

	1	2	3	4
there is an option to separate rubbish for recycling in the room *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
there are energy-saving light bulbs or motion sensor lights *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
water pressure is regulated to standards *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
the heating system is energy efficient *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
there is an option for on-demand cleaning *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
shading systems are efficient (e.g. blackout curtains, blinds) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
bathroom amenities are in refillable bottles *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
minimum amount of disposable amenities in the room (e.g. proper glasses instead of one time use plastic) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
they provide information on transport options to reduce your carbon footprint (e.g. bike rentals, public transport info) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
they provide information on local products to take home as souvenirs *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
they provide you with ideas on what to visit nearby without a car *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
there are visible signs of sustainable measures around (e.g. food waste count at breakfast, towel cleaning policy) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
they emphasise the use of local products *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Sustainable travel choices

16. Which of the following will prompt you to book again the same accommodation?
You may select as many options as you find relevant *

- Brand
- Price
- Location
- Staff
- Environmental impact
- Additional services

17. Would you be willing to pay extra to contribute to the accommodation's sustainability efforts? *

- Yes
please indicate the amount in percentage relative to the room price
- No

18. How likely are you to choose on your next trip an accommodation that promotes sustainability? *

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all likely	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely likely

Previous

Submit

100% Completed

Finnish version

Ympäristöystävällistä matkailua

Hyvä Vastaanottaja,

Suoritan Haaga-Helian ammattikorkeakoulussa ylempää ammattikorkeakouluturkintoa pääaineenani Turismi. Osana lopputyötäni olen laatinut kyselyn koskien kestävän kehityksen roolia ihmisten matkustusvalinnoissa. Vastaaminen kyselyyn kestää noin 10 minuuttia ja vastaaminen on anonyymiä.

Seuraavien ehtojen täytyessä olet vastaukelpoinen:

- Asut Suomessa
- Olet yli 18-vuotias
- Matkustit omakustanteisesti vähintään kerran viime vuonna.

Vastaamisessa hyödynnä henkilökohtaista matkustamista, jossa majoitusvalinta oli sinun oma päätöksesi. Jätä huomioimatta työmatkailu tai matkustaminen jossa yövyit yksityisessä majoituksessa.

Kiitos ajastasi.

Terveisin,
Agnes Kusiak

Seuraava

17% Valmis

Ympäristöystävällistä matkailua

1. Sukupuoli *

- Nainen
 Mies

2. Ikä *

- 18-24
 25-34
 35-44
 45-54
 55-64
 65 tai vanhempi

3. Koulutustaustasi *

- Peruskoulu
 Toisen asteen koulutus
 Ammattikorkeakoulututkinto (BA, BSc)
 Yliopisto / ylempi AMK tutkinto (MA, MSc)
 Jatkotutkinnot (PhD)
 Muu, mikä:

4. Missä maakunnassa asut? *

Valitse



Ympäristöystävällistä matkailua

5. Pidätkö itseäsi ympäristötietoisena? *

Kyllä En

6. Valitse sopiva vaihtoehto *

	Aina	Joskus	En ikinä
käytätkö vettä säästeliäästi *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
käytätkö energiansäästölamppuja *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
lajitteletko jätteesi *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
kierrätätkö tavaroita *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
otatko osaa hyväntekeväisyyteen *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
luetko ympäristöasioista *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ostatko luomutuotteita *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
hyödynnätkö lähituotantoa *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
käytätkö julkista liikennettä tai polkupyörää *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
minimoitko paperijätteen määrää *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
käytätkö ekologisia siivoustuotteita *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
vältätkö ruokahävikkiä *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Edellinen

Seuraava

50% Valmis

Ympäristöystävällistä matkailua

7. Matkoilasi valitset usein *

- Hotellin
- Hostellin
- Loma-asunnon (esim. Airbnb, HomeAway)
- Leirintäalueen
- Muu, mikä:
(maksullinen majoitusvaihtoehto)

8. Miten varaat majoituksesi? *

- Suoraan palvelun tarjoajalta (sähköpostitse, puhelimitse tai verkkosivustoon kautta)
- Käytän online-matkatoimiston palveluita (esim. Booking.com, hotels.com)

9. Kuinka monta yötä olet yöpynyt matkustaessasi viimeisen vuoden aikana? Huomio ainoastaan vapaa-ajan matkustaminen. *

- 1-5
- 6-14
- 15 tai enemmän

10. Aseta seuraavat matkustusvalintaa koskevat kriteerit tärkeysjärjestykseen: *

Brändi	Valitse ▼
Sijainti	Valitse ▼
Hinta	Valitse ▼
Maine	Valitse ▼
Ympäristöystävällisyys	Valitse ▼
Lisäpalvelut	Valitse ▼

11. Oletko koskaan etsinyt tietoa kestävästä kehityksestä tehdessäsi majoitusvalintaa *

- Kyllä En
 En muista

12. Tiedätkö mikä on ympäristömerkki? *

- Kyllä En

Edellinen

Seuraava

67% Valmis

Ympäristöystävällistä matkailua

Ympäristömerkinnän tavoitteena on lisätä puolueetonta tietoa tuotteiden ympäristövaikutuksista sekä ohjata tuotteiden valmistusta ja kulutusta ympäristöä säästävään suuntaan. Ympäristömerkkien avulla yritys voi tiedottaa kuluttajille tuotteensa kilpailukyvästä ympäristöasioissa.

13. Osaatko nimetä yhtään ympäristömerkkiä? (suomalaista tai kansainvälistä) *

- Kyllä
- En

14. Tehdessäsi majoitusvalintaa, kuinka tärkeänä pidät seuraavia asioita?

1=ei tärkeä, 4=erittäin tärkeä *

	1	2	3	4
lähiyhteisöjen huomioiminen *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ympäristötietoa on saatavilla verkkosivuilla *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ravintolassa käytetään luomutuotteita *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
palvelut ja raaka-aineet ostetaan lähituottajilta *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
paperiton asiointi on mahdollista (esim. online check in) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
majoituspaikalla on ympäristömerkki *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
majoituksen tarjoajalla on kestävän kehityksen strategia tavoitteinen *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
yhteistyö kansalaisjärjestöjen kanssa (esim. Ihmisoikeudet, hyväntekeväisyys, ympäristönsuojelujärjestöt) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. Majoittumisesi aikana, kuinka tärkeänä pidät seuraavia asioita?
1=ei tärkeä, 4=erittäin tärkeä *

	1	2	3	4
tarjolla on mahdollisuus jätteiden lajitteluun *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
majoituksessa on energiansäästölamput tai liiketunnistimilla toimiva valaistus *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
vedenpaine on kontrolloitu *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
lämmitysjärjestelmä on energiatehokas *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
siivous pyynnöstä *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
tarjolla on tehokkaita huoneen himmenysvaihtoehtoja *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
kylpyhuoneessa on uudelleen täytettäviä suihkutuotteita *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
kertakäyttötuotteiden määrä on minimoitu huoneessa *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
tarjolla on tietoa ympäristöystävällisistä liikkumisvaihtoehdoista (esim. Polkupyörän vuokraus, julkinen liikenne) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
tarjolla on tietoa paikallisista tuotteista (esim. tuliaiset) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
tarjolla on tietoa lähiympäristön nähtävyyksistä *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
kestävän kehityksen toimet ovat havaittavissa (esim. ruokahävikin määrä näkyvissä, pyyhkeenvaihto valinnaista) *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
lähituotteiden käyttö on tärkeä majoituspaikalle *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Edellinen

Seuraava

83% Valmis

Ympäristöystävällistä matkailua

16. Mikä seuraavista vaihtoehtoista saa sinut varaamaan majoituspaikan uudelleen?
Voit valita useamman vaihtoehdon *

- Brändi
- Hinta
- Sijainti
- Henkilökunta
- Ympäristöystävällisyys
- Lisäpalvelut

17. Olisitko valmis maksamaan ylimääräistä kestävästä kehitystä tukevasta majoituksesta? *

- Kyllä
kuinka monta prosenttia huoneen hinnasta
- En

18. Kuinka todennäköisesti valitset seuraavaa matkaasi varten majoituksen joka edistää kestävästä kehityksen arvoja? *

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Ei todennäköistä	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Erittäin todennäköistä

Edellinen

Lähetä

100% Valmis