

WHAT REALLY DRIVES TOURIST PATRONAGE AND WHEN

SUMMARY FOR MANAGERS

Tourist patronage is the lifeblood of tourism business performance, underpinning occupancy, revenue, and long-term brand equity. Academic research has identified a consistent set of factors that encourage tourists to choose and return to a hotel/destination: design, service and food quality, amenities, price, customer satisfaction, sustainable practices, reputation, and trust. Yet these factors do not influence all hotels, markets, or customer groups equally. Drawing on a meta-analysis of 37 studies covering 26,682 individuals across 18 countries, this summary explains when each factor matters most and what that means for how you allocate resources.

WHERE EACH FACTOR MATTERS MOST

Design carries more weight in green hotels than in conventional ones, suggesting that guests choosing eco-friendly properties expect the sustainability ethos to be visible in the physical environment. Its influence, however, was stronger before COVID than after, so design alone is no longer the differentiator it once was.

Service and food quality matter more in conventional hotels than green hotels, more among student travellers than non-students, and are especially decisive in the Asia/Pacific region relative to Africa and the Americas. Conventional hotels competing in Asia/Pacific markets, particularly those serving younger travellers, should treat service and dining excellence as a top priority.

Amenities are a stronger draw for conventional hotels than green ones, and for luxury hotels compared with other segments. Notably, their importance has surged since COVID, and they influence non-student (typically older or professional) travellers more than students. Luxury and conventional operators serving mature travellers should view amenity upgrades as a high-return, post-pandemic investment.

Customer satisfaction is a comparatively weaker driver of patronage in luxury hotels than elsewhere, suggesting that luxury guests appear to be swayed more by other cues. Like amenities, satisfaction has become a stronger predictor after COVID than it was before, making retention-focused satisfaction programmes more valuable now than in the past.

Price matters less for green hotels than for conventional ones. Guests choosing green properties are less price-sensitive, giving eco-positioned hotels room to sustain premium pricing rather than compete on discounts.

Sustainable practices are less influential in the luxury segment than in other hotels, and their impact varies sharply by region: strongest in the Americas, followed by Asia/Pacific, then Africa. Sustainability messaging will resonate most with travellers in the Americas and should be calibrated accordingly elsewhere.

Reputation and trust were relatively weak drivers before COVID but have become substantially stronger predictors of patronage since. In a post-pandemic environment marked by heightened risk awareness, guests increasingly choose hotels they trust, making review management, transparent communication, and brand credibility strategic priorities.

It is important to note that there is no universal formula for winning tourist patronage. Managers are suggested to match their investments to their context: green hotels should lead with design and can protect price premiums; conventional hotels should compete on service, food, and amenities; luxury properties gain most from amenities but less from sustainability or satisfaction alone; and every hotel, regardless of segment, should recognise that in the post-COVID era, amenities, satisfaction, and above all reputation and trust have become the important factors leading to tourist patronage.

