

# The Sustainable Hotel Handbook

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*With practical insights, tools and resources  
for you and your team*



## Introduction

Getting started on your sustainability journey.

MAp

THE SUSTAINABLE HOTEL

#01

March 2026

**The Sustainable Hotel Handbook:  
Introduction  
by MAp Boutique Consultancy.  
Edition 02, March 2026.**

Published by  
MAp Boutique Consultancy  
Zweierstrasse 132  
8003 Zurich  
Switzerland

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*For everyone on the journey  
to making this Planet a more purposeful  
and hospitable place.*



## FOREWORD

### *Pursuing the path to sustainability – together*

**Welcome to The Sustainable Hotel – and thank you for joining us on the journey to a better future!**

We carefully and passionately crafted *The Sustainable Hotel Handbook – Collection* in order to MAp out the way for hoteliers to develop more sustainable hotels. Sustainable hotels that make a positive impact on People and Planet, while delivering sustainable success for you. Whether you've long been on the path to sustainability or are just starting out, this collection of handbooks is intended to empower you and get you going in the right direction.

Before we begin, we'd like to introduce ourselves. We are MAp, a creative-led hotel branding and marketing consultancy. We turn Purpose into performance, creating sustainable hotels and standout brands that do good, look good and sell well. As a Certified B Corporation based in Zurich, we work internationally, MApping out a better future for hotels, People and Planet.

Through our experience, we know that hoteliers, such as yourself, have the power to create real impact in this world and leave it better off for future generations. But, we also know that sustainability can be daunting – especially when it comes to hospitality. With so much information out there, where do you start? With such a complex topic, what's the correct

route for your hotel? With so much marketing noise, how do you avoid the trap of greenwashing?

Composed of 4 distinct handbooks, each dedicated to one of MAp's 4 Ps of sustainability (Purpose, People, Planet, Profit), the collection sets out to make sustainability more than just a buzzword or abstract notion – to make it clear, easy and accessible. That's why we've filled each handbook with practical guidance, tools and resources, so that you are empowered to go from hotelier to sustainable hotelier. By the end, you will be fully equipped to reach the destination of having an impactful, successful and profitable hotel business.

As we embark on this journey together, it's important to always remember that, when it comes to sustainability, you should strive for progress not perfection. Achieving 100% sustainability, while an admirable goal, is simply not realistic and as the needs of our world change, the way we tackle those needs changes, too. What's most important is that you simply start the journey, and continue to learn, grow and improve along the way.

"Progress not perfection" was our guiding mantra when creating *The Sustainable Hotel Handbook – Collection*, knowing that it will never be perfect or finished. We knew it was needed for the hospitality industry, and we approached it

with the goal to serve and empower hoteliers as well as do our part for People and Planet. We too will continue to provide updated guidance and tackle new challenges and critical topics for the betterment of the industry and the world. That's our commitment.

It is our hope that you too will approach this journey with a deep commitment to learning, serving and making a real difference now and in the future.

**Once again, thank you for joining us on the journey to impact! Let's build a more hospitable and purposeful Planet – together.**

**#onwards  
Your MAp team**



**VISIT THE SUSTAINABLE HOTEL NOW**

*P.S.: We'd love to hear from you along the way! Please feel free to share your feedback, insights and comments with us at [onwards@MAp-consultancy.com](mailto:onwards@MAp-consultancy.com).*

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# 1.1. UNDERSTANDING *Sustainability*

*“Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”*

**G. H. BRUNDTLAND (1987)**

## WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY?

While you probably know a decent amount about sustainability, it's okay if you don't know exactly how to define it.

The most-used definition of sustainability dates back to 1987 when the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) published the “Our Common Future” report, better known nowadays as the “Brundtland Report” (Brundtland, 1987).

In this report, sustainable development is defined as “Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

Etymologically, or looking at the root behind the term sustainability, we discover that it is derived from the term *sustinere*, which in Latin means *to hold* (or maintain, support, endure).

**Therefore, sustainability conveys the importance of holding onto / maintaining our resources for generations to come.**

## WHAT ARE THE UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS?

When addressing sustainability, a good place to start is with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In 2015, the United Nations created a universal agenda to tackle sustainability through the establishment of the SDGs, later adopted by all UN member states (United Nations, n.d. a).

There are 17 SDGs in total, organised according to key pillars (Social, Environmental, Economic) and covering a broad range of challenges – from diminishing natural resources, to poverty reduction, to environmental degradation and beyond.

**To learn more about the SDGs and be inspired to take action, visit the [United Nations website](#).**

There you will discover the 17 goals, the respective targets as well as some eye-opening facts outlining why it's important to take action NOW.



**VISIT THE UNITED NATIONS WEBSITE**



United Nations (n.d. b).



## WHAT IS A SUSTAINABLE HOTEL?

Even if the term sustainability is clearly defined and, in the past years, quite a few sustainable hotel certifications and cooperations have entered the market, there is no official definition or agreed-upon standard of what a sustainable hotel is. This often leads to confusion, misunderstanding, and unfortunately, greenwashing.

Throughout our journey together, we will highlight the most common misconceptions and serve you with definitions and explanations as it relates to sustainable hotels. But let's start by laying the basis for what a sustainable hotel is, according to MAP's definition:

**"A sustainable hotel is committed to creating a better future for People and Planet by acting in a conscious and responsible way – for the benefit of present and**

**future generations. It is guided by a clear Purpose and addresses the three core pillars of sustainability: social (People), environmental (Planet) and economic (Profit)."**

And how do you recognise a truly sustainable hotel (or other business)? A sustainable hotel will NEVER put Profit above People and Planet. In other words: People and Planet will always be more important than Profit. And it dedicates itself to constantly learning and improving with the aim to increase its impact over the long-term, with clear objectives that are measured on a regular basis.

Thus, sustainable hotels know that sustainability is not a destination, but an ongoing journey.

## WHY DO HOTELS NEED TO BE SUSTAINABLE?

**The tourism and hospitality industry has a major impact on People and Planet. Not only is it THE People industry, it is also one of the largest industries in the world, employing 1 in 10 People globally (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2022).**

Furthermore, it is deeply intertwined with local communities and natural environments. Think about the destination in which your hotel sits and the local community that is directly impacted by your hotel (i.e. how your hotel looks, how it acts).

Hotels depend on stable communities and healthy ecosystems because, after all, what else do you have to offer your guests if your destination and its People are in trouble?

Not only this, hoteliers have an imperative to practice sustainability and ethical hotel development. Why? To ensure that, together, we do business and run hotels in such a way that we're able to afford future generations a healthy Planet – making sustainability a moral priority for all.

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF SUSTAINABILITY FOR YOUR HOTEL?

Yes, sustainability is truly a moral imperative for all. But it's not only good for People and Planet, it's good for business, too. Let us present you with some of the main benefits of having a sustainable hotel:

**Gain customer appeal:** According to the Sustainable Travel Report by Booking.com (2021), 83% of global travellers think sustainable travel is important and 61% say they want to travel more sustainably. By practicing and sharing your sustainable measures and activities, you attract more customers.

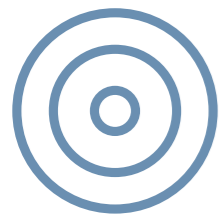
**Generate customer loyalty:** Running a sustainable hotel shows that you care and think long-term. This aligns with the ideals of (increasingly) more forward-thinking guests, which thereby increases the perceived value of your hotel in their minds. This keeps guests coming back and recommending your sustainable venture to their like-minded friends.

**Save costs and realise efficiencies:** By adopting sustainable practices, you realise efficiencies and cost savings over the long-term thanks to reduced water and energy consumption, etc. That means sustainability pays off – literally!

**Better navigate turbulent times:** Sustainable hotels are more prepared for changes and more resilient to challenges posed by such changes and other risks to your market, such as supply chain, physical structure, regulatory, litigation and reputational risks.

**Attract investment:** Government and private sectors are increasingly investing in businesses that do a greater good for the world. Therefore, sustainable hotels are more marketable when it comes to bringing on investment.

**Inspire and benefit stakeholders:** In addition to creating value for your guests, sustainable hotels are better able to attract and retain top talent, bring on best-fit partners, increase shareholder value in the long-run, benefit local communities, and more.



**SUSTAINABILITY IS NOT A DESTINATION, BUT AN ONGOING JOURNEY.**

## 1.2. MAP'S 4 Ps Of sustainability

**MAp has created a holistic sustainable hotel framework to guide your journey to a more sustainable future. Aptly titled the 4 Ps of sustainability, this framework encompasses the key elements you must address in order to qualify as a sustainable hotel: Purpose, People, Planet, Profit.**

In each of the 4 handbooks, we dive deep into each P in order to show what it means for sustainability and how to tackle it head-on.



### PURPOSE – YOUR WHY

At the heart of MAp's sustainable hotel framework is Purpose. We look at how Purpose informs what path your sustainability journey takes. In other words, the sustainability initiatives you implement should reflect your Purpose.

**In the Purpose handbook, we MAp out what Purpose is and why it matters, and outline how to discover, define, embed and activate your hotel's unique Purpose.**

[Discover The Sustainable Hotel Handbook: Purpose HERE.](#)



### PEOPLE – SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

We examine the impact your hotel has on People, including your guests, employees, partners and local community members. At the cornerstone of social sustainability is making a positive impact for People, addressing issues that affect People, and uplifting and empowering them.

**In the People handbook, we define who your most important stakeholders are and show you how to understand and address their problems, wants and desires in a sustainably-minded way.**

[Discover The Sustainable Hotel Handbook: People HERE.](#)



### PLANET – ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

We take a look at the impact your hotel has on the Planet, ensuring that you protect the world's ecosystems and conserve natural resources for the health and wellbeing of all – now and in the future.

**In the Planet handbook, we help you to define what your environmental footprint is, and break down the measures your hotel should take in order to reduce its footprint, while realising important efficiencies and cost savings.**

[Discover The Sustainable Hotel Handbook: Planet HERE.](#)



### PROFIT – ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

We address the impact your hotel has on economic growth, in a way that does not negatively impact the social and environmental aspects of the community, but drives profitability for your hotel and everyone involved.

**In the Profit handbook, we introduce you to the concepts and benefits of Purposeful Profits and Triple Bottom Line, and lay out the specific ways in which you can create economic prosperity for your People and your hotel.**

[Discover The Sustainable Hotel Handbook: Profit HERE.](#)



## 1.3. ON THE ROAD

### *To sustainability*

Sustainability is a long and winding road, and it's important to start the journey knowing what lies ahead before you get started. That's why we want to manage expectations, share helpful tips, dispel any myths, help you avoid the traps – to make it as smooth a ride as possible.

## SUSTAINABILITY IS / IS NOT

Here's what we've learned through MAp's own sustainability journey – and we hope you'll find it helpful in understanding what sustainability really is and is not about.

### IT IS...

- **A journey.** We use this term again and again, but 100% sustainability is not a destination you'll ever reach – it's a journey involving constant learning, improving, bettering.
- **A series of small steps.** Continuing on the point above, sustainability involves a series of small steps that create big impact. So don't think it's all about major and expensive overhauls – in fact, it's every little action that helps.
- **A lifestyle.** To make your hotel sustainable, you as the hotelier, have to become more sustainable and lead by example. Words only go so far, but actions and "walking the walk" never go unnoticed. Therefore, it's a must that you make sustainability part of your day-to-day life, prioritise it and take those small steps – and inspire your team to do the same as a leading example.
- **Holistic.** Unlike what most People think, sustainability is not just about "being green." There are four distinct and important elements that need to be addressed in order to call yourself truly sustainable. And yes, we will work through all 4 Ps together in *The Sustainable Hotel Handbook – Collection*.
- **Good for the world.** This is a no-brainer: by being sustainable you make the world a better place! Need we say more?
- **Equally good for your business.** Now this one you may not know, but in the Profit handbook, you'll discover that sustainable businesses see greater financial gains than unsustainable ones. And there's proof to it (Whelan & Kronthal-Sacco, 2019).

### IT IS NOT...

- **Quick fixes and quick wins.** You can't simply eliminate plastic and call your hotel a sustainable hotel. Instead you have to be committed to a long-term journey involving small but constant steps in the right direction.
- **A fad.** With the growing threat of climate change, and younger generations like Millennials and Generation Z increasingly more conscious of their impact, sustainability isn't going anywhere. Luckily!
- **A buzzword and marketing gimmick.** Consumers can see right through marketing bullsh\*t, so if you aren't walking the walk when it comes to sustainability, you will lose their trust and, ultimately, their business. To be successful, you must be committed to implementing sustainable measures into your hotel and making it a top priority.
- **Easy.** Sustainability is complex. It involves a lot of conscious thinking. It requires you to take on responsibility. It also implies that right now, some challenges and problems can't be solved. However, we say: it's not easy, but it is definitely worth it.

## BARRIERS AND MOTIVATORS TO SUSTAINABILITY

We're here to bust some myths about sustainability – and turn obstacles into opportunities.



**Barrier = Perceived high capital costs.**

Investing in thermal insulation, triple-glazed windows, employee training and education and other measures does involve capital expenditures.

→ **Motivator = Potential cost savings.**

Such upgrades and investments do allow you to realise potential cost savings over the mid- and long-term due to reduced use of resources, reduced operating costs, smarter buying habits, increased efficiencies and more. Sometimes you need to invest money to make money.



**Barrier = Doubts regarding Return on Investment (ROI).**

With the investments required to make sustainable upgrades to your hotel, you may doubt if you'll ever see a return.

→ **Motivator = Sustainability pays off.**

With such cost savings, increased room sales, improved employee morale leading to improved performance, and more, the fact is: it's good for your bottom line. And we will prove this point over and over again throughout all handbooks.



**Barrier = Lack of time.**

With all that is required in running a hotel on the day-to-day, you simply don't have the time or bandwidth to focus on sustainability.

→ **Motivator = Time well spent.**

While there is a bigger time investment as you work through the handbooks and get your sustainability initiatives off the ground, the time you need to dedicate drops off as you make sustainability a normal part of your everyday business and tackle it step-by-step. Not to mention, it's well worth the time given all the benefits!



**Barrier = Too much management required.**

It's hard to get the buy-in of managers, align them and get them moving in the right direction when it comes to sustainability.

→ **Motivator = Empower your People.**

It doesn't have to be top management leading the charge – identify those People who are passionate about sustainability and motivated to drive your sustainability measures forward.



**Barrier = Limited knowledge.**

It's difficult to know where to start when there's so much information out there on the subject of sustainability, and most of it's just not relevant to your hotel.

→ **Motivator = The Sustainable Hotel Handbook – Collection.**

That's why this collection exists!

## GUIDELINES TO GETTING IT RIGHT

In light of the previous learnings, we've compiled our top guidelines for getting your sustainability journey started down the right path.

**Do it for the right reasons.** Your motivation for pursuing sustainability should be an ethical one – the business benefits are just a side effect.

**Start with your Purpose.** Let your Purpose lead you and the sustainability initiatives you pursue.

**Don't do it alone.** Bring on a trusted and motivated team to help you make your sustainability journey happen.

**Be committed.** Be willing to dedicate the time, resources and money that sustainability requires – it will all pay off in the end!

**Don't favour one P over the others.** Sustainability is more than just being green, and you must approach it holistically (as in, addressing all Ps equally!) in order to count your hotel as sustainable.

**Measure your impact and success.** You won't know if you're meeting your sustainability goals if you don't measure your progress – that's what the scorecards in each handbook are for.

**Communicate, communicate, communicate.** Inform and educate your internal team on your sustainability journey, and then communicate it externally to your stakeholders in order to get their feedback, buy-in and support.

**Put everything in writing.** With the exercises and scorecards provided, it's best to record everything in writing so your team has clarity and can refer back to it all in the future – and better yet if you post it on the wall for all to see!


**Don't greenwash.** If you're only talking the talk, People won't buy it – you've got to put your money where your mouth is and be committed to sustainability.

**See it as a marathon – not a sprint.** Know that you are committing to sustainability for the long-haul, and that you'll never achieve perfection, but will need to make constant progress in the right direction.

**Know you can make a difference.** Yes, you – hotelier! – have what it takes to make a positive impact on People and Planet.

**Do it now – not later. The world, and future generations, are counting on us all to do our part – NOW!**





The Journey  
of a thousand  
miles begins  
with a single  
step.

-Lao Tzu

## 1.4. HOW TO USE

### *The handbooks*

These handbooks exist to get you started on, or take you further down, the road to hotel sustainability. Sustainability is a complex topic, so we've taken every effort to make it as approachable, practical and actionable as possible – tailored to boutique hotels with specific challenges, and limited time and resources.

#### HOW THEY'RE STRUCTURED

**Our goal with the handbooks is to educate you on the most relevant knowledge regarding hotel sustainability, and give you the tools required to make it happen!**

Therefore, they're equal parts theory and practice.

#### THE 4 Ps OF SUSTAINABILITY

**We've structured the collection in an easy-to-follow way, with each of the 4 P handbooks composed of the following sections.**

**Introduction:** We present the theoretical background behind the P, including defining it, conveying its importance through facts and figures and highlighting the benefits you realise for your hotel when addressing it.

**Success Story:** To make it as tangible as possible, we interview hoteliers, experts and insiders who describe their own experience in executing sustainable measures, and how they created positive impact for People, Planet and their business.

**In Action:** We break down each P into the specific sub-elements that must be addressed in order to achieve holistic sustainable success. For each sub-element, we show you step-by-step how to activate it in your hotel in an orderly and measurable way through exercises and MAp Advices.

**Conclusion:** We wrap up the key learnings from the handbook, and direct you to helpful resources that will guide you along the way.

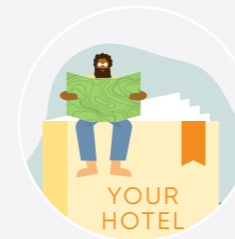
**Scorecards:** We provide you with scorecards to track and measure the most important action items.

# #stepbystep

## THE ELEMENTS

In all *The Sustainable Hotel Handbooks*, we work with various elements that give guidance, provide insights and help you measure how far you've come on the way to becoming a sustainable hotel.

- MAp Advices
- Learning Boxes
- Exercises
- Scorecards



### MAP ADVICES

Needing some further advice on how to MAp out sustainability for your hotel? Then read through our MAp Advices, where we share what we've learned from our consultancy practice.

Every MAp Advice gives you practical help, and of course advice, especially in those areas where we've discovered independent hoteliers often face challenges.



### LEARNING BOXES

At MAp, one of our mantras is: never stop learning. As there is a wealth of great information out there related to sustainability, we've created Learning Boxes.

Every Learning Box highlights what you can learn about and then directs you to a helpful resource, be it a website, toolkit, checklist or similar.



### EXERCISES TO HELP GET YOU ON YOUR WAY

When you see these boxes, it's time for a sustainability exercise. All exercises were created with the aim to get you to take action – moving you further #onwards on your journey to becoming a sustainable hotel.

Exercises are optional, as you may have already achieved the task independently of the handbook, and we recommend doing them together with your team.



★★★★★  
EARN 5 STARS

**SCORECARDS**  
**TRACK YOUR SUCCESS**

We've created the scorecards to measure your performance and aligned them with the requirements of hotel sustainability certifications. The scorecards will keep you and your team going in the right direction, with clear guidance on what needs to be done, by whom and when.

Through the scorecards you can collect stars and track your performance, evaluate how far you've come and celebrate successes with your team – in order to keep you motivated and have fun along the way. Because as we all know by now: sustainability is a journey, not a destination.

**HOW TO USE THE SCORECARDS**

**Here you go with our top tips on how to use the scorecards and measure your success.**

**Evaluate your status quo:** Where are you standing right now? Assess your status quo through our [online assessment tool](#) and start your journey.

**Define clear responsibilities:** Identify the best-fit person who is close to the topic, passionate about it and willing to dedicate the time to serve as the responsible individual.

**Be realistic about timelines:** People tend to be too optimistic in what they can achieve in a year and underestimate what they can achieve in two years. Therefore, create timelines, together with

your team, that are realistic and achievable.

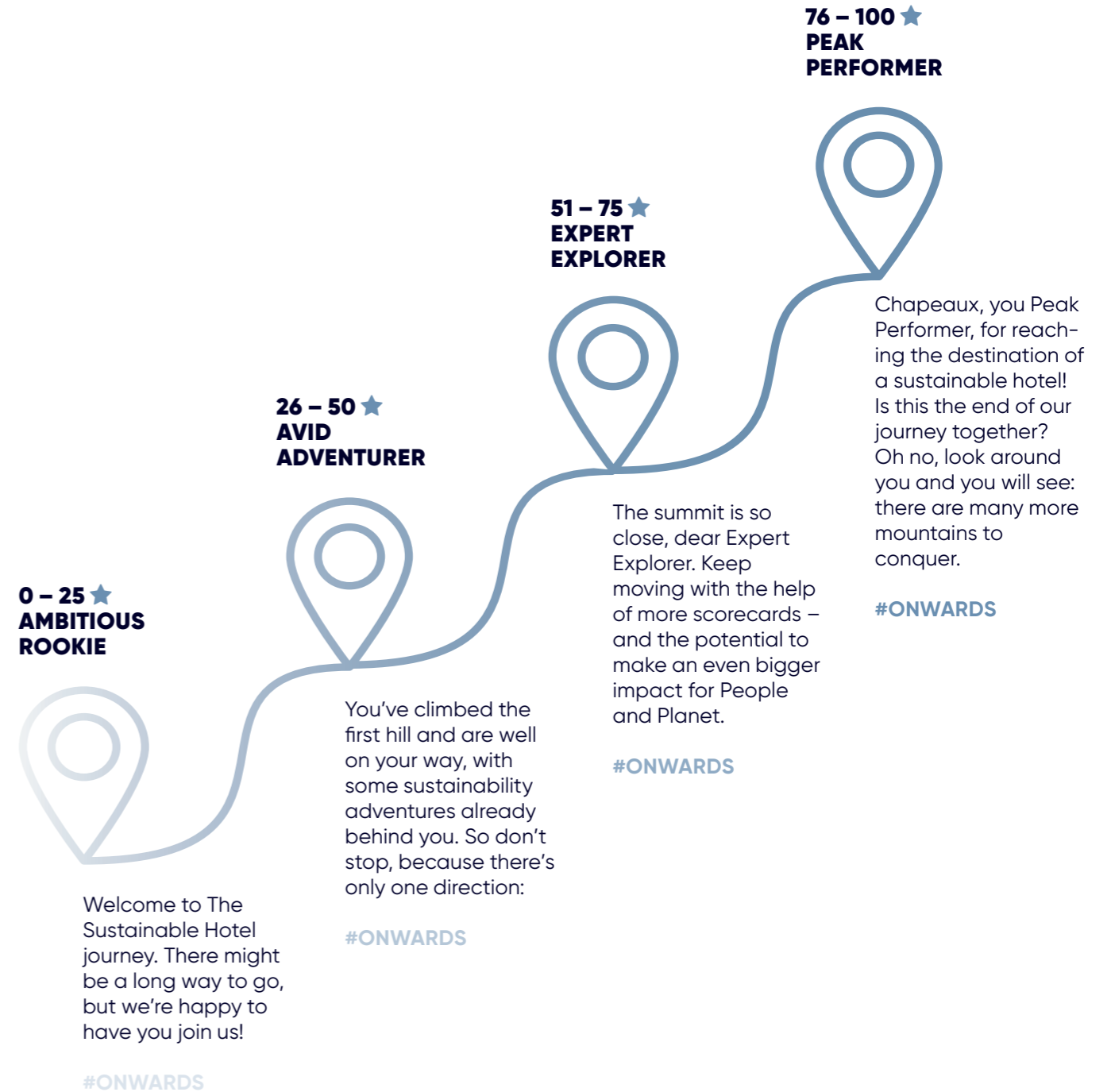
**Start with one scorecard:** From experience, we can say that often the first scorecard is the trickiest one. Why? You have to set up processes and free up resources, set up internal communication channels and create your own "sustainability system."

Only once you feel the process runs smoothly, move on to the other scorecards.



**ASSESS YOUR STATUS QUO HERE**

\*\*\*\*\*  
**100 STARS**



**ARE YOU A PEAK PERFORMER? SEND US AN EMAIL AND WE WILL FEATURE YOU ON THE SUSTAINABLE HOTEL PLATFORM:**

*onwards@MAp-consultancy.com*

## HOW TO GET STARTED

It's nearly time to dive into your first P. But before you do, read our final tips on how to get started AND how to keep going.

### 1

#### Start with Purpose.

Every journey begins with a first step. So we strongly encourage you to start your sustainability journey with our first P – Purpose.

Why? Because once you know your Purpose, everything will become much clearer, including priorities and next steps.

### 2

#### Build your theoretical knowledge first.

For every P handbook, start by reading through the respective theoretical information, in order to build your awareness and knowledge base.

Let our insights and ideas, the success stories and our advice, inspire you before you start with the action.

### 3

#### Onboard your sustainability squad.

As a next step, it's time to define who will be your closest companions on your way to becoming a sustainable hotel. After all, with every journey, it's so much more rewarding and successful when you go it together.

We encourage you to bring together a multi-disciplinary team from various departments within your hotel, that champions your sustainability initiatives.

Be curious and open. Share the news that you'll be setting out on a journey toward a sustainable future with all of your employees, and invite them to collaborate. Often you will be surprised to see who is already on a personal sustainability journey and eager to be part of yours.

### 4

#### Create a sustainability action plan.

After you have successfully executed the first three steps, together with your sustainability squad, create a long-term action plan.

Identify which scorecards you have to tackle first, and define what you want to achieve this year, the next year, etc., as you aim to reach Peak Performer status.

### 5

#### Communicate consistently with your team.

Your whole team is your biggest force for change. Once you have gained clarity on your next steps, share them with all of your team members – and be sure to drum up excitement about it!

Educate them on what exactly you'll be doing and how exactly they can help. The goal is to not only get their buy-in, but make them part of the process by showing them how they too can make an impact.

This means always make sure that everyone at your hotel is involved and motivated. Take special care that your internal communication is working and that you update and include everyone on a consistent basis.

### 6

#### Monitor your progress.

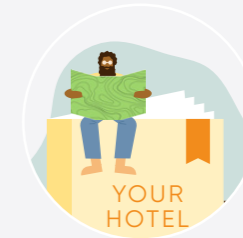
What you can't measure, you can't improve. Therefore, you need to make monitoring and evaluating your progress a top priority.

Set clear goals and define the key performance indicators (KPIs) you will be monitoring. Then, once you know what your status quo is, you can set out on crushing those goals and achieving those KPIs.

We recommend evaluating your progress on a monthly basis and publishing an annual sustainability report that highlights your overall accomplishments.



**#ONWARDS  
TOGETHER**



#### MAP ADVICE – TAKE IT #STEPBYSTEP

It's time for our first MAP Advice to share with you what we've learned over the years while working with boutique and independent hoteliers like you.

#Stepbystep. We know you're familiar with this mantra already. And we think it's crucial to emphasise it at the end of the introduction, before you start your big and sometimes overwhelming sustainability journey.

Here are some of our tips to avoid feeling overwhelmed by it all:

**Know that tomorrow is today.** The truth is, we only have today. So don't get discouraged if you didn't start out on your sustainability journey last week, last month or last year – but don't push it to tomorrow either! Make a commitment to get going NOW.

**Count every action.** Don't get discouraged if you're unable to make big investments right away, or if you still have a stock of 1,000 unsustainable bath amenities in your storage. Every little action and step is important: for the Planet but also for your People, who see that you are taking sustainability seriously.

**Take one step at a time.** And to help you with this advice, we have created the scorecards you find at the end of every handbook.

**Let's continue stepping into a better future!**



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[LINK](#)

## PHOTO CREDITS

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